

## **Raising Algerian Master's Students' Self-awareness towards Using Learning Strategies during Online Classes at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University of Mostaganem**

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### **Abstract**

Since *the Coronavirus* outbreak in 2019, higher education has shifted from face-to-face learning to distance learning incorporating various platforms such as Moodle. The use of the latter has changed the Algerian university's teaching and learning dynamics. In this case, and unlike in-traditional class learning, which is characterized by physical interaction, online learning requires self-awareness about personal strengths and weaknesses. Thus, the issue addressed in this paper was which strategy the students need to use online and whether the students use the same learning strategies in the two modes of learning; in-class and online. They are now a must to use new strategies to engage in Digital Learning (DL). In this view and based on Oxford 2003, Chamot 2004, Griffith 2013, and O'Malley 1995 references regarding learning strategies that have been pointed out as major determinants for successful learning, this study aims to raise the students' self-awareness towards using different learning strategies in online learning compared to in-class learning. The main objective of the present investigation is to identify whether Master's students in the department of English at the University of Mostaganem use different learning strategies for their online courses or not. Oxford's Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL), 1990, has been adapted and used with 80 Master's students of English at Abdelhamid University of Mostaganem, Algeria, to gather relevant data. The findings revealed that most students use the same language learning strategies for both in-class and online learning. Hence, an adaptation and strategy instruction for online learning is recommended, i.e., students have to modify and adapt their own way of learning the target language since some learning strategies may not be effective for distance one.

**Keywords:** Algerian Master's students, Covid-19, in-class learning, instruction, learning strategies, online learning, students' self-awareness

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## Introduction

The purpose of instruction is not limited to acquiring new content but equipping learners with skills to cope with everyday challenges. Accordingly, the Algerian ministry of education has overhauled the whole educational system, starting with the primary level to the university level, where the teaching is learner-centered. Accordingly, teaching methodologies and approaches have been adapted to the main goals of learning in the new era. Because of its importance, teaching English has been introduced almost in all curricula, from middle school to university. Consequently, syllabi have been reviewed and adapted to the new requirements and demands. Technology and modern teaching methodologies have been introduced in teaching/learning. Besides, emphasis is directed toward the learners' learning mode, styles, and strategies. Indeed, learning outcomes should match learning goals. For such reasons, learners should be aware of the learning goals and the strategies they employ to attain satisfactory learning outcomes in in-class learning and mainly when used online.

In the year 2020, the world witnessed a sanitary crisis that compelled the population to a lockdown. As a result, institutions, firms, and companies have reduced their workforce attendance and opted for a shift to virtual work. Academically, teachers and their students attend virtual classes, a new mode of teaching/learning whereby several e-learning platforms or apps have been made available for teachers to deliver their courses through online platforms, such as Moodle( Sarnou & Sarnou,2021). Accordingly, it was necessary to identify the students' way of learning as compared to the in-person one. Therefore, the main objective of the present paper then is to shed light on the differences in strategy use in two different modes of learning; in-class and online. Accordingly, the main research question of the present paper is: Do master's students in the department of English at the University of Mostaganem use different learning strategies during their online courses?

In order to answer the above research question, we have assumed that the students use the same learning strategies for the two learning modes, which may lead to unsatisfactory learning outcomes.

## Literature Review

Online learning, unlike in-person one, requires adaptation to the context. Indeed, learners and their teachers adopt different interactions with different teaching and learning approaches. Thus, both of them have to be aware of the characteristics that specify each mode of learning. Online learning not only requires specific tools but also requires learners' awareness of appropriate learning strategies used. Indeed, if not well-trained on the online platforms, learning would not be effective. According to Sarnou and Sarnou (2021), Moodle platform also failed to offer the students an interactive platform that allows them to stay connected with their teachers during the quarantine.

Effective learning, according to research, pertains to appropriate strategy use. Learners who are less successful or academically weak have access to fewer strategies and use them inadequately (Ali,2020). Indeed, they will not use effective strategies unless

learning is meaningful and relevant to learners' needs and preferences (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001). Language learning strategies have been defined as the actions or tricks taken by the learners to accomplish an activity or a task (Chamot, 2004). Because of their impact on learning, language learning strategies have attracted the attention of many scholars to identify their types and purposes (Dorneyi, 2001 & 2003, Chamot, 2004, Oxford, 1996). There is a consensus in Algeria regarding the importance of language learning strategies in foreign language learning. However, there is a paucity in the literature on online language learning strategies. The present study tries to fill the existing gap and raise the students' awareness to adopt different language learning strategies for online learning.

