

EFL Grammar Learning Strategy Use: Utilizing Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory in an Arabic Context

February 2024 – Volume 27, Number 4

<https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.27108a6>

Mohammad R. Alnufaie

English Language Institute, Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu, Saudi Arabia
<dr.nufaie@gmail.com>

Ibrahim H. Alzahrani

English Language Institute, Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu, Saudi Arabia
<ibrahim.hanash@gmail.com>

Abstract

This study attempts to replicate Pawlak's (2018) Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory (GLSI). It explores the use of GLSI by Saudi students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in their college preparation year. The re-emergence of GLSI after a long period of neglect is a significant development in Language Learning Strategies. Consequently, due to the shortage of GLSI studies in Arab countries, this study was conducted. Participants were assessed using the GLSI with its four categories of metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social strategies. 419 EFL students participated in this study. The findings generally showed a high use of grammar strategies in all four categories of GLSI among EFL learners. As a result, a strong, positive, and significant correlation was found between all the categories of strategies. Furthermore, students' Grade Point Average (GPA) did not appear to affect their use of GLS.

Keywords: grammar learning strategies, grammar learning strategy inventory, EFL learners, GPA, Saudi Arabia

As argued by Pawlak (2018), the field of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) has witnessed quick and massive progress in almost all language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking, and vocabulary) except for grammar. Researchers in LLS have neglected Grammar Learning Strategies (GLS) for a long time. This gap in the literature urges more studies to be conducted. One of the early calls for more research on GLS was by Anderson (2005), who emphasized the lack of studies investigating LLS used by second language (L2) learners to learn grammar and understand its elements (cited in Pawlak, 2018). In addition, Oxford, Lee, and Park (2007) investigated GLS and called for a more developed theory of GLS. From their perspective, if Vandergrift (1997) named listening strategies the "Cinderella of strategies" because of the lack

of studies in that area, “a ‘Second Cinderella’ remains yet unexplored: grammar strategies” (p. 117). They state that the reason behind neglecting GLS is the impact of the communicative language teaching approach that recently dominated the grammar learning and teaching field. Pawlak (2009) stressed the importance of identifying and describing GLS used by L2 learners while learning grammar. Like other LLS, Pawlak asked for more understanding of the effectiveness of GLS, examining the impact of training on them and knowing factors that affect their use. In her volume, Oxford (2011) believes that “grammar strategies have had very little attention. In fact, they have garnered the least interest and concern of any area of L2 learning strategies” (p. 256). Similarly, Oxford (2017) pointed out that GLS have gained the slightest interest and concern compared to other LLS. This lack of studies indicates that research on GLS was and still is in its infancy (Pawlak, 2013, 2018). Consequently, this shortage of studies in this area is one of the motives for conducting this study.

Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory (GLSI) was used in the present study to measure GLS use among EFL students in Saudi Arabia and to examine its relationship with learners’ success. GLSI, developed by Pawlak (2018), was a new methodological instrument designed to measure GLS use in a way similar to those used to measure general LLS (i.e., Oxford’s (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning or Cohen’s et al. (2002) Language Strategy Use Survey). GLSI was developed to categorize GLS under the general LLS categories of metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective strategies. Deploying this inventory in a Saudi context is an attempt to discover whether Arab students use GLS and to what extent. In addition, it is essential to consider grammar-translation and communicative language approaches when teaching English grammar as a foreign language in the Saudi context. Thus, using GLS in this mixed-approach grammar instruction context is an exciting study. Consequently, teachers might better understand how English language learners deal with grammar learning in this situation. If necessary, teachers may be able to adjust their teaching approaches so that appropriate grammar instruction is delivered.

Literature Review

Oxford et al. (2007), one of the first to attempt a definition of GLS, defined it as a set of “actions and thoughts that learners consciously employ to make language learning and language use easier, more effective, more efficient, and more enjoyable” (p. 117). Their definition is derived from the general definition of LLS, which has been debated for years due to the absence of a unified theoretical foundation (see Cohen, 2007). It emphasized some essential characteristics of a strategy, including activity, consciousness, and goal-directedness (Griffiths, 2013).

Another attempt to define GLS was provided by Cohen and Pinilla-Herrera (2010), who constructed a learner strategy website to control Spanish grammar and defined GLS as “deliberate thoughts and actions that students consciously employ for learning and getting better control over the use of grammar structures” (p. 64). In a more precise way, Oxford (2017) defined GLS as “teachable, dynamic thoughts and behaviors that learners consciously select and employ in specific contexts to improve their self-regulated, autonomous L2 grammar development for effective task performance and long-term efficiency” (p. 244). In this definition, the importance of the context of practicing GLS is stressed since learners with different mother tongues and educational and cultural backgrounds may practice GLS differently (Pawlak, 2018). Another characteristic of this definition is learning the grammar of a second language (L2), a more specific goal than the general LLS definition’s goal of learning a second language.

