

Exploring Learning Strategies and Characteristics of Good Language Learners among EFL Graduate Students in Morocco: A Case Study

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Abstract: The article presents the findings of a case study that examines the learning strategies and characteristics of successful language learners among EFL graduate students. The study investigates the language learning approaches employed by these students and explores the extent to which they possess the traits that define effective language learners. The research involved a sample (N=118) of graduate students from the Master's and Doctorate programs in Morocco. The data were collected using a questionnaire that was adapted from the original version developed by Oxford (1990) that focused on different types of learning strategies. The results reveal high levels of engagement in memory, metacognitive, cognitive, compensatory, and affective strategies, indicating the proficiency and commitment of the participants as language learners. While the use of social strategies received a moderate rating, the study underscores the importance of individual learning and personal strategies for these students. The findings support the notion that graduate students possess the characteristics of good language learners, including self-motivation, positive attitudes, metacognitive awareness, and resourcefulness. The implications of these findings suggest the integration of diverse learning strategies into language teaching, learner training programs, and further exploration of social strategies. The study contributes to our understanding of successful language learning among graduate students and provides insights into the effective strategies and traits that contribute to their learning process.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, good language learners, learning strategies

1. Introduction

It is undeniably true that students learn their mother tongue in a relatively similar way. However, when it comes to learning a second/foreign language, differences among them start to become apparent. It seems that some learners go through the learning process effortlessly in comparison to other learners. These learners can be referred to using specific taxonomy: good language learners, successful learners, proficient learners, among others.

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Understanding the strategies and characteristics of good language learners is crucial for effective language instruction and learner development. This article presents a study that explores the learning strategies and traits exhibited by graduate students as they learn English. The study aims to shed light on the extent to which these students possess the qualities of successful language learners and identify the strategies they employ to enhance their language acquisition process.

Informed by previous research on learning strategies, the study draws on the questionnaire developed by Oxford (1990) as a foundation, and adapts it to the specific context of graduate students in a Moroccan setting. By utilizing this questionnaire, the research investigates the learning strategies employed by these students and examines their proficiency in various strategy types. The focus is placed on memory, metacognitive, cognitive, compensatory, affective, and social strategies, as they have been identified as key components in successful language learning.

The study participants consist of graduate students enrolled in Master's and Doctorate programs, reflecting a population with a high level of language proficiency and academic engagement. By targeting this specific group, the study seeks to uncover the unique characteristics and strategies employed by successful language learners within the academic context.

In summary, this article aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on good language learners by examining the learning strategies and characteristics of graduate students. The study fills a gap in the literature by exploring the specific context of graduate programs in Morocco and shedding light on the strategies employed by successful language learners in this academic setting. The findings and implications of this research have the potential to inform and shape language teaching practices and learner training programs to optimize language learning outcomes among graduate students.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1. Background and Origins

In the late 60s and early 70s, researchers (Carroll 1967; Rubin 1975; Stern 1975; and Cohen 1977) were inciting more research to find differences in language learning between effective learners and less effective ones. These articles constitute a valuable source of inspiration for a large number of researchers who wanted to investigate good language learners as well. In 1978, Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern, and Todesco conducted a study entitled '*The Good Language Learner*'. Following this research, further studies were undertaken by many scholars in the 1980s namely: Long (1985), Ellis (1986), Johnson and Newport (1989), and Oxford (1989). Naiman et al. (1978) aimed to identify distinguishing traits and strategies of successful language learners. The study, which focused on both adults and Canadian schoolchildren learning French, found that successful adult learners employed five key strategies, including an active approach to learning and effective self-monitoring. For schoolchildren, while certain learner characteristics were correlated with success, the majority of cognitive and personality tests did not show a systematic relationship with language proficiency. Nonetheless, the study underscored the pivotal role of attitude and motivation as overarching predictors of language learning success, thereby laying the foundation for subsequent research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

2.2. Characteristics of Good Language Learners

It is widely known that some learners perform better than others in a classroom. When learning a foreign language, various variables can help some learners achieve better than others. In addition to that, there are also a few features and strategies that can draw a difference between successful and

less successful learners. Therefore, understanding how good learners approach learning can help teachers deal with less successful learners more suitably.

