

A Cross-sectional Study of Oral Communication Strategies by Successful EFL Learners

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Abstract

This paper reports on how top EFL students foster oral communication strategies (OCSs) throughout their 4-year English program at the university level. It is a cross-sectional study of 40 EFL learners enrolled in the Department of English, Faculty of Education, Taiz University, Yemen. Data were collected through a questionnaire based on Oxford's Strategy inventory for language learning (SILL). The findings revealed that the respondents not only used listening and speaking strategies in Oxford's inventory but also invented some other strategies to cope with their learning environment. It was also found that the more they advance in the EFL program, the more their strategic competence improves. The results confirm previous studies that high-achieving learners employ several OCSs which facilitate their success. These strategies are put forward to low-achieving learners so as to elevate their English learning.

Keywords: learning strategies, language learning strategies (LLS); oral communication strategies (OCSs), EFL learners; strategy inventory

Introduction

Today English language has established itself as an international language. It is being increasingly recognized as a global language and most non-English speaking countries are turning their attention to its teaching much more seriously. Like many other countries, Yemen exerts effort to promote English instruction. However, there are several obstacles on the way of language learners as well as teachers who deliver English instruction in structured classroom sessions. Of course, in such classrooms teachers use various strategies to accomplish their teaching tasks, and learners similarly employ some learning strategies to attain better learning outcomes (Ali & Säberg, 2017; Al-Sohbani, 2013; Keong, Yassin & Abdulrahman, 2014; Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011). In the context of this study, English learners do not study all subjects in English. At the entry level, for example, they need to study an average fourteen subjects. Only eight of these subjects are taught in English, and most of these are taught by expatriates, and to understand them, the students need good oral communication skills.

Noticeably, university students tend to use strategies that help them cope with their new learning atmosphere which is quite different from their school ecology. They join the department of English with no pre-college preparation. They directly join the new learning environment without a smooth transmission (Al-Sohbani, 2013; Keong, Yassin & Abdulrahman, 2014). Hence, they tend to use new strategies for the new learning situations. For example, they memorize a lot of information, texts, and rules for the purpose of examinations. They lack practical communication strategies when they come into contact with their teachers. They hesitate to ask questions in the class or talk to their language teachers without switching to their mother-tongue. They feel ashamed to be involved in a talk in English with limited skills of communication (Keong, Yassin & Abdulrahman, 2014). They find it uneasy to open a conversation and, even if they do, they are unable to keep the conversation going or close it favourably. Thus, investigating the learning strategies used by the Yemeni English learners is

helpful to find out certain strategies that these learners need to develop in order to use English effectively and efficiently.

The research problem

As a matter of fact, most university students of English are quite inept at expressing themselves orally, particularly at the entry level. Upon joining university, Yemeni EFL learners find themselves in a learning environment quite dissimilar from the one they used to (i.e. at school). They join university with particular needs and expectations. However, their needs and the actual system of teaching do not match (Al-kadi, 2012; Keong, Yassin & Abdulrahman, 2014). There is a gap between the required competence and the existing competence of the learners. This gap has to be closed. Bridging this gap requires teacher-intervention as well as development of useful learner strategies. Despite a substantial body of research on language learning strategies (LLSs) in the worldwide context, there is a scant research on LLSs in the context of this study. Thus, the study builds on the premise that EFL learners' uses of communication strategies predict success in learning English (Arpacı-Somuncu, 2016) and teaching communication strategies impacts English learning (Bataineh, Al-Bzour & Baniabdelrahman, 2017; Kongsom, 2016). Assumingly, good language learners utilize strategies that enable them to be more successful than slower learners (Khan, 2010; Maldonado, 2016; Metcalfe & Noom-Ura, 2013; Yanju & Yanmei, 2016).

A good number of previous studies looked into learning strategies employing samples of homogeneous linguistic background (same level of learning). There is a need of longitudinal and/or cross sectional studies to investigate the oral communication (OCSs) across a given population of learners. The present study is a cross sectional inquiry of the strategies adopted by successful Yemeni EFL learners who cope with learning difficulties to succeed in their learning. The study primarily focuses on OCSs. The results are benchmarked against the status of OCSs in similar EFL contexts, e.g. the Thai context (Metcalfe & Noom-Ura, 2013; Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011); the Spanish context (Khan, 2010; Maldonado, 2016); the Turkish context (Arpacı-Somuncu, 2016); the Iranian context (Rastegar & Gohari, 2016); and the Iraqi context (Ugla, Adnan & Zainol Abidin, 2012). This comparison illuminates what works and what do not work in the context under scrutiny. Once those strategies are identified, they can be taught to the less successful learners.