### *Oxford's Typology of Language Learning Strategies*

Language learning strategies have seen different classifications among scholars and researchers. Oxford (1990) has divided language learning strategies into two main categories; direct and indirect. The direct strategies are brain-based and include memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies responsible for acquiring new knowledge, solving a problem or completing a language activity. The indirect strategies are feeling-based and include affective, metacognitive, and social strategies and help language learners overcome the learning obstacles (figure one).

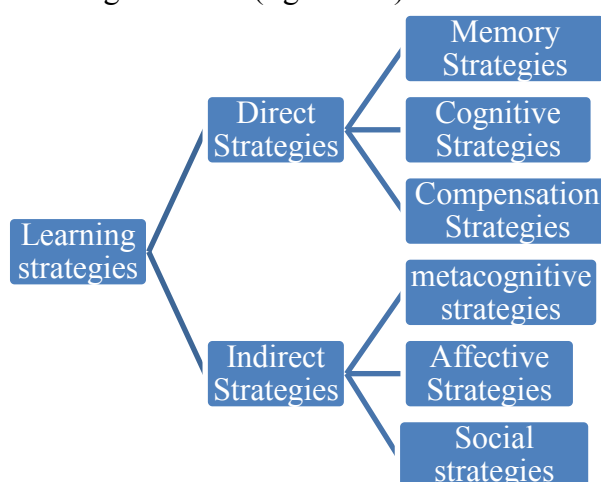


Figure 1. Oxford's typology of learning strategies (2001, 2003)

Although direct and indirect strategies are different in their application, they help learners achieve successful learning. Proper strategy use helps learners accomplish tasks and activities and help them overcome their anxieties and learning difficulties (Westwood, 2004).

### *Online Learning and Strategy Use*

The current academic conditions have been affected by the sanitary conditions. Accordingly, in-person teaching has been partly replaced by distance teaching. Consequently, teaching has been adapted to avoid any disturbance in the students' academic achievements. Unlike in class, online learning is characterized by the absence of physical contact with the teacher and the classmates who may assist in learning. During

the confinement, some fundamental subjects are taught in class and transverse ones at distance. At different levels, the Algerian ministry of higher education and research has established a national platform (Moodle platform) to help both teachers and students meet virtually for academic purposes. Lectures for some subjects, that the students can easily acquire, are uploaded, and assignments are done at distance. The students are asked to acquire new content, learn new knowledge, and accomplish activities or tasks.

Apart from the availability of technical resources like the computer and internet access, online learning requires more effort and readiness from its participants; learners should expand their plans and develop autonomous learning strategies (Afzal, 2019). Both teachers and learners need to demonstrate their motivation to teach and learn non-conventional. Online learning requires personal involvement, and the students have to employ their learning strategies to cope with their learning difficulties they encounter. Indeed, remote teaching and learning are challenging for both teachers and learners. Both of them seek appropriate ways to attain satisfaction. Students, accordingly, use learning strategies that allow them to reach that purpose. It is noteworthy to mention that the students are experiencing new conditions in online learning, and consequently, they have to overcome some difficulties they are not used to. However, students can attain positive achievement using the right metacognitive strategies.

Metacognition results in specific changes in how learning is managed and the strategies chosen for this purpose (Anderson, 2009). Therefore, learning difficulties are caused by students' lack of appropriate cognitive strategies and a relative absence of metacognition (Westwood, 2004). The emphasis then is directed towards the teachability of metacognitive strategies for remote learning. Planning, controlling, and evaluating are crucial in metacognition and with which learners can easily succeed if properly applied. Educators should harness these to enhance an individual's ability to learn the language (Griffith & Parr, 2001). On the other hand, compensation strategies, like guessing or using synonyms, allow learners to use the language despite their often language gaps in knowledge (Oxford, 2003).

## Methods

The present study sheds light on the students' use of learning strategies in the department of English at the University of Mostaganem in Algeria. The objective of the present investigation is to find whether the students use the same learning strategies in the two modes of learning; in-class and online.

Oxford's Strategy Inventory of Language Learning SILL, 1990 has been adapted and used to gather relevant data for such an objective. The inventory is divided into six main parts; A, B, C, D, E, and F (See appendix A). Part A concerns the memory strategies, part B concerns cognitive strategies, part C concerns compensation strategies, part D concerns metacognitive strategies, part E concerns affective strategies, and part F concerns social strategies. Each part includes four learning strategies except part D; the metacognitive strategies contain eight learning strategies. Each section questions the students about their learning strategies in the two modes of learning, in-class and online.

The strategy used is selected in terms of frequency, 1 for usually, 2 for sometimes, and 3 for rarely.

### ***Participants***

The research study took place in 2022 at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University, in the department of English language with eighty Master one and two students of didactics and applied linguistics. The sampling was done randomly, and the students were free to participate in the study.