Rubin (1975) suggested some strategies that are attributed to good language learners: (1) They enjoy guessing and make smart guesses. It seems that their guesses are not random, and they are based on their “*feel for grammatical structures, clues from the lexical items...clues from redundancy in the message.*” (p. 46). (2) They try to communicate, and they learn from it. They overcome their limitations in the target language to convey a message. In other words, they can use different strategies to replace a word that they do not know just to get the message across. (3) They are risk-takers and are not restrained. They are not afraid to make mistakes in order to learn. (4) They notice forms, grammatical structures, and meanings. For example, in a conversation, they would pay attention to conversation management strategies, including reformulation techniques, to ensure that both speakers understand each other's pronunciation. When speaking, they monitor their own pronunciation and the pronunciation of the other speakers as well. (5) They enjoy practicing. They start conversations and seize every opportunity that will allow them to put their knowledge into practice. (6) They are active learners, and they are constantly checking their language and that of other people.

Similarly, Stern (1975) discussed the following traits that distinguish good language learners and make them stand out: (1) Good learners develop their own learning styles and adopt learning strategies that suit them. In addition to that, they can easily adapt to various learning conditions. (2) They are active and are not content with receiving only. In other words, they are autonomous because they appear to take responsibility for their own learning. (3) They are more accepting and tolerant of native speakers of the target language. (4) They know how to approach learning languages. (5) They experiment with the language in an organized manner. (6) They are active researchers, and they always search for meaning. (7) They enjoy practicing language and communicating in real-life situations. (8) They have the ability to monitor themselves and be critical of their own use of the language. (9) They improve the target language to the extent of thinking in that language instead of simultaneously translating from their first language while communicating.

To sum up, it can be deduced from the abovementioned characteristics that good language learners are active learners who are constantly craving to learn more. They attend to form and to meaning. They are outgoing and enjoy communicating with others and experimenting with language. These characteristics are affected by some internal and external factors that will be discussed next.

2.3. Factors

The following variables are not the only ones that can affect learning. In fact, there are countless factors that one can discuss, and that can affect the learners to some extent. Rubin (1975) asserted that there is a minimum of three variables that affect language learners: aptitude, motivation, and opportunity. In addition to the variables mentioned before, Griffiths (2008) suggested more learner variables such as age, style, personality, gender, culture, beliefs, strategies, metacognition, and autonomy. She argued that both these internal and external factors make every learner stand out. Additionally, she mentioned the following learning variables: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, function, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. She explained that although these factors are external, they must be taken into consideration in order to make the learning process successful.

2.4. Aptitude

Rubin (1975) claimed that aptitude is one of the variables that cannot be manipulated and that is difficult, if not impossible, for a teacher to change it. In other words, it is considered to be a static or a semi-static factor. It is almost described as a talent that good language learners have naturally. Obler (1989) provided an example of an exceptional language learner named CJ. He was a native speaker of English who became multilingual by learning many languages in a short time. He learned French, German, Spanish, Latin, and Moroccan Arabic in formal settings. He also learned German in school but mastered it better while visiting Germany. Additionally, he learned both Spanish and Italian simply by staying for a few weeks in both Spain and Italy. Not only did CJ learn various languages, but he also learned them quickly. Rubin (1975) mentioned two commonly used ways to test aptitude: The Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) and the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (PLAB). They were designed by Carroll and Sapon (1959) and Pimsleur (1966), respectively. She also explained that the issue with these tests is that they are in fact an efficient way to foretell how successful the students will be, but they do not give any indication on how to improve the students' ability to learn the language. In a similar vein, Ranta (2008) argued that the communicative language teaching's (CLT) appearance in the 80s also influenced the importance of aptitude as a factor by rendering it worthless. She challenged this idea by explaining how aptitude is interrelated to other factors like opportunity and motivation. Therefore, it can still be a beneficial factor that is worth considering if it is well-adapted by teachers to help poorer learners become good learners.