After this brief of GLS definitions, GLS use cannot be isolated from grammar learning and instruction. Learning grammar can be explicit or implicit. Explicit learning is “a conscious process and is generally intentional as well” (Ellis, 2009, p. 7). According to Hulstijn (2002), explicit learning is “a conscious, deliberative process of concept formation and concept linking” (p. 206). Consciousness represents one of the most essential characteristics of LLS, although the degree of consciousness is not always constant (Cohen, 2007). Therefore, in explicit grammar learning, students are provided with grammatical rules and practice them in many examples (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). On the other hand, implicit learning, “learning without any metalinguistic awareness, takes place without intentionality or awareness” (Ellis, 2009, p. 7). However, researchers debate that any learning process should include a degree of consciousness (see Ellis, 1995; Schmidt, 1995). In this type of learning, examples are given to learners where learners should infer the grammatical rule. If consciousness is absent in implicit learning, GLSs are unlikely to exist (Oxford et al., 2007) due to the nature of strategies that demand a degree of attention. Oxford et al. (2007) introduce grammar instruction in four modes: implicit mode, which includes a focus on meaning and a focus on form modes; and explicit mode, which includes inductive mode and deductive mode. These four modes are compared based on whether 1) meaning or form is the primary focus; 2) the target form is explicitly or implicitly stressed; 3) the target form is emphasized or otherwise highlighted; 4) grammatically correct rules are provided or not; 5) learners are told to impose the grammatically correct rules. As explained below, this theoretical framework for grammar instruction has helped classify GLS.

Since GLS is still in its infancy, researchers such as Oxford et al. (2007) and Pawlak (2009, 2013) attempted to classify GLS. Oxford et al. (2007) classified GLS into three categories based on the theoretical framework of grammar instruction referred to above. The first category includes strategies used by learners who are oriented to meaning but occasionally shift attention to form (implicit learning), such as “I notice (or remember) structures that are repeated often in the text.” The second category includes strategies used by learners oriented to explicit-inductive learning, such as “I write down structures on note cards so that I can think about how they work.” The third category includes strategies used by learners oriented to explicit-deductive learning, such as “I make up new sentences using the rule.” According to Pawlak (2013), this classification has limitations, such as excluding the learner’s point of view and its inability to follow the categories found in leading strategy classifications (e.g., metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social strategies).

Pawlak has devoted most of his work to GLS, focusing on establishing proper GLS classification and creating more effective instruments to measure GLS use among L2 learners. From his point of view, there is a need for a developed categorization for GLS that is comprehensive and truly reflects what learners do when learning grammar structures. This was represented in Pawlak’s research (2009, 2013), where he believes that a proper GLS taxonomy should: “1- build upon existing classifications of LLS; 2- draw upon a current classification of methodological options in teaching TL forms; 3- be informed by research findings, however scant and partial these might be” (Pawlak, 2013, p. 202). He classified GLS into four broad categories (metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social strategies) following Cohen and Dörnyei (2002), who proposed a classification that was initially a compromise of previous classifications by O’Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990). Metacognitive strategies master grammar learning through planning, monitoring, organizing, and evaluating, for instance, “I schedule grammar reviews in advance” and “I have specific goals and objectives

in learning grammar.” Cognitive strategies involve mental actions and processes that take place in the brain at the time of learning grammar.

This category of cognitive strategies is divided into 4 subcategories as follows: (1) GLSs that are used to assist the production and comprehension of grammar in communication tasks such as “I try to use specific grammar structures in communication (e.g., telling a story)” and “I compare my speech and writing with that of more proficient people to see how I can improve”; (2) GLSs that are used to develop explicit knowledge of grammar such as “I pay attention to rules provided by the teacher or coursebook” and “I try to understand every grammar rule”; (3) GLSs that are used to develop implicit knowledge of grammar such as “I use newly learned rules to create new sentences (to write about my plans)” and “I listen to and read texts containing many examples of a grammar structure”; and (4) GLSs that are used to deal with corrective feedback on errors in the production of grammar such as “I listen carefully for any feedback the teacher gives me about the structures I use” and “I pay attention to teacher correction when I do grammar exercises and try to repeat the correct version.”

Affective strategies deal with emotions and motivation while learning grammar, for example, “I try to relax when I have problems with understanding or using grammar structures” and “I encourage myself to practice grammar when I know I have problems with a structure.” Social strategies require communication with others in L2; for instance, “I ask the teacher to repeat or explain a grammar point if I do not understand” and “I try to help others when they have problems with understanding or using grammar.” Pawlak’s taxonomy of grammar strategies is essential and considered a reference for other researchers in the field of GLS for some reasons. First, it benefited from previous classifications that received much criticism and development (e.g., Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Oxford et al., 2007). Also, it harmonized with the most agreed categorization of LLS among researchers in the field, which includes metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social strategies. In addition, it has resulted in a vital instrument to measure GLS, a considerable advancement in the field of LLS in general and in GLS in particular.