Objectives

The study aims at finding out the strategies that the first ten top (most successful) EFL learners tend to use in order to foster oral communication strategies in their English studies. It also intends to explore the diversity of such strategies among a body of learners of different linguistic background. These objectives were operationalized into the following research questions:

Research questions

- Q1. What are the strategies that high-achieving Yemeni EFL learners generally use in learning listening and speaking?
- Q2. Is there evidence of diversifying OCSs among the cohort of learners in this study? If yes, what implications does the study suggest?

Literature review

Language learning strategies (LLSs)

The term *language learning strategy* has been defined by many researchers. In an early definition, Wenden and Rubin (1987) referred to learning strategies as “any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information” (p.19). Likewise, Richards and Platt (1992) stated that learning strategies are “intentional behaviour and thoughts used by learners during learning so as to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information” (p. 209). A learning strategy in Faerch and Kasper’s (1983) words is “an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language” (p. 67). According to Stern (1992), “the concept of learning strategy is dependent on the assumption that learners consciously engage in activities to achieve certain goals and learning strategies can be regarded as broadly conceived intentional directions and learning techniques” (p.261). Whatever the definition, LLSs remain a broad concept referring to all strategies foreign language learners employ in learning the target language, and communication strategies fall within one type of LLSs.

It follows from this that LLSs are essential to develop the communicative competence of students for they process gigantic amount of information in the language classroom. Arguably, using LLSs is a good indicator of how learners approach tasks or problems they encounter in language learning (Ali & Säberg, 2017; Arpacı-Somuncu, 2016; Brown, 2014; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011; Yanju & Yanmei, 2016). In other words, LLSs, while non-observable or unconsciously used in some cases, give language teachers valuable clues about how their students assess the situation of learning, plan, select appropriate skills so as to understand, learn, or remember the new input presented in classroom (Arpacı-Somuncu, 2016; Bataineh, Al-Bzour & Baniabdelrahman, 2017). Lessard-Clouston (1997) argued that language learning strategies contribute to the development of the communicative competence of students.

There has been a shift within the field of language learning and teaching over the last decades with greater emphasis on learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching (Jacobs, Renandya & Power, 2016; Sit, 2017). The new shift accentuated how learners process new information, and what kinds of strategies they utilize to understand, learn or remember information. Research into LLSs began in the 1960s in parallel to developments in cognitive psychology which influenced much of the LLS research. In most of LLS research, the primary concern has been on “identifying what good language learners report they do to learn a second or foreign language, or, in some cases, are observed doing while learning a second or foreign language” (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 19). Aaron Carton’s (1966) study, *The Method of Inference in Foreign Language Study*, is believed to be the first attempt on learner strategies. After Carton, in 1975, Rubin started doing research focussing on the strategies of successful learners arguing that such strategies – once identified– could be made available to less successful learners.

Classifications of learning strategies

Learners are different, so are learning strategies. Since the factors like age, gender, personality, motivation, self-concept, life-experience, learning style, excitement, anxiety, etc. affect the way language learners learn the target language, it is not reasonable to support the idea that all language learners use the same good LLSs. Hence, language learning strategies have been classified by many scholars (e.g. O’Malley et al. 1985; Oxford 1990; Stern 1992; Wenden & Rubin 1987). However, most of these attempts reflect more or less the same categorizations of LLSs without radical changes. Here is a brief discussion of some well-known taxonomy, namely, Rubin, 1987, Oxford, 1990, and O’Malley’s 1985 classifications.

To begin with, O'Malley et al. (1985) divide LLSs into three main subcategories: meta-cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies. According to the author, meta-cognitive strategies require planning for learning, thinking about the learning process as it is taking place, monitoring of one's production or comprehension, and evaluating learning after an activity is completed. In the main meta-cognitive strategies it is possible to include advance organizers, directed attention, selective attention, self-management, functional planning, self-monitoring, delayed production, self-evaluation. Cognitive strategies are more limited to specific learning tasks and they involve more direct manipulation of the learning material itself. The important cognitive strategies include repetition, resourcing, translation, grouping, note taking, deduction, recombination, imagery, auditory representation, key word, contextualization, elaboration, transfer, inference, etc. Socio-affective strategies are related with social-mediating activity and transacting with others. Cooperation and question for clarification are the main socio-affective strategies (Brown, 1987; Brown, 2014).