2.5. Motivation

One of the most crucial factors in language learning is motivation. Whether it is intrinsic or extrinsic, it seems to be the fuel that can push anyone to take action. As defined by Ryan and Deci (2000), "*To be motivated means to be moved to do something.*" (p. 54) It was mentioned as one of the three main variables that affect good language learners by Rubin (1975). Gardner and Lambert (1972) suggested two types of motivation in language learning. On one hand, integrative motivation occurs when the learner desires to integrate the community of people who speak the target language. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, happens when learners want to use the language as a means to achieve something. Skehan (1991) explained that although integrative motivation seems to be stronger than the instrumental one, the further one goes away from Montreal (the birthplace of Gardner and Lambert's study), the more results change. He confirmed it by mentioning a few studies where instrumental motivation appeared to be more rewarding. Another way to categorize motivation is through intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. As their names suggest, the former refers to a type of motivation that comes from within while the latter is an external source of motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) defined them as the following:

The most basic distinction is between intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and extrinsic motivation, which refers to doing something because it leads to a separable outcome. (p. 55).

As mentioned before, some types of motivation seem to have a different effect on learners. However, one cannot deny the importance of motivation for learners in general. Therefore, it remains an important factor that pushes good language learners to continue improving their skills (Rubin, 1972).

2.6. Attitude

Attitude is a factor that is very closely related to motivation. Holding a positive attitude towards a given language creates a strong motivation to learn that same language. Stern (1975) asserted that when learners develop an outgoing attitude toward the language, they are more likely to learn better. The author linked this idea to the “integrative orientation” that was introduced by Gardner and Lambert. It is only natural that if learners hold a positive attitude towards a language, they will want to discover the culture and speak to native speakers of that language. In addition to that, the characteristics that distinguish good language learners will allow them to learn through communication as long as their perception of the target language is positive.

2.7. Opportunity

Opportunity regroups all the activities that learners are exposed to in both formal and informal settings (Rubin, 1975). As mentioned before, one of the characteristics of good language learners is that they like to seize every opportunity they have to communicate with other people. Rubin (1975) also mentioned that they would even generate opportunities when there are none in order for them to enhance their skills. When drawing a comparison between good and poor language learners, Stern (1975) explained that while successful learners use opportunities to test their knowledge, less successful ones circumvent them. This makes poorer learners lag behind successful ones because they do not use and are not exposed to the language as is required.

2.8. Gender

Gender is an important factor that can determine how people act in everyday life. Being born a male or a female somehow dictates how the person should act when he/she grows up. This, of course, also affects language since it reflects the identity of the person. It is widely believed that women learn languages better than men. Legato (2005) stated that when compared to men, women are better at communicating because the areas in their brains that are concerned with listening and speaking function better during a conversation. Nyikos (2008) claims that women tend to utilize more strategies in language learning than men. She asserted the following:

Women encourage conversational partners to talk, remember more details, are more polite, and more likely to try to reach consensus. Women's greater tendency to accept cultural norms and their desire for social approval motivate them to strive for higher grades than men.” (p. 76)

These criteria seem to match with the characteristics of good language learners in the sense that they both like to communicate, they are more accepting of other people and their culture, and they are motivated to perform better. Nyikos (2008) said that even if the belief that women are better is widely common, studies did not provide a definitive answer. Therefore, it is best to believe that both genders can be good language learners.

2.9. Environment

The environment that surrounds learners can also affect how they perform. For example, schools can provide different environments for learners. Some people study in better conditions and some are exposed to traditional teaching. These elements can highly influence the student's learning process. However, Naiman et al. (1996) argue that although successful and less successful learners share the

same classroom, they do not necessarily share the same learning environment. This is due to various factors such as classroom interaction, students' attitudes toward the language, their levels of motivation, etc.

2.10. Personality

There are certain characteristics pertinent to personality that can differentiate between successful and unsuccessful learners such as risk-taking and introversion/extroversion.

Brown (2000) suggests that learners who are willing to take risks while learning without the fear to appear foolish are good language learners. This was also one of the characteristics cited by Rubin (1975). It is true that in a formal context, teachers can choose to help students feel more at ease while learning; therefore, the idea of taking risks does not seem as difficult. However, this does not dismiss the fact that good language learners are more likely to keep trying, practicing, and experimenting with language whenever they get the chance to do so.

It seems obvious for extroverts to be better language learners than introverts because they engage in conversations and practice the languages that they are learning. Research confirms this idea by explaining that extroverts have a tendency to practice inside and outside the classroom, which gives them better opportunities to ameliorate their language skills (Naiman et al., 1996; Skehan, 1989). Since communication improves certain skills like listening and speaking, it could mean that extroverts are better language learners in these skills only. For example, in oral communication, extroverts were proven to perform better than introverts. Nevertheless, they did not excel as much in other language skills (Ellis, 2004). This could be explained by the fact that they enjoy communicating; thus, they are more fluent. While this fits the general description of a good language learner, other research proved this belief wrong. Ehrman (2008) noticed that introverts were the best language learners. She interpreted the results of her study explaining that there are other factors that are stronger than personalities and that can have an impact on how good a learner is such as motivation.