Regarding studies investigating GLS use, Pawlak (2009) evaluated the use of GLS by university students specializing in English using the theoretical scheme provided by Oxford et al. (2007). His study showed a high frequency of overall strategy use ($M= 3.49$). A mean score of 3.59 was obtained when using implicit strategies, followed by a mean score of 3.46 for explicit-deductive strategies and a score of 3.42 when using explicit-inductive strategies. In another study on high school students in China, Zhou (2017) measured students’ use of GLS through a questionnaire survey and interview. The results showed that the mean score of the overall strategy use was 2.8, which means that students sometimes use these strategies (as per Oxford’s interpretation, 1990). Cognitive strategies recorded the highest frequency, with a mean of 3.4. Metacognitive strategies ranked second with a mean of 3.0, and social/affective strategies ranked third at 2.86. In addition, there was no correlation between GLS and English grammar achievement. Cahyani et al. (2022) studied GLSI use among undergraduate students in Indonesia. The findings showed high use of all categories of strategies (metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social strategies) within low achievers ($M= 3.80, 3.61, 3.65, 3.90$ consecutively), middle achievers ($M= 3.77, 3.71, 3.70, 3.93$ successively) and high achievers ($M= 4.25, 3.90, 3.87, 4.0$ consecutively). Moreover, high achievers used metacognitive strategies, whereas low and middle achievers mostly used social strategies.

In another GLSI study, Nakachi (2021) examined GLS among English-major university students in central Japan. The results showed a medium to high use of GLS, where the overall mean of GLS use was 3.06. Cognitive strategies dealing with corrective feedback ($M= 3.44$, and those dealing with the production and comprehension of grammar ($M= 3.43$) were the most frequently used strategies. However, affective strategies were the least used ($M= 2.50$). Zarrinabadi et al. (2021) examined the links between GLS and language mindset among L2 and third language (L3) learners. The GLSI by Pawlak (2018) was used to measure GLS. The results of GLS use in the four categories showed that the L3 learners had higher mean scores than L2 learners. In more detail, metacognitive strategies ranked first as the most used, cognitive strategies in second place, affective strategies in third place, and social strategies as the least used in fourth place. The findings of these studies indicate inconsistency in strategy use among students, which might be attributed to the nature of GLS as they might be culturally and linguistically induced (Oxford et al., 2007).

Methodology

This study uses Pawlak's (2018) Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory (GLSI) to assess the grammar learning strategies used by English language learners at an English language institute in Saudi Arabia. An exploratory-quantitative approach was used to determine which strategies were most and least used and their correlations with students' grades.

Research Questions

As part of this study, EFL students enrolled in an English Language Institute at an Industrial College in Saudi Arabia are asked about their English language grammar learning strategies. Based on GLSI, this study aims to identify various grammar learning strategy categories and their correlations with students' GPA. By answering the research questions below, we hope to identify strategies to facilitate our students' learning process while receiving English grammar instruction.

- 1- What is the level of use of grammar strategies among EFL college students?
- 2- What are the most and least used GLS by EFL college students?
- 3- Do the GLS categories listed in the inventory have any correlations?
- 4- How does the use of grammar strategy relate to students' GPAs?

Participants

The present study's participants were 419 male Saudi EFL college students involved in a general English program that adopted the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) in their college preparation year. They represented four levels of English proficiency as follows: A1 ($N=6$), A2 ($N=4$), B1 ($N=82$), and B1+ ($N= 327$). The English program, with its four levels, is required for the participants to pursue their undergraduate studies as English is the language of instruction in the institute. It is a one-year program divided into four quarters where students start at A1 and finish at B1+. Each level includes reading, writing, listening, speaking skills, and grammar. Students have a separate vocabulary course only in A1 and A2. During eLearning lessons, students are provided with computers and internet access in the language labs. Teachers inform the participants of the study and participation conditions. The participants were asked to participate in the study voluntarily, and their consent was verbally taken. They were informed that their information was confidential and that they could withdraw

from the study if they wished to. The participants could access the survey in class or complete it later online via Blackboard, through which the questionnaire link was posted. There was no reward for voluntary participation. The survey received 516 responses. Ninety-seven incomplete questionnaires were discarded after ten days, leaving 419 participants with complete data.

Instrument

To conduct the present study, Pawlak's GLSI (2018) was utilized to measure students' GLS use for the following reasons: 1- it is a specialized inventory designed to measure GLS after a long period of absence; 2- although it is still not widely used, it is the only valid and reliable GLS inventory that has been tested (Pawlak, 2018); 3- it is in parallel with previous LLS inventories that consisted of the primarily agreeable strategy classification to include metacognitive, cognitive, affective and social strategies (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990); 4- it includes GLS that develop explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar which is in harmony with the present study's context of grammar teaching approaches. The inventory included 70 items, which were divided into four categories: metacognitive strategies (8 items), cognitive strategies (50 items), affective strategies (7 items), and social strategies (5 items). The 70 items were translated from English into Arabic and put on the Blackboard for students to complete during their e-learning classrooms. A five-point Likert scale was used in the inventory where 1 (it does not apply to me at all) and 5 (it perfectly applies to me) consecutively refer to the low and high use of the GLS.