Another classification is Rubin's (1987) Taxonomy. Pioneering much of the work in the field of LLSs, Rubin discriminated between strategies, arguing that language learners tend to employ three types of strategies that contribute directly or indirectly to language learning: Learning strategies, communication strategies, and social strategies. Learning strategies are of two main types, being the strategies contributing directly to the development of the language system constructed by the learner-cognitive learning strategies and meta-cognitive learning strategies. However, communication strategies are less directly related to language learning since their focus is on the process of participating in a conversation or clarifying what to say. Social strategies refer to those activities which afford learners opportunities to practice their knowledge. Although these strategies provide exposure to the target language, they contribute indirectly to learning since they "do not lead directly to obtaining, storing, retrieving, and using of language" (Wenden & Rubin, 1987, pp. 23).

One more classification widely referred to in the literature is that of Oxford (1990, 1995). Oxford (1990) stated that language learning strategies are oriented towards the development of communicative competence. The author divided the LLSs into two main classes: direct and indirect strategies. Again, these two sets were further subdivided into six groups: meta-cognitive, affective, social, cognitive, memory, and compensation strategies. In Oxford's system, meta-cognitive strategies help learners to regulate their learning. Affective strategies are concerned with the learner's emotional requirements such as confidence, while social strategies lead to increased interaction with the target language. Cognitive strategies are the mental strategies learners use to make sense of their learning, memory strategies are those used for storage of information, and compensation strategies help learners to overcome knowledge gaps to continue the communication.

Oral Communication Strategies (OCSs)

Tarone (1983) defines communication strategies as "a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared" (p.65). Similarly, Færch and Kasper (1983a,) define communication strategies (CSs) as "conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal" (p.36). Further, Canale (1983) termed CSs as "verbal and non-verbal strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to limiting conditions in actual communication or to insufficient competence in one or more other areas of communicative competence, and to enhance the effectiveness of communication" (p.10). The importance of OCSs stems from the significance of learning strategies in general;

they are essential not only within the classroom but also in society. Through talk, students not only communicate information but also come to understand ideas and concepts, identify and solve problems, organize their experience and knowledge, clarify their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Oral communication skills involve listening, and speaking. Students need to listen to their teachers and other students to find meaning in texts and vocal strategies and respond appropriately. Speaking, on the other hand, enables students to interact with others using appropriate language. Selecting useful strategies help learners to express meaning and emotions clearly.

It goes without saying that all language learners use language learning strategies (either consciously or unconsciously) when processing new information. Since language classroom is like a problem-solving environment in which language learners likely face new input and difficult tasks given by their instructors, learners' attempt to find the quickest or easiest way to do what is required, that is, using LLSs is inescapable. Besides developing the communicative competence of the students, teachers who train students to use LLSs may help them become better language learners. Good LLSs are thought to be "the appreciated characteristics of a good language teacher" (Lessard-Clouston 1997, p. 3). Lessard-Clouston (1997) states that language learning strategies contribute to the development of the communicative competence of the students. According to Oxford (1990), LLSs "...are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed movement, which is essential for developing communicative competence" (p.1). In a context similar to the one at hand, Yanju and Yanmei (2016) looked into communication strategies in oral interactions among Middle Eastern students at the University of Malay. The results showed that students used different communication strategies to overcome their communication difficulties. The communication strategies were used to avoid communication breakdown and encouraged them to develop their oral skills (with their limited English language proficiency).

Previous research studies on LLSs

One of the difficulties of researching LLSs is that they cannot usually be observed directly; they can only be inferred from language learner's behaviour (Al Saqqaf, Bidin, Shabdin, Din & Swanto, 2016; Ellis & Tod, 2015). Metaphorically, Ellis (1989) alleged that "it is a bit like trying to work out the classification system of a library when the only evidence to go on consists of the few books you have been allowed to take out" (p.14). Given the difficulties of such a task, the challenge is devising a means first of all to record and subsequently to interpret the phenomena involved, a process which Ellis (1989) likens to stumbling blindfold round a room to find a hidden object. Over the years, different researchers have employed a variety of approaches to this rather daunting task, one of the most frequently used approach is gathering of data about good language learners (Al Saqqaf, Bidin, Shabdin, Din & Swanto, 2016) and about what it is that they do that makes them more successful than slower language learners (Khan 2010; Maldonado, 2016).