2.11. Use of Strategies

Based on what has been mentioned before, successful learners tend to use strategies that suit their learning and make the learning process easier for them. Chamot (2005) defined learner strategies as "*procedures that facilitate a learning task*" (p. 112). According to Grenfell and Harris (1999), it is essential to understand how learners use strategies for two main reasons. The first reason is to learn more about the metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective processes in language learning. The second one is to help less successful learners learn by developing new strategies that successful learners use. Nonetheless, when it comes to the second reason, it is best to help learners find strategies that will fit them on a personal level. Grenfell (2007) claims that successful learners do not use all strategies. He emphasized this idea by stating the following: "*Individual preferences could be seen in terms of individual learning styles.*" (p. 12). Sometimes, it appears that teaching students to use certain strategies is not the issue, but it is about teaching how to use them that makes a difference.

In this regard, Khaldieh (2000) demonstrated that both proficient and less proficient writers used various writing strategies. However, 'good' writers applied the strategies more actively than others. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that it is not the number of strategies that are used, but how students adapt them to their own learning. As for determining which learning styles learners use, Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is a widely recognized and influential tool

in the field of second language acquisition. The SILL is a comprehensive questionnaire designed to assess learners' use of language learning strategies across various dimensions. It provides valuable insights into learners' metacognitive, cognitive, and social strategies, as well as affective, memory, and compensatory strategies. The SILL has been widely used in research and educational settings to explore the relationship between strategy use and language learning outcomes. By examining learners' awareness and application of different strategies, the SILL offers a deeper understanding of learners' approaches to language learning and informs the development of effective instructional practices and learner training programs.

2.12. Rationale Behind Studying Good Language Learners

Based on what has been discussed previously, one can only ask questions about 'What can we learn from good language learners?', 'Can everyone become a good language learner?', and 'How can a person become a better learner?' As Rubin (1975) stated, "*If we knew more about what the 'successful learners' did, we might be able to teach these strategies to poorer learners to enhance their success record.*" The idea of understanding the characteristics of good language learners as well as the variables that influenced them can be implemented for less effective learners to help them improve their ability to learn. Thus, if teachers observe good language learners closely, they can probably help the poorer ones perform better.

Rubin's (1975) initial idea was to teach less successful learners about the strategies that good language learners use. Various studies have been conducted over the years to check whether teaching strategies would yield effective results. Nonetheless, these studies have reached different results. Griffiths (2015) explained that while some studies reported negative results about strategy teachability, others recorded prosperous ones. She suggested that in order to elaborate an effective strategy instruction, the following items should be included: "*awareness-raising, practice, and evaluation, and these should be taught using both explicit and implicit instructional techniques.*" (p. 7) Furthermore, she insisted that one teaching technique would not be adequate for all learners. They have to be treated individually because they have differences that should be taken into consideration.

2.13. Autonomy and Good Language Learners

Autonomy can be defined as "*the ability to take charge of one's own learning.*" (Holec, p. 3) It focuses mainly on the responsibility and control that learners can have about their own learning. Autonomous learners then could be considered good language learners. In this regard, Cohen (1998) found similarities between good language learners and autonomous learners. He believes that successful learners tend to be knowledgeable about their learning level and are able to take control of their learning the same way that autonomous learners would decide upon their learning. They both possess a sense of awareness of the learning process that can make both of them learn efficiently. Analogously, Maftoon, Daftarifard, and Lavasani (2011) reported that good language learners were indeed autonomous because they "*set their goals, find their own strengths and weaknesses in learning, they evaluate their learning process, etc.*" (p. 111) These criteria can be used to describe autonomous learners as well. They suggested that teachers need to implement autonomy in their classrooms for less successful learners to help them become independent and take control over their own learning. On this matter, Cotterall (2008), argued that in order to foster learner autonomy, teachers need to take into consideration students' differences as well as the learning context. As a result, using one teaching technique on all learners will not lead to successful learning. As she stated, "*We must also accept that it is futile to try and develop a teaching approach which will suit all*

learners, or indeed to promote a unique profile of the good language learner.” In other words, students need to be dealt with as individuals with different personalities, motivations, needs, goals, etc. Perhaps, it is safe to say that if teachers encourage students to become more autonomous, they will be helping them become better language learners.