Data Collection and Analysis

Since the research questions were primarily quantitative, Qualtrics was used to collect the data. Using this platform made it easy and accessible to construct and share the questionnaires electronically. Using Qualtrics, data reliability was also increased by flagging and filtering responses that can be bots or cheaters. Data analysis for descriptive statistics was conducted using SPSS software.

As part of the descriptive analysis, we utilized three distinct data analysis methods to describe the frequency and mean of grammar learning strategies utilized by the participants: frequency tables, measures of central tendency, and measures of correlations and regression. Additionally, we employed standard deviation to grasp the variability of the scores. Moreover, we conducted a correlation analysis among the categories included in the GLSI. The descriptive results of the GPA and usage of grammar learning strategies were also compared.

Results

RQ1: What is the level of use of grammar strategies among EFL college students?

RQ2: What are the most and least used GLS by EFL college students?

Table 1 below shows the descriptive statistics and the reliability measure of the scales and the subscales in the instrument (GLSI) initially designed by Pawlak (2018). It is very clear from the Table that the scales, the subscales, and the entire research instrument are highly reliable measures of grammar strategies. The value of Cronbach's alpha for the entire instrument is $\alpha = .97$. Consequently, we can confidently infer from the means of the responses that the participants have almost a high level of strategy use when learning grammar. In addition, the most used are the cognitive strategies that deal with corrective feedback on errors in grammar

production ($M= 3.78$). Then comes the group of cognitive strategies used in communication tasks ($M= 3.69$). The third group of grammar strategies used in learning grammar is the group of social strategies ($M= 3.63$). After that, metacognitive strategies come in fourth place ($M= 3.52$). On the other hand, the least used groups of grammar strategies are, respectively, affective strategies ($M= 3.46$), cognitive grammar strategies for developing explicit knowledge ($M= 3.47$), and cognitive grammar strategies for developing implicit knowledge ($M= 3.48$).

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, level of strategy use, and Cronbach alpha values ($N = 419$) for the scales and subscales included in the GLSI

GLS	Mean	SD	Level of Use	Cronbach's alpha
Metacognitive	3.52	.954	High	.87
Cognitive-All	3.55	.856	High	.97
B1-cognitive used in communication tasks	3.69	.905	High	.89
B2- cognitive for developing explicit knowledge	3.47	.906	Medium	.95
B3- Cognitive for developing implicit knowledge	3.48	1.015	Medium	.92
B4- Cognitive for dealing with corrective feedback	3.78	.964	High	.87
Affective	3.46	.972	Medium	.84
Social	3.63	1.030	High	.83
GLS-All	3.54	.843	High	.97

In addition, Table 2 below specifies the five top strategies used by the participants and the five least used strategies.

Table 2. The top and the least used grammar learning strategies ($N= 419$)

#	GLS	Mean	SD	Category
18	“I use Google or other search engines to see how a specific grammar structure is used in meaningful contexts.”	3.99	1.20	Cognitive
19	“I pay attention to rules provided by the teacher or coursebook.”	3.9	1.20	Cognitive
54	“I pay attention to teacher correction when I do grammar exercises and try to repeat the correct version.”	3.89	1.18	Cognitive
55	“I try to notice and self-correct my mistakes when practicing grammar.”	3.86	1.16	Cognitive
70	“I try to help others when they have problems understanding or using grammar.”	3.85	1.27	Social
The Five Least Used				
25	“I make charts, diagrams, or drawings to illustrate grammar rules.”	3.13	1.44	Cognitive
28	“I physically act out new grammar structures.”	3.11	1.44	Cognitive
7	“I schedule grammar reviews in advance.”	3.08	1.43	Metacognitive
27	“I use rhymes or songs to remember new grammar rules.”	3.08	1.47	Cognitive
1	“I preview the grammar structures to be covered in a lesson.”	3.05	1.42	Metacognitive

Because the questionnaire was rather long, many respondents who completed it might have been impatient toward the end and answered the questions quickly without carefully considering them. Since this might be common in long questionnaires (Galesic & Bosnjak, 2009), counting the number of respondents who responded with “3” in all the questions was an effective way to determine whether this was a confounding factor in the responses. However,

a thorough investigation of the data revealed that the students responded consistently until the end of the questionnaire.

RQ3: Do the GLS categories listed in the inventory have any correlations?

For comparison and contrast purposes with the original study of Pawlak (2018), a correlation analysis was conducted between the categories included in the GLSI. We found similar and even better results for the correlation values. As we can see from the correlation matrix in Table 3 below, there are strong, positive, and significant correlations among all the different types of grammar strategies used by the participants in the current study. The *r* value of 60 – 79 indicates a strong relationship between the variables (Lehman et al., 2005). The strongest correlation is between all cognitive strategies and the entire GLSI. They correlate at the .89 level. This confirms the findings of the original study conducted by Pawlak (2018). Similarly, all the other categories correlate positively, firmly, and significantly with each other and with the entire instrument (GLSI), with the correlation coefficients ranging from .63 level in the case of affective and social strategies with metacognitive strategies to .86 level in the case of affective strategies with the entire instrument.