Somsai and Intaraprasert (2011) investigated the strategies of oral communication problems (OCP) employed by Rajamangala University of technology students majoring in English for international communication. Findings showed that the students used 24 emergent strategies for coping with OCPs were identified and classified into (a) strategies for conveying a message to the interlocutor and (b) strategies for understanding the message.

In the Thai context too, Kongsom (2016) investigated the effect of teaching communication strategies (CS) on the English undergraduates' speaking abilities in the Thai context. The study reported interplay between CSs and students' learning outcomes only after 10

weeks of instruction; the learners transferred all the strategies that they were taught to their utterances in four speaking tasks. Similarly, Metcalfe and Noom-Ura (2013) investigated the oral fluency and general English proficiency of 104 first year undergraduates at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. The study forges a link between strategy use and proficiency levels showing that high proficiency learners reported significantly higher use of social-affective, fluency-oriented, negotiation for meaning whilst speaking and circumlocution and low proficiency learners reporting significantly higher use of message abandonment and less active listener strategies.

In another EFL context, Ali, and Säberg (2017) highlighted how a teacher may foster and develop student's oral communication skills to speak English. Employing focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews, the study investigated the knowledge gained from the data collected in India and the possibility of utilizing those strategies in the Swedish context. The study found that there were several factors that facilitate students' use of English, by gradually (a) giving them balanced activities and appropriate tasks that challenge them, or (b) enhancing their willingness to speak English by having free discussions about topics familiar to them, or (c) having them deliver speeches on topics that they are passionate about.

In the Arab context, Uгла, Adnan, and Zainol Abidin (2012) investigated the kinds of communication strategies (CSs) used by 50 Iraqi EFL students using a questionnaire adopted from Dornyei and Scott's taxonomy of CSs (1995). The results show different kinds of communication strategies used by Iraqi EFL students. However, students face many difficulties during their communication in English because they use most of CSs in high level. The study suggested a need to incorporate CSs into the English language programs at different levels of education in order to enhance ESL students' ability in oral communication.

Briefly, there is no watertight and rigorous definition of oral communication strategies (OCSs). However, there have been many definitions proposed by researchers who developed new classifications of CSs from time to time. Being a broad concept, LLSs refer to all strategies foreign language learners use in learning the target language, and communication strategies are one type of the package of LLSs. It follows from this that language teachers aiming at developing the communicative competence of the students and language learning should be familiar with LLS. A considerable research work has forged an association between learners' proficiency and CSs utilization, and this study investigates the topic in a new EFL situation.

Method

This paper adopted a cross-sectional research design to unveil OCSs employed by the most successful learners of English in the Faculty of Education, Taiz University. The impetus for choosing this paradigm was the type of investigation itself: examining the strategies of oral communication strategies throughout a 4-year course of English learning. Such a research design, according to Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen (2010), requires a cross sectional sample of a population at a single point of time.

Participants

As suggested by several researchers, a study of good language learners is one of the most frequently used methods in gathering data about learning strategies (Ellis, 1989; Rubin, 1975; Oxford, 1990). Hence, forty students were deliberately selected to fill out Oxford's (1995) SILL. The sample consists of ten top students in a four level EFL teacher-training program (total=40, see Table 1). These students scored the highest marks in their batches. These high achievers joined the Department of English upon an admission test, like the rest of their classmates.

Throughout their course of study, they must have been using different OCSs to contact with their teachers, peers, and reflect on their English studies.

Table 1. *The Sample's background information*

Year/ Level	No. of respondents		Total	Age average
	Male	Female		
Level 1	5	5	10	19
Level 2	3	7	10	20
Level 3	4	6	10	21
Level 4	2	8	10	22
Total	14	26	40	

Source: Registration Record (2014-2017), Faculty of Education, Dept. of English

Instrument

The research instrument was designed in light of Rebecca Oxford's (1990, 1995) model referred to as Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (abbreviated as SILL). It was selected for it is widely recognized as one of the best and earliest strategy inventory of ESL/EFL learning and it has been quoted in several studies that followed Oxford's work (e.g. Almakhtary, 2002; Metcalfe & Nook-Ura, 2013; Somsai & Intaraprasert, 2011; Uгла, Adnan, & Zainol Abidin, 2012;). As far as the scope of this study is concerned, the strategies adopted in Oxford's (1995) model is learning and speaking strategies (see the Appendix).