What might have been drawn from the aforementioned discussion is that there are indeed countless characteristics and factors which shape in more subtle ways the success or failure of language learners. However, when looking into these variables, one should not focus solely on one variable as the only one affecting learners. It seems that in order to help learners in their journey, teachers need to consider their uniqueness. The idea is to provide learners with the tools they need and with the ability to choose suitable ones. As Brown (2002) asserted,

It has long been recognized that the most successful learners of language are those who understand their own abilities and capabilities well and who autonomously engage in systematic efforts within and beyond the classroom to reach self-determined goals of acquisition” p. vii.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Do graduate students possess the characteristics that allow them to be considered good -language learners?
2. What are the strategies that are used by these learners?

3.2. Respondents

This study was conducted among Master’s and Doctorate students enrolled in EFL programs in Morocco (N=118): 42 Master’s students and 76 Doctorate students. The method that was adopted is the purposive sampling method. These respondents were chosen because they fit the criteria of good language learners based on their good academic grades and on the fact that they had to sit for the entrance examinations as a prerequisite for the enrollment in their respective programs. Therefore, the chosen method helps determine whether these learners share the same characteristics as good language learners as they fit the requirements for this study.

3.3. Instruments

The questionnaire that was distributed to the respondents was based on Oxford’s (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0. The questionnaire was modified to better suit the level of the learners. Some items were changed while others were omitted. After adapting the questionnaire, it was distributed to respondents (N= 14) who are not participating in the study to check the reliability of the questionnaire. (R= .864)

The present questionnaire includes 43 learning strategies that good language learners use. The answers are on a Likert scale of 5 points where 1 is “never or almost never true of me”, 2 is “generally not true of me”, 3 is “somewhat true of me”, 4 is “generally true of me”, and 5 is “always of almost always true of me”.

3.4. Data Analysis

In order to measure the frequency of the strategies used, a sum of mean scores was used to determine the average score. Oxford (1990) suggests that a score from 1.0 to 2.4 is considered to be low, 2.5 to 3.4 is medium, and 3.5 to 5.0 is an indicator of a high strategy use. Thus, the scores were categorized into low, medium, and high.

4. Findings

Overall Strategy Use

Table 1. Mean Scores of Language Learning Strategies.

Strategy	Mean	Frequency	Rank
Memory	4.0000	High	1
Metacognitive	3.9778	High	2
Cognitive	3.7846	High	3
Compensatory	3.7333	High	4
Affective	3.6133	High	5
Social	3.2111	Medium	6
TOTAL	3.7199		

Table 1 demonstrates that the respondents are successful language learners since the total average of the strategies' use is 3.7199. It also appears that the frequency of use of most strategies (memory, metacognitive, cognitive, compensatory, and affective) is high ranging from 3.6133 to 4. It is also worth mentioning that although social strategies were ranked last, the frequency of their use is medium (Mean=3.211).

4.1. Individual Strategy Use

Memory

Table 2. Table 3. *Mean Scores of Memory Strategies.*

Statement	Mean	Frequency Level
I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.	4.4667	High
I review the information I recently learned very often.	3.2000	Medium

All the items in this category had a high frequency of use except for the item shown above which had a medium frequency level: "I review the information I recently learned very often." Table 2 demonstrates that the highest strategy used by students is "I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word." This means that the majority of students depend on their visual memory to retain vocabulary by associating words with images in their minds (Ali, et al 2023). Farrokh et. al (2021) found that visual mnemonic techniques can be efficient in enhancing adult learners' vocabulary learning. On the other hand, though the other item scored the least, this strategy is still frequently used by the respondents. This could mean that

the students are reviewing their lessons and self-study notes regularly, but not as often as they could be.

4.2. Metacognitive

Table 4. Mean Scores of Metacognitive Strategies.