Table 3. Correlations between the categories included in the GLSI (Pearson’s *r*, *N* = 419)

	Metacognitive	Cognitive	Affective	Social	GLS-All
Metacognitive		.791**	.631**	.636**	.805**
Cognitive			.806**	.737**	.892**
Affective				.686**	.862**
Social					.788**
GLS-All					

Note. Values of Pearson’s *r*. An asterisk indicates statistically significant correlations at *p* = .001. GLSI-All stands for the entire instrument used.

RQ4: How does the use of grammar strategy relate to students’ GPAs?

Table 4 below compares the descriptive results of the GPA and the entire use of the grammar learning strategies reported by the participants in this study. Students have a high level of strategy use when dealing with grammar learning regardless of their GPA. This finding is backed up and supported by Table 5 of the regression results.

Table 4. Comparing GLS with GPA

GPA	Mean	Level of Use	SD	Frequency	Percent
Below 2.00	3.60	High	.890	72	17.2
2.00 - 2.74	3.55	High	.803	124	29.6
2.75 - 3.49	3.49	High	.824	146	34.8
3.50 - 4.00	3.56	High	.907	77	18.4
Total	3.54	High	.843	419	100

Simple linear regression was used to assess whether GPA significantly predicts the level of strategy used in learning grammar (see Table 5). Before that, we did the necessary check-up for the normality of residuals. As Figure 1 of the P-P plots shows, the data is average as it should be. The regression results suggested that GPA explained zero % of the variance in the

grammar learning strategies. The R-Square value is .001, which means that the supposed influence of GPA on GLS cannot be explained or predicted in this study. In other words, the independent variable (i.e., GPA) causes a 0% change in the dependent variable (i.e., GLS). In addition, the low F value (.259) and the high p-value ($p = .611$) indicate no significant relationship between the dependent and the independent variables. So, the predicted influence of one variable upon the other is not statistically significant. The student's GPA does not impact the strategies used in learning grammar.

Table 5. GPA Linear Regression with GLS

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	R	R Square	F	F Sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
GLS	GPA	.025	.001	.259	.611	-.025	-.509	.611

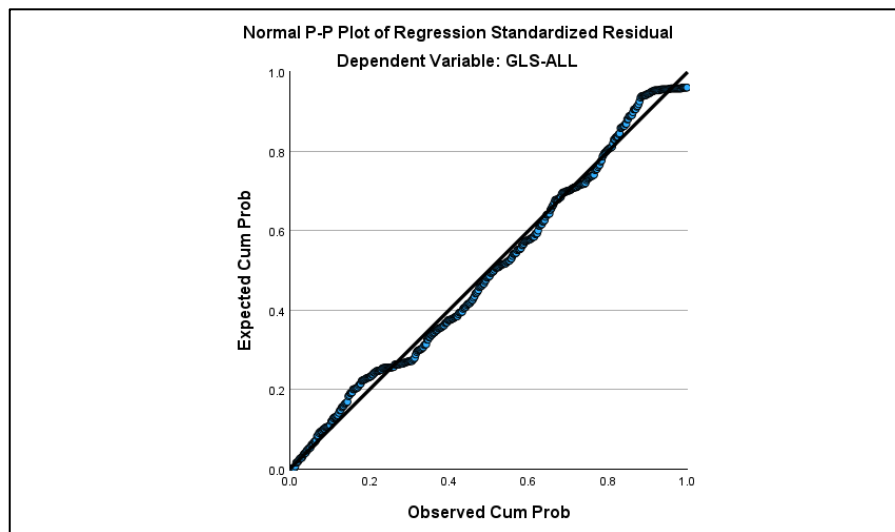


Figure 1. Data Normal Regression

Discussion

With little known about GLS use in the Saudi context and due to researchers' preoccupation with other LLS, it is interesting to find this unpredictable high use of GLS among EFL college students. It is evident from the results that students deployed different GLS to learn English grammar, whether they were aware of that or not. It was also exciting to find that all strategy categories (cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective) correlate strongly, positively, and significantly. Learning grammar by adult learners might encourage them to deploy strategies to understand English grammatical structures first and then to have better control of their language learning. This might be attributed to the participants' educational background, where Arabic (their mother tongue) was excessively taught in discrete courses during their primary, intermediate, and high school. Thus, this might impact their English grammar learning, where they should utilize some GLS to control their learning. However, it is unclear whether participants used strategies while learning their Arabic grammatical structures and if these strategies have been transferred to learn English grammar. This is another area of research that

needs to be explored as research shows that strategy transfer from the first language (L1) to the second language (L2) is problematic (Rubin et al., 2007).