Procedures

First of all, the author reviewed the state of the art in language learning strategies. Upon this review, the questionnaire was developed and piloted. Prior to implementation, it was checked for psychometrically appropriateness, and its validity and reliability were found appropriate. Second, the sample of learners was determined by selecting the first ten top students from each level. The selection was based on their academic records which were obtained from the Department of English. Upon prior approval obtained from the concerted authority and cooperation of the teaching staff in the department, the researcher approached the informants with a purpose to fill in the questionnaire. It was administered during normal classes. Finally, it was collected on the same day, and the return rate was 100%.

Data analysis

Data collected via the questionnaire were collated and processed. Initially, the responses were coded by using the SPSS. By running statistical procedures, the dataset was screened and checked that the values were entered properly. Then, the data were arranged and discussed. The OCSs were divided into two categories: listening and speaking strategies. After that, both categories were taken as a whole to interpret the oral skills of the respondents. The variables of the study were (a) level of study determined by their attendance to an EFL program, and (b) OCSs determined by a questionnaire.

Results

In order to identify the strategies that successful EFL learners generally use in learning oral communication, they were asked to select, among a five-point Likert scale, the closest choice

of their own. Then the responses were coded, and numeric values were clustered and represented graphically (see Figures 1 & 2). Among the listening strategies in Oxford's inventory, there are five remarkable strategies the informants stated they adopted most. The responses were displayed as a pie, and each strategy was given a percentage: (a) listening to people when speak the language (15%), (b) asking for repetition (15%), (c) guessing the meaning from the speakers' tone (10%), (d) noticing the music of the language (8%), and focusing on the important words in the conversation (8%). The learners in focus tend to use Oxford's (1990, 1995) listening strategies. Out of the whole package of Oxford's listening strategies inventory, the respondents gave priority to the above-mentioned five strategies followed by less common strategies varying between 6% and 0% (see Figure 1). Besides, in response to the open-ended question in the questionnaire, the learners in question invented strategies that they find helpful in enhancing oral skills. For instance, they (a) download and listen to English clips, (b) imitate native speakers, (c) find sounds from dictionary, (d) try to understand the context of conversations and (e) use mobile phones to listen to songs, movies, etc.