Statement	Mean	Frequency Level
I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	4.6000	High
I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	2.8667	Medium

Only one out of nine strategies had a medium frequency of use. The most used strategy with a mean score of 4.6 is the following: “I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.” Certain characteristics assist good language learners to succeed in learning a new language. These include paying attention to meaning, having good techniques for practicing listening, speaking, reading, and writing, pushing themselves to communicate and try to become fluent, looking for opportunities to talk with native speakers, finding their own way, and taking charge of their learning and becoming autonomous learners, learning from others and experimenting with different methods, working independently and taking responsibility for developing aspects of their own learning, organizing their study of the language, and organizing information about the language they study, being creative and understanding that language is creative, experimenting with the language and playing with grammar, words, and sounds. These characteristics can explain why the frequency level of use of the item “I try to find out how to be a better learning of English” is high among students enrolled in Master’s and Doctorate programs.

The frequency level of use of the statement “I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English” is medium among the respondents because while many students recognize the importance of planning and organizing their study of English, they may face challenges in balancing their time between studying English and other academic or personal responsibilities. Additionally, some students may prefer a more flexible approach to studying English, rather than adhering to a strict schedule. These factors could contribute to the medium frequency level of use of this item.

4.3. Cognitive

Table 5. Mean Scores of Cognitive Strategies.

Statements	Mean	Frequency Level
I read for pleasure in English.	4.5333	High
I use the English words I know in different ways.	3.0667	Medium

This table demonstrates that reading for pleasure is a high-frequency use. It makes sense considering how reading helps language learners improve their grammar, vocabulary, writing, and reading comprehension skills (Santi et al., 2021). It also allows language learners to explore topics that they love and stories that engage them. In addition to that, it helps learners discover more about the culture of native speakers by learning cultural expressions and idioms. Therefore, it comes as no surprise

that reading for pleasure is an activity that good language learners enjoy doing because it allows them to learn more about the language they are learning while having fun at the same time. The table also showed that using English words in different ways is a medium frequency use because it is not as common as reading for pleasure. However, it is still an important activity for good language learners because it helps them remember and use new words in speech. They experiment with different ways of recording vocabulary such as mind maps or flashcards. They also make note of the different forms, uses, and pronunciation of particular words.

4.4. Compensatory

Table 6. Mean Scores of Compensatory Strategies.

Statements	Mean	Frequency Level
If I cannot think of an English word, I use a word or a phrase that means the same thing.	4.2000	High
I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	2.7333	Medium

The high-frequency use of the statement “If I cannot think of an English word, I use a word or a phrase that means the same thing” as shown in the above table indicates an important characteristic of good language learners. Good language learners possess a strong ability to employ effective communication strategies, such as circumlocution, when faced with lexical gaps. Instead of getting discouraged by a brief inability to recall a specific word, they show resourcefulness by employing alternative expressions that convey the desired idea. This approach highlights their adaptability and versatility in language use, allowing them to maintain fluency and communicate their thoughts effectively even in the face of vocabulary limitations. By embracing this strategy, good language learners demonstrate their proactive approach to language learning, fostering continuous growth and improvement in their English language proficiency. Since the respondents tend to resort to circumlocution to get their message across, it explains their reluctance to invent new words to get their message across. The medium frequency use of the statement “I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English” suggests that the respondents would rather prioritize accuracy and strive to use appropriate and established vocabulary in their communication. Making up new words can be seen as a less desirable approach because it may lead to misunderstandings or confusion for both the speaker and the listener.

4.5. Affective

Table 7. Mean Scores of Affective Strategies.

Statement	Mean	Frequency Level
I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	4.1333	High
I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	3.1333	Medium

The high-frequency use of the statement “I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake” in the questionnaire highlights a key characteristic of good language learners.

Good language learners possess a strong motivation and self-confidence that enables them to overcome the fear of making mistakes in order to actively engage in English communication. Recognizing that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process, these learners embrace opportunities to practice speaking English without letting their fear hinder their progress. By encouraging themselves to speak despite their apprehensions, they create a supportive environment that fosters language development and fluency. This willingness to take risks and step outside their comfort zones demonstrates their dedication to continuous improvement and the mastery of English language skills. Moreover, it reflects their understanding that effective language learning involves trial and error, as well as a positive mindset that values learning from mistakes as an essential part of the learning journey.