### ***Research Procedures***

Because of the sanitary conditions, the electronic version of the inventory is sent to the students via a social network group for master students. The inventory scale of language learning strategies has been adapted and sent to the students who were required to send it back after completing it. The inventory included two sets of learning strategies, and the students had to tick the ones they use in in-class learning and the ones in online learning. The completed version of the inventory is sent back to the researcher via her email address.

### **Results**

Once the data was gathered, it was quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed. The selected strategies are counted and classified in terms of their frequency and use in the two different modes of learning; online and in-class. Identifying the frequent use of a learning strategy reveals their awareness of using the same or different learning strategies in two different modes of learning. The respondents' answers are compared and then analyzed.

As far as memory strategies are concerned, the data revealed that most students use the same learning strategies, except for thinking of the relationship between what they already know and what is new to them. The students said they rarely connect what is new to them and their prerequisite knowledge. When reading, the students said that they usually use the same strategies, looking for the meaning of words and avoiding translation in both modes of learning, and this demonstrates their unawareness of appropriate strategy use, which may lead to ineffective learning.

Also, the data showed that the students use the same compensation strategies, like guessing the meaning of new words. It is noteworthy to mention that compensation strategies help learners overcome their learning difficulties, and unless they are aware of those difficulties, they will not use the right learning strategy. The findings clearly showed that the students use fewer compensation strategies in online learning; this may be due to poor instruction and practice( figure two).

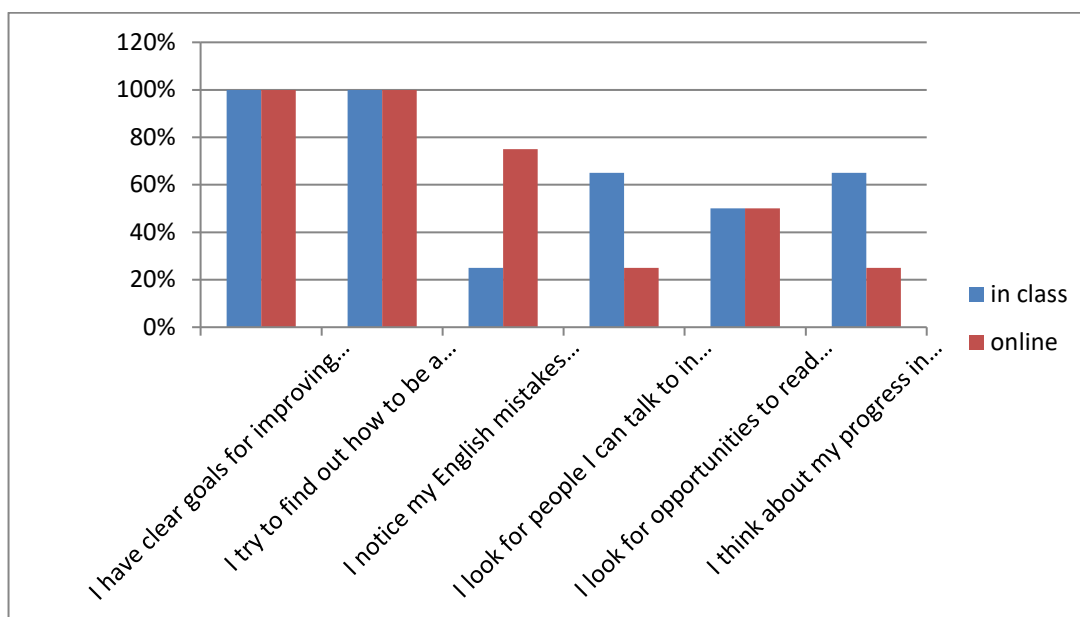


Figure 2. Learners' metacognitive strategy used in online and in-class learning

Metacognitive strategies are crucial determinants of effective learning. Unfortunately, the data revealed that all the students usually use the same strategies in learning the target language. Their goals in learning the target language have not changed in the two modes of learning since they avowed that they rarely look for opportunities to read in English. Also, the students said they rarely think of their progress in learning English; this clearly shows a significant difference between the students' goals in learning English and the strategies they use to achieve those goals.

## Discussion

Many studies advocate the crucial role of learning strategies for successful learning. According to Oxford(2003), language learning strategies allow learners to become more self-directed and support their learning directly and indirectly. The present study aims to raise the students' awareness of the use of adequate language strategies in their online courses. Obviously, and as it has been hypothesized, the students use approximately the same learning strategies in the two modes of learning. They learn the target language in the two modes the same way, except for some strategies. Besides, the use of the same metacognitive learning strategies during the two modes of learning certainly does not provide the same chances for success in the two learning modes. The students do not use indirect strategies with the direct ones, which may be the main cause behind some students' failure to master the target language( figure two).