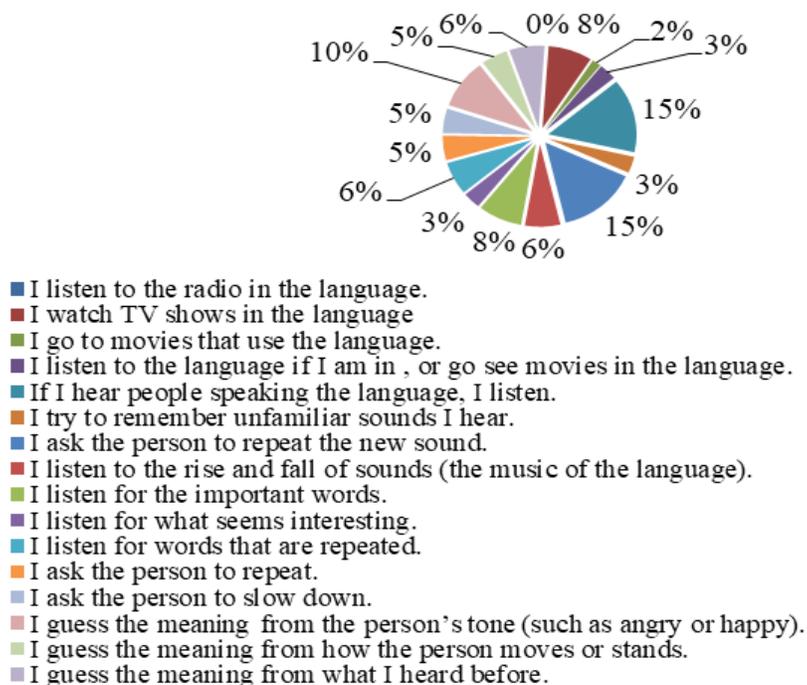


Figure 1. *Listening Strategies Used by the Sample*

Similar to the analysis in the above section, speaking strategies were probed from the questionnaire. The results in Figure 2 show that the informants used some of Oxford's speaking strategies which varied in this study from 90% to 10%. As data in the figure suggests, nine of those strategies dropped less than 50 %, and only 3 strategies crossed the limit of 50%. In addition to this, responses to the open ended question yielded some other strategies– not listed in Oxford's inventory. They were used by the learners including the following strategies: (a) speaking with oneself (monologue) 32%, (b) speaking to a mirror (36%), (c) talking with peers (78%), (d) using similar words (54%), (e) attending English cafe at academic institutes (47%).

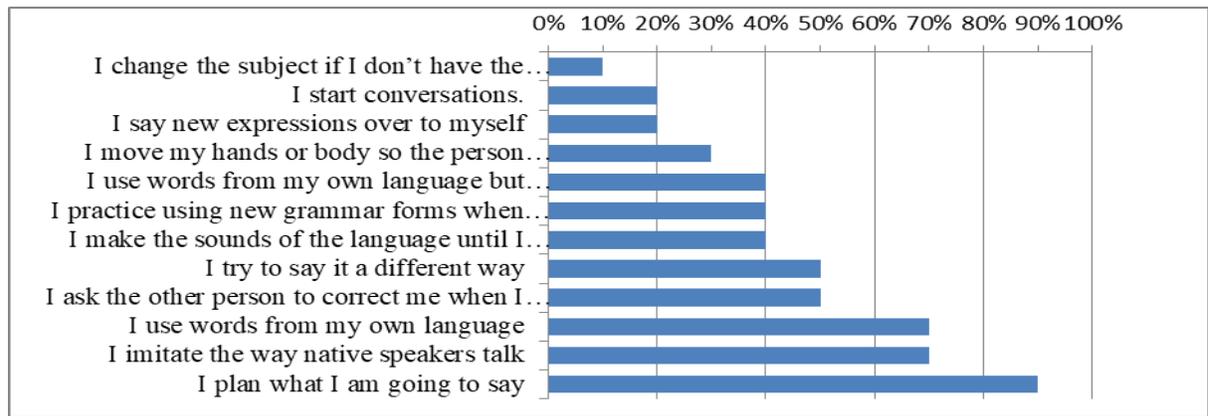


Figure 2. *Speaking Strategies Used by the Sample*

The second research question corresponds to the variation of OCSs across the sample. It identifies the listening and speaking strategies used by the respondents and determines a possible association between these strategies and their level of progress. To answer this question, the mean scores and standard deviations of each level-based group were tabulated and interpreted accordingly. The results are arranged in Tables 2 and 3. As Table 2 shows, first level/year students scored less mean values vis-à-vis their counterparts (Mean scores: 28.900, 36.44, 41.85, and 51.9) respectively. Taken listening strategies as a case in point, the first-level respondents scored mean value of 1.250 against 3.03, 2.250 and 3.03 when it comes to strategies No. 6 (asking for repetition).

Table 2. *Distribution of Listening Strategies across the Sample*

Listening strategies	1 st level		2 nd level		3 rd level		4 th level	
	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD
to the radio in the language.	1.000	0.05	2.000	0.420	3.04	0.40	4.00	0.80
movies that use the language.	2.250	0.462	3.03	0.196	3.25	0.462	4.03	0.166
to the language if I am in class.	1.510	0.554	3.300	0.470	3.5	0.534	4.3	0.47
to remember unfamiliar sounds I hear.	3.500	0.715	2.650	0.450	3.52	0.155	4.65	0.85
I listen for what seems interesting.	1.080	0.06	3.000	0.080	4.04	0.500	5.00	0.08
I ask the person to repeat.	1.250	0.462	3.03	0.196	2.25	0.162	3.03	0.156
I ask the person to slow down.	1.500	0.534	1.300	0.47	2.5	0.534	3.3	0.47
I guess the meaning from	3.510	0.755	4.15	1.050	2.500	0.155	3.61	1.010

	how the person moves or stands.								
	to the rise and fall of sounds	1.03	000	2.000	0.04	4.000	0.07	4.00	0.070
	I listen for words that are repeated.	1.250	0.462	2.03	0.196	2.25	0.462	4.03	0.166
	I guess the meaning from what I heard before.	3.500	0.534	4.3	0.53	3.5	0.534	3.3	0.47
	I watch TV shows in the language	3.510	0.755	2.65	1.05	3.5	0.785	3.65	0.158
	I listen for the important words.	4.010	000	3.000	0.06	4.000	0.08	5.00	0.070
	Total	28.900	5.343	36.44	5.208	41.85	4.833	51.9	4.936