The medium frequency use of the item “I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English” suggests that this self-awareness of emotional states during language learning is moderately prevalent among the surveyed respondents. Good language learners understand the significant impact of emotions on their language acquisition process. While some learners may experience occasional anxiety or uneasiness when studying or using English, they understand the need of being aware of their emotional state. This self-awareness enables them to identify the factors that contribute to their emotional discomfort and take appropriate actions to alleviate it. The recognition of their emotional state reflects their commitment to optimizing their learning experience by creating a relaxed environment for language acquisition. It indicates that good language learners value the connection between emotions and language learning outcomes, demonstrating a balanced approach that acknowledges the role of emotional well-being in achieving proficiency in English.

4.6. Social

Table 8. Mean *Scores of Social Strategies.*

Statement	Mean	Frequency Level
I ask questions in English.	3.8000	High
I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	2.6667	Medium

As demonstrated in Table 7, respondents’ frequency of asking questions in English is high. Asking questions in English demonstrates their active engagement and proactive approach to language learning. By frequently asking questions in English, they demonstrate a willingness to actively participate in discussions, interact with professors and peers, and seek valuable information. This practice not only helps them clarify concepts and resolve doubts but also enhances their language skills, including vocabulary acquisition, sentence structure, and fluency. Moreover, by asking questions, learners demonstrate their confidence and willingness to take risks, valuing the opportunity to learn and improve. Overall, this high frequency of asking questions in English highlights their curiosity, critical thinking skills, and commitment to continuous learning, all of which contribute to their overall proficiency and success in mastering the English language. As for the other statement concerning learning about the culture of native speakers of English, it appears that a significant portion of the respondents recognize the value of understanding the culture associated with the English language. While not as prevalent as some other practices, this medium frequency reflects a moderate level of interest and effort in exploring the cultural aspects intertwined

with language learning. Good language learners understand that culture and language are closely interconnected, and gaining insights into the cultural context of English speakers can greatly enhance their language proficiency. By attempting to learn about the culture, these learners aim to develop cultural competence, which includes knowledge of social norms, customs, traditions, and communication styles of English-speaking communities. Understanding cultural nuances not only facilitates effective communication but also promotes cross-cultural understanding. Although the medium frequency suggests that some respondents may focus more on language acquisition itself, the recognition and engagement with cultural learning demonstrate the learners' holistic approach to language learning, acknowledging the importance of cultural awareness and its impact on successful language use.

5. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into graduate students' learning strategies. The mean scores indicate that these students exhibit high levels of engagement in types of learning strategies, namely memory (Mean=4.000), metacognitive (Mean=3.9778), cognitive (Mean=3.7846), compensatory (Mean=3.7333), and affective (Mean=3.6133), while the social strategies received a medium rating (Mean=3.2111). Oxford (1990) posits that learning strategies can be broadly categorized into direct and indirect strategies. The high mean scores observed in this study across direct strategies, notably memory and cognitive, resonate with Baddeley's (1992) multi-component model of working memory. This suggests that graduate students effectively operationalize their working memory system to store and manipulate language-related information. Importantly, none of the strategies were considered low, indicating the overall proficiency and commitment of the graduate students as EFL learners. These findings align with Lai, Saab, and Admiraal's (2022) systematic review, which also identified high utilization of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in self-directed language learning among higher education students.

The results strongly support the notion that graduate students possess the characteristics that allow them to be considered good language learners. The high mean scores across multiple strategy types suggest that these students actively employ a diverse range of strategies to facilitate their language learning process. Pintrich (2000) asserts that metacognitive strategies are instrumental in enhancing learning outcomes. The high scores in metacognitive and cognitive strategies may suggest that graduate students are adept at navigating their learning environment, arguably reflecting Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development where learning is optimized through structured planning and self-regulation. This is further corroborated by Bećirović, Brdarević-Čeljo, and Polz (2021) who found that cognitive strategies positively predict academic achievement in language learning.

The high ratings in compensatory strategies indicate that these learners demonstrate resourcefulness by employing alternative means, such as circumlocution or using context clues, to compensate for any gaps in their language proficiency. The high scores in affective strategies signify their self-motivation, positive attitude, and perseverance in language learning. According to Dörnyei and Csizér (1998), motivation is pivotal in the success of language acquisition. The high ratings in affective strategies might indicate not just self-motivation but also greater resilience, echoing Goleman's (1995) theories on emotional intelligence as a precursor to academic success. Sukying's study on Thai EFL university students also found a high frequency of use of affective strategies, further substantiating these findings.