The high use of cognitive strategies related to corrective feedback (B4) indicates participants' attention while learning English grammar, which is congruent with the fact that applying strategies requires some consciousness (Cohen, 2011). According to Ellis (2009), corrective feedback positively affects learners' implicit and explicit knowledge. Therefore, such corrective feedback strategies might be very utilitarian to the participants and were highly used. Most L2 classrooms in our context are teacher-centered (Al-Zu'bi, 2013; Fareh, 2010); thus, the dominancy is for teachers, and they are considered the authentic source of information, which seems logical to have high use of this strategy. It should not be forgotten that two of the cognitive strategies under the category of corrective feedback strategies ("I pay attention to teacher correction when I do grammar exercises and try to repeat the correct version" and "I try to notice and self-correct my mistakes when practicing grammar") were among the top five high used strategies.

The participants also highly used cognitive strategies related to communication (B1), which might be attributed to the effectiveness of these strategies in terms of language comprehension and production. Savage et al. (2010, p. 3) state that "efficient communication cannot occur without correct grammar." Thus, as adult learners, the participants might notice the importance of accuracy in grammar if they intend to communicate appropriately. Such cognitive strategies under this category might assist them, bearing in mind that the most used strategy by the participants in the inventory ("I use Google or other search engines to see how a specific grammar structure is used in meaningful contexts") lies under this category. This indicates that students learned correct grammatical structures using different sources to communicate in L2.

Social strategies were recorded to be highly used among the participants, which could be attributed to their persistence in learning the grammatical structure. By using these strategies, learners can interact with others for a wide range of purposes, including verification or clarification, self-corrections, or cooperation with other learners who are more proficient. Griffiths (2013) illustrates that using social strategies results in language learning through interaction with others to ask for help or to talk to classmates. One of the top five used strategies in the present study is a social strategy: "I try to help others when they have problems with understanding or using grammar." The high use of this strategy in the present study indicates the participants' desire to interact and exchange assistance in L2 learning.

Metacognition strategies were also widely used by the participants. These are higher-order cognition strategies "that supervise a person's thoughts, knowledge, and actions" (Ku & Ho, 2010, p. 252). This high level of mental activity includes paying attention, planning, organizing, obtaining and using resources, implementing plans, orchestrating strategy use, monitoring, and evaluating (Oxford, 2011). Although two metacognitive strategies were among the five least used strategies ("I schedule grammar reviews in advance" and "I preview the grammar structures to be covered in a lesson"), the six remaining metacognitive strategies were not. This might be related to the flexibility and fluidity in the strategy functions perceived by the learners in different contexts (Oxford, 2017).

While the participants did not highly utilize affective strategies, they still occupied a large portion of their strategy use. This indicates that while they are not highly reliant on affective strategies, they can still be helpful in certain situations. The medium use of affective strategies

in the present study might be attributed to the rationale of using affective strategies to establish optimistic emotions, beliefs, and attitudes to create more motivation (Oxford, 2011). There is also the possibility that some participants were unaware of using affective strategies or whether the teacher-centered approach considered learners' emotions, beliefs, and attitudes. More research is needed to determine how LLS, in general, and affective strategies, in particular, are treated in more teacher-centered classrooms.

The medium use of cognitive strategies for developing explicit and implicit knowledge represented the least used strategies in the present study. According to Gillette (1994), the classroom context plays a crucial role in using LLS. Using these cognitive strategies might be affected by how grammar is taught in classrooms (explicitly, implicitly, or both), which is another area that needs more research. However, one of the cognitive strategies used to develop explicit knowledge, "I pay attention to rules provided by the teacher or coursebook," was among the top five strategies. The high use of this given strategy might also be attributed to the teacher-centered approach, as the teacher is considered the source of knowledge.

The value of Cronbach's alpha in the present study ranged between $\alpha = .83$ for the social strategies and $\alpha = .97$ for the cognitive strategies. Similarly, in Pawlak (2018), social strategies recorded the lowest Cronbach's alpha value ($\alpha = .54$). The Cognitive strategies, however, recorded $\alpha = .85$. When it comes to the correlation between scales in the current study, the strongest positive and significant correlation was between all cognitive strategies and the entire GLSI at the .89 level. This is lower than what Pawlak (2018) found ($\alpha = .98$) but still statistically significant. Overall, it can be said that this instrument is reliable and considered internally consistent. In addition, the fascinating strong correlation between the four categories of grammar strategies might draw our attention to what Oxford called flexibility and fluidity in the strategy functions. The learners are practically busy using their learning strategies, while the researchers are theoretically busy classifying them. Consequently, scholars are called to focus more on strategy functions than categories (Oxford, 2017). A strategy can shift from one category into another depending on "how and why the learner is using the strategy" (Oxford, 2021, p. 30).