The paucity of using indirect strategies for general management of learning(Oxford,2003) in online learning does not help the students enhance their learning. Learning strategies such as planning, monitoring, organizing, elaborating, or evaluating, allay anxiety (O'Malley &Chamot, 1995). According to the new learning conditions, the students need to adapt their learning strategies. Metacognitive strategies

, such as, planning, organizing, monitoring, and evaluating their learning play a crucial role in helping the students overcome their learning difficulties in online learning. For online courses, planning is crucial because even under the best of circumstances, online learners often struggle with understanding what is expected of them. They can get unbelievably frustrated (or worse) and avoid learning at distance. In this context, Westwood, 2004 argues that learning difficulties may be due to the absence of metacognition . That is one of the best reasons for using a systematic approach to planning your instruction (Shank,2006). Students' physical assistance during in-person learning from their teacher or classmates does not necessarily disappear in online learning. Asking for assistance or help virtually can alleviate learning obstacles.

As far as affective strategies are concerned, the data revealed that these are not given priority. The students sometimes talk about their feelings or ask for help in in-person learning, but they rarely do in online learning. Similarly, they rarely ask for correction or practise with others to learn more about the target language; this implies that the students are more comfortable with in-person learning and cannot overcome their obstacles in online learning, which may negatively affect their learning achievement. Hence, training students to use appropriate learning strategies for distance learning is very required. In addition, using online dictionaries to understand the meaning of new words and interacting with classmates in social networking groups can be beneficial in overcoming anxiety and seeking help.

### Conclusion

The present paper attempted to demonstrate students' wrong strategies used in online learning. Students have witnessed new teaching methodologies, combining in-person learning with online one. Because of its specificities, this latter asks learners to adopt different learning strategies from those they use during in-person learning. In fact, unlike in-class learning, which is characterized by physical interaction, online learning requires self-awareness about personal strengths and weaknesses. Aware of this, students have to modify their way to learn the target language since some learning strategies may not be effective for distance learning. Interacting with others in a virtual setting, asking for help or clarification, and asking for correction are good strategies to learn the target language. Indeed, the contemporary educational conditions require self-awareness and self regulation to cope with the new educational challenges. Therefore, it rests on the teachers' responsibility to implement new teaching techniques and strategies and help their learners use adequate ones.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

## LLS Inventory (Adapted Version)

The present questionnaire scrutinizes the students' strategy use.

Complete each section by ticking the statement you feel accurately describes you in both **in-person** and **online learning**. Put **1, 2, or 3** in the column that best corresponds to you.

Thank you

1. Usually

2. Sometimes

3. Rarely

| Statements  | In-person learning | Online learning |
|---|--------------------|-----------------|
| <b>PART-A ( Memory strategies)</b>  |                    |                 |
| 1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I will learn in English. |                    |                 |
| 2. I use new English words in a sentence, so I can remember.                                    |                    |                 |
| 3. I make a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.                      |                    |                 |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| 4. I remember new words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, etc. |  |  |
| <b>PARTB(cognitive strategies)</b>   |  |  |
| 1. I write notes, messages ,letters ,orreportsinEnglish.   |  |  |
| 2. I first skim an English passage (read it quickly) then go back and read it carefully.         |  |  |
| 3. I find the meaning of any English word by dividing it into parts that I can understand.       |  |  |
| 4. I do not try to translate a given passage word by word to understand.                         |  |  |
| <b>PARTC)(compensation strategies)</b>   |  |  |
| 1. To understand unfamiliar English words , I make guesses.                                      |  |  |
| 2. When I cannot think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.               |  |  |
| 3. If I cannot think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.       |  |  |
| 4. I read in English without looking up every new word.  |  |  |
| <b>PARTD(metacognitive strategies)</b>   |  |  |
| 1. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.   |  |  |
| 2. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.                                      |  |  |
| 3. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.                   |  |  |
| 4. I look for people I can talk to in English.   |  |  |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| 5. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.                               |  |  |
| 6. I think about my progress in learning English.   |  |  |
| 7. I always use a checklist to set my goals and evaluate my progress.                             |  |  |
| 8. I know the best ways that help me to understand or memorize.                                   |  |  |
| <b>PARTE (affective strategies)</b>   |  |  |
| 1. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.  |  |  |
| 2. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making mistakes.                  |  |  |
| 3. I write down my feelings in a diary or talk to someone else.                                   |  |  |
| 4. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.                            |  |  |
| <b>PARTF (social strategies)</b>  |  |  |
| 1. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or repeat it. |  |  |
| 2. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.  |  |  |
| 3. I practice English with other students.  |  |  |
| 4. I try to learn about the culture.  |  |  |