Although the social strategy mean score falls within the medium range, it is still notable that graduate students recognize the importance of social interaction and collaboration in language learning.

Bandura (1977) emphasized the significance of social interaction in the learning process. The medium rating could suggest that while graduate students do engage in social learning, the focus might predominantly lie on autonomous strategies, supported by Knowles' (1975) theory on adult learning which posits that adult learners are often more self-directed. Alfian (2021) found that Islamic university students also reported a high use of metacognitive strategies, which could imply a similar focus on autonomous learning strategies.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that both Master's and Doctorate students in this study exhibit characteristics of good language learners by employing a wide range of effective learning strategies. These findings align with previous research that emphasizes the importance of employing a combination of strategies to enhance language learning outcomes. By utilizing these strategies, graduate students show their commitment, motivation, and metacognitive awareness, which contribute to their success in acquiring English language proficiency.

It is important to note that these findings are specific to the sample of graduate students in this study, and further research needs to be conducted to explore the generalizability of these results to other contexts or larger populations. However, the results provide valuable insights into the strategies employed by successful language learners among graduate students and highlight the significance of these strategies in facilitating their language acquisition process. Further investigations are warranted to explore the role of social strategies in depth and to assess the generalizability of these findings.

5.1. Implications

The implications drawn from the findings of this study on good language learners among graduate students offer valuable insights into language teaching practices, learner training, research focus, and the transferability of the findings to diverse educational contexts. The practical implications derived from the study provide guidance for educators, curriculum designers, and researchers aiming to enhance language learning outcomes among graduate students.

Firstly, the study's implications emphasize the importance of integrating a variety of learning strategies in language teaching. Educators can leverage the findings to design instructional approaches that promote the utilization of memory, metacognitive, cognitive, compensatory, and affective strategies among students. By incorporating these strategies into the classroom, instructors can encourage students to become more autonomous and effective language learners.

Secondly, the study's implications highlight the need for learner training programs that explicitly teach and guide students in utilizing the identified strategies. As Nadif and Benattabou (2021) stated, "*training learners on how to use effectively language learning strategies that are used by GLLs may surely help promote their language learning outcomes.*" (p. 71) These training programs can provide students with the necessary knowledge and skills to employ these strategies purposefully and effectively. By fostering awareness and providing training in these strategies, learners can enhance their language learning experiences and optimize their language proficiency development.

Additionally, the study's findings draw attention to the need for further research on social strategies in language learning. While the medium rating of social strategies suggests an avenue for exploration, future research can delve deeper into the role of social interaction, collaboration, and cultural immersion in promoting language learning outcomes among graduate students. Understanding the potential benefits of social strategies can inform instructional practices and create opportunities for meaningful language engagement.

Lastly, the implications prompt researchers to examine the transferability of these findings to different educational contexts. While this study focused on graduate students in Morocco, exploring the generalizability of the implications to a larger population sample and other linguistic backgrounds can enhance our understanding of good language learning strategies in diverse settings.

In conclusion, the implications derived from this study provide practical guidance for language teaching practices, learner training programs, research focus, and the transferability of findings to diverse contexts. These implications contribute to the enhancement of language learning practices and can facilitate the success of graduate students as they strive to become proficient English language learners.

6. Conclusion

The research article delves into the strategies and characteristics that define successful language learners among EFL graduate students in Morocco. By utilizing a case study approach with a sample size of 118 graduate students from various programs, the study aimed to uncover the prevalent learning methods and traits associated with effective language acquisition. The research instrument, adapted from Oxford's (1990) questionnaire, was instrumental in gauging the students' engagement in a variety of learning strategies. The findings indicate a pronounced inclination among participants towards strategies such as memory, metacognitive, cognitive, compensatory, and affective.

The findings of this study seem to offer further support in corroboration of the contention that the incorporation and implementation of the learning strategies espoused by good language learners is of paramount importance and should therefore be given a top priority in the arena of foreign language learning and teaching. The implications derived from this research provide practical guidance for language teaching practices, learner training programs, research focus, and the transferability of findings to other more diversified contexts. These implications may surely contribute to the enhancement of language learning practices and can eventually facilitate the success of graduate students as they strive to become proficient English language learners.

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