Although literature refers to the relationship between success and using LLS (see Cohen, 2011; Grenfell & Harris, 1999; Macaro, 2001; Oxford, 1990, 2011), this relationship seems complex, particularly in grammar learning strategies. The present study's findings showed no relationship between strategy use and participants' GPAs, as all participants with low and high GPAs used strategies similarly. This emphasizes the dichotomy in the literature on whether strategy use is linked to success (Grenfell & Macaro, 2007). It might suggest that GPA is not a good indicator of success because the GPA measures a student's performance over their entire academic career rather than their more recent performance. It might also suggest that learning strategies could not be essential for academic success because the same strategies were used by participants regardless of their GPA. It is also possible that these participants with different GPAs have different individual needs behind their persistent desire to use GLS to gain greater control over their grammar learning. Therefore, more research is needed to better understand how learners of different motivation, proficiency, and commitment levels use different grammar learning strategies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study, using GLSI designed by Pawlak (2018), explored grammar learning strategy use among EFL college students. It also investigated the link between students' grammar learning strategy use and their success. The findings declare that the research results confirm the findings of the original replicated study conducted by Pawlak (2018). They showed a high use of metacognitive, cognitive, social, and affective grammar learning strategies. As a result, a strong, positive, and significant correlation was found between all the strategy categories. The top five used strategies included four cognitive strategies ("I use Google or other search engines to see how a specific grammar structure is used in meaningful contexts," "I pay attention to rules provided by the teacher or coursebook," "I pay attention to teacher correction when I do grammar exercises and try to repeat the correct version," "I try to notice and self-correct my mistakes when practicing grammar") and one social strategy ("I try to help others when they have problems with understanding or using grammar"). In addition, the findings showed that the GLSI is a valid and reliable instrument and can be used successfully to measure GLS use. There was no relationship between students' GLS use and students' success.

Limitations

The present study has its limitations as follows. First, the study only examined GLS use without investigating other factors that might affect the use of these strategies (e.g., learning styles, age, gender, etc.). However, the present study can be a key for a strategy instruction program on GLS in Arab contexts. It can be used to raise students' awareness of GLS to impact their grammar learning positively. Second, students' GPAs were used to represent students' success. Students' GPAs represent other courses students studied in their college preparation year, such as Math, Introduction to Computer, and Study Skills. It would have been more precise if students' scores in English levels (A1, A2, B1, and B1+) had been used to measure students' success in L2 learning, but this was not easy to obtain during data collection. Third, the study involved only male students, which makes the results of the present study ungeneralizable to female or mixed-gender classes. Exploring how female students use GLS will assist in the possibility of generalizing the results.

Discovering GLS use in different contexts will assist language teachers in having a better understanding of how their students learn EFL grammar, and consequently, strategy instruction programs can be utilized. Through such programs, teachers' and students' awareness of GLS will be raised, and hopefully, positive L2 learning outcomes will be gained. The present study opens the door for more research and questions: Do students transfer their GLS from their L1 (Arabic) learning to L2 learning (English)? How does L2 grammar teaching affect GLS? Are there any differences in GLS use and LLS use in general? Answering these questions and many others will contribute to the literature on GLS, which has been neglected for many years.

About the Authors

Mohammad Alnufaie is an assistant professor of second language education at the Jubail English Language and Preparatory Year Institute, Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu, Saudi Arabia. He completed his PhD in Education at Dublin University under the supervision of Professor Michael Grenfell. He is mainly interested in language teaching and learning, particularly learner strategies and strategy instruction. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0646-8539>

Ibrahim Alzahrani is an assistant professor at Jubail English Language and Preparatory Year Institute, Royal Commission for Jubail and Yanbu, Saudi Arabia. He has a PhD in applied linguistics and English language teaching from the University of Southampton, UK. His research interests are language learning styles and strategies, strategy instruction, and self-regulation. ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7826-9761>

To Cite this Article

Alnufaie, M., & Alzahrani, I. (2024). EFL grammar learning strategy use: Utilizing grammar learning strategy inventory in an Arabic context. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ)*, 27 (4). <https://doi.org/10.55593/ej.27108a6>