Likewise, the data in Table 3 illustrates how the learners in question used speaking strategies across the 4-year EFL program. The freshmen and senior students make two extremes of cases in the dataset. There is a flow of OCS usage. They start their English studies with less listening abilities so that they tend to make use of several strategies. As they advance to higher levels in the program, they learn and use more learning strategies. Moreover, similar to the results in Table 2, the respondents stated that they create some speaking strategies beyond Oxford's model. Data gleaned from the open-ended question in the questionnaire indicated that the respondents get into a monologue, talk with friends, and attend English café at academic institutes, etc.

Table 3. Distribution of Speaking Strategies across the Sample

	Speaking Strategies	1 st level		2 nd level		3 rd level		4 th level	
		mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD	mean	SD
1	I make the sounds of the language until I can ...	1.00	0.014	2.00	0.100	4.00	0.026	4.00	0.06
2	I imitate the way native speakers talk.	2.25	0.462	3.03	0.192	3.25	0.465	4.03	0.19
3	I say new expressions over to myself.	3.50	0.534	2.30	0.170	3.20	0.544	4.300	0.46
4	I practice using new grammar forms when I..	1.50	0.755	1.55	1.02	3.50	0.755	4.65	1.65
5	I start conversations.	2.00	000	1.00	0.002	3.20	0.20	4.00	0.06
6	I change the	2.25	0.462	3.53	0.196	3.25	0.465	3.03	0.19

	subject if I don't have the words I..								
7	I plan what I am going to say.	2.50	0.554	3.3	0.47	3.5	0.535	3.30	0.46
8	I ask the other person to correct me when I talk.	2.50	0.715	1.55	0.015	3.5	0.755	4.65	1.65
9	I ask the person to help me.	1.00	0.01	1.54	0.1	4	0.911	4.00	0
10	I try to say it a different way.	3.25	0.162	1.03	0.196	3.25	0.462	4.03	0.19
11	I use words from my own language.	2.5	0.154	2.3	0.47	3.52	0.134	3.3	0.47
12	I use words from my own language but say them with sounds from the new language.	1.50	0.155	1.65	0.255	3.2	0.191	3.650	0.96
13	I move my hands or body so the person will understand me	1.00	0.51	2.00	0.02	3.2	0.29	4.00	0.066
	Total	26.75	4.487	26.7	3.206	44.5	5.733	50.94	6.43

Discussion

Results in Figures 1 and 2 indicate that there are common listening and speaking strategies, and there are also strategies invented by the EFL learners themselves to cope with their learning situations. Noticeably, these strategies are unexclusive to the informants in question. Previous studies reported similar strategies in similar EFL contexts. For instance, Arpacı-Somuncu (2016) in the Turkish context and Rastegar and Gohari (2016) in the Iranian context came up with similar results. In the context of the present study, those strategies were used by the first 10 top students. Such strategies might be of some help to (be tried by) less successful learners (Khan, 2010). This has echoes in previous studies such as Metcalfe and Noom-Ura (2013), Maldonado (2016), and Yanju and Yanmei (2016) who reported a positive link between students' success and communication strategies.

As the sample who responded to the questionnaire was purposefully chosen, the results outlined in the figures above indicate that the respondents employ common strategies. In a bid to cope with learning English, these high-achieving learners tend to use useful strategies to support their language learning. They particularly develop strategies that they find useful to enhance their oral skills. As these learners were recognized as the most successful in their batch, it is implicated that such learners used strategies directly relevant to their English learning, and the rest of learners should follow suit.

Taken together, the data in Tables 2 and 3 illustrate the diversity of OCSs across the sample. The learners' strategies diverge across the learning program. When considering the mean scores of each level, it is apparent that the more the learners advance in their study, the more they employ listening strategies. As reflected in the tables, fresh students try fewer strategies than sophomores and junior students. Put differently, the respondents, upon joining university, have less Oxford's OCSs than their seniors, and the sophomores show less than their counterparts in the third and fourth levels. The more they advance, the more they become able to use more practical strategies to make progress in their English learning. This is quite contradictory with Maldonado's (2016) claim that when taking proficiency as a factor (correlating it with CSs), learners with a lower level of proficiency need to resort to a higher number of CSs due to the relatively small number of linguistic resources available. More proficient learners, on the other hand, seem not to make much use of these strategies due to their broader linguistic gamut.

Remarkably, the whole cohorts generally tend to employ listening strategies at a higher rate than speaking strategies (*Mean* scores: 28.900, 36.44, 41.85, and 51.9 vs. 26.75, 26.7, 44.5, and 50.94 respectively). Prior research studies (e.g. Arpacı-Somuncu, 2016; Ellis & Tod, 2015; and Rastegar, & Gohari, 2016) reported the significance of learning OCSs for individuals to make progress in English leaning as a foreign language. Although the OCSs reported in the study were learner-driven, studies of Bataineh, Al-Bzour and Baniabdelrahman (2017) and Kongsom (2016) alleged that strategies should be part and parcel of the package of language curriculum. In this regard, Somsai and Intaraprasert (2011) reported that Thai learners of English employed strategies to cope with face-to face communication including (a) strategies for conveying messages, and (b) strategies to keep the interaction going or discontinuing. Nevertheless, despite selecting the informants from each level, the study did not check the OCSs across the sample. In the current study, the frequency of OCSs noticeably differed from what has been generally observed in the dataset in Tables 2 and 3. Students in the first two levels were keener to use a plenty of strategies.

In summary, the results strengthen previous findings concerning the significance of OCSs (Rastegar & Gohari, 2016; Yanju & Yanmei, 2016). Such studies alleged that fostering CSs develop students' oral skills to pay off their limited English language proficiency. Communicational strategies (CSs) in Bataineh, Al-Bzour and Baniabdelrahman's (2017) words, "improve oral performance and increases strategy use" (p. 213). Teachers who train students to use meaningful and practical LLSs help their students to become better language learners. They can make use of Brown's (2014) suggestions to implement activities that lower learners' inhibitions, encourage risk-taking, and build self-confidence. Likewise, building on Bataineh, Al-Bzour and Baniabdelrahman (2017) and Khan's (2010) argument, the instructability of CSs enhance learners' willingness to take risks and provide opportunities for strategic competence. Helping students to understand good LLSs and training them to utilize such good strategies is considered to be "the appreciated characteristics of a good language teacher" (Lessard-Clouston 1997, p. 3). Therefore, it can be suggested that those OCSs should be embodied in the teaching materials and considered by teachers as they plan their daily lessons (Kongsom, 2016; Sit, 2017). The results also suggest an intervention inventory of OCS to be taught to the undergraduates. It could be a course in the syllabus or added to an existing course of study skills. Last but not least, students' own strategies should be valued; other researchers might pile such strategies and examine how they are employed which is a new topic for further research with a purpose to arrive at an inventory of context-based strategies adopted by learners to overcome their learning problems.

Conclusion

The study at hand explored the oral communication strategies (OCSs) used by the most successful EFL learners compared to less successful learners' OCSs. The study confirms previous claims that high-achieving learners make use of several learning strategies commonly used by top students worldwide, and this is perhaps what makes them more successful (Khan, 2010). This set of learning strategies are thought to be useful for low-achieving learners to enhance their performance as well. The results of this study concurs with Stern (1992), Lessard-Clouston (1997) and Oxford (1990) in that language learning strategies are tools for active, self-directed leaning that develop the communicative competence of students. The study targeted the first ten top EFL learners and yielded evidence of the significance of learning OCS as those smart learners employ more effective oral communication. Upon their joining the Department of English, the medium of instruction changes, and hence learners arrive at an inventory of strategies adopted by them to overcome these problems. Nonetheless, it is to be noted that students' success cannot directly be attributed to, or stem from, using the above-mentioned strategies only. Some other variables are expectedly play crucial roles in making their success in learning English. These factors include but not limited to, learners' personality traits, motivation, attitude, age, gender, etc. which are beyond the scope of the current study.

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