References

- Al-Zu'bi, A. (2013). The difference between the learner-centered approach and the teacher-centered approach in teaching English as a foreign language. *Educational Research International*, 2(2), 24–31. [http://www.erint.savap.org.pk/PDF/Vol.2\(2\)/ERInt.2013\(2.2-04\).pdf](http://www.erint.savap.org.pk/PDF/Vol.2(2)/ERInt.2013(2.2-04).pdf)
- Anderson, N. J. (2005). L2 learning strategies. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 757-771). Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cahyani, R., Abdullah, M., & Komara, C. (2022). The investigation of English grammar learning strategies on high, middle, and low achievers' students in Indonesia. *ELLTER Journal*, 3(2), 54–63. <https://doi.org/10.22236/ellter.v3i2.10063>
- Cohen, A. D. (2007). Coming to terms with language learner strategies: Surveying the experts. In E. Macaro & A. D. Cohen (Eds.), *Language learner strategies: 30 years of research and practice* (pp. 29–45). Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, A. D. (2011). *Strategies in learning and using a second language*. Routledge.
- Cohen, A. D., & Dörnyei, Z. (2002). Focus on the language learner: Motivation, styles, and strategies. In N. Schmitt (Ed.), *An introduction to applied linguistics* (pp. 170–190). Arnold.
- Cohen, A. D., & Pinilla-Herrera, A. (2010). Communicating grammatically: Constructing a learner strategies website for Spanish. In T. Kao & Y. Lin (Eds.), *A new look at language teaching and testing: English as subject and vehicle* (pp. 63–83). The Language Training and Testing Center. https://carla.umn.edu/about/profiles/CohenPapers/communicating_grammatically.pdf
- Cohen, A. D., Oxford, R. L., & Chi, J. C. (2002). *Language strategy use survey*. Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota. https://carla.umn.edu/maxsa/documents/LanguageStrategyInventory_MAXSA_IG.pdf
- Ellis, R. (1995). Interpretation tasks for grammar teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(1), 87–105. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587806>
- Ellis, R. (2009). Implicit and explicit learning, knowledge, and instruction. In R. Ellis, S. Loewen, C. Elder, H. Reinders, R. Erlam, & J. Philp (Eds.), *Implicit and explicit knowledge in second language learning, testing and teaching* (pp. 3–25). Blue Ridge Summit: Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691767-003>

- Fareh, S. (2010). Challenges of teaching English in the Arab world: Why can't EFL programs deliver as expected? *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 3600–3604. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.559>
- Galesic, M., & Bosnjak, M. (2009). Effects of questionnaire length on participation and indicators of response quality in a web survey. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 73(2), 349–360. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfp031>
- Gillette, B. (1994). The role of learner goals in L2 success. In J. Lantolf & G. Appel (Eds.), *Vygotskian approaches to second language research* (pp. 195–210). Ablex.
- Grenfell, M., & Harris, V. (1999). *Modern languages and learning strategies*. Routledge.
- Grenfell, M., & Macaro, E. (2007). Language learner strategies: Claims and critiques. In A. D. Cohen, & Macaro, E. (Eds.), *Language learner strategies: 30 years of research and practice* (pp. 9–28). Oxford University Press.
- Griffiths, C. (2013). *The strategy factor in successful language learning*. Multilingual Matters.
- Hulstijn, J. (2002). Towards a unified account of the representation, processing, and acquisition of second language knowledge. *Second Language Research*, 18(3), 193–223. <https://doi.org/10.1191/0267658302sr207oa>
- Ku, K. Y., & Ho, I. T. (2010). Metacognitive strategies that enhance critical thinking. *Metacognition and Learning*, 5(3), 251–267. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11409-010-9060-6>
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2001). Teaching grammar. In M Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 251–266). Heinle and Heinle.
- Lehman, A., O'Rourke, N., Hatcher, L. & Stepanski, E. (2005). *JMP for basic univariate and multivariate statistics: A step-by-step guide*. SAS Press.
- Macaro, E. (2001). *Learning strategies in foreign and second language classrooms*. Continuum.
- Nakachi, K. (2021). Grammar learning strategy use by English-major university students: An investigation with grammar learning strategy inventory (GLSI). *Nagoya JALT Journal*, 2(1), 53–70. <https://doi.org/10.37546/jaltchap.nagoya2.1-3>
- O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139524490>
- Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Heinle & Heinle.
- Oxford, R.L. (2011). *Teaching and researching language learning strategies*. Pearson Education.
- Oxford, R. L. (2017). *Teaching and researching language learning strategies: Self-regulation in context*. Routledge.
- Oxford, R. L. (2021). Consciously keeping watch: self-regulation and learning strategies. In Z. Gavriilidou & L. Mitits (Ed.), *Situating language learning strategy use: Present issues and future trends* (pp. 25–34). Multilingual Matters.

- Oxford, R.L., Lee, R. L., & Park, G. (2007). L2 grammar strategies: The second Cinderella and beyond. In A.D. Cohen & E. Macaro (Eds.), *Language learner strategies: 30 years of research and practice* (pp. 117–139). Oxford University Press.
- Pawlak, M. (2009). Grammar learning strategies and language attainment: Seeking a relationship. *Research in Language*, 7, 43–60. <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10015-009-0004-7>
- Pawlak, M. (2013). Researching grammar learning strategies: Combining the macro- and micro-perspective. In L. Salski, W. Szubko-Sitarek, & J. Majer (Eds.), *Perspectives on foreign language learning* (pp. 191–220). University of Łódź Press.
- Pawlak, M. (2018). Grammar learning strategy inventory (GLSI): Another look. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 8(2), 351–379. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2018.8.2.8>
- Rubin, J., Chamot, A., Harris, V., & Anderson, N. (2007). Intervening in the use of strategies. In E. Macaro & A. D. Cohen (Eds.), *Language learner strategies: 30 years of research and practice* (pp. 141–160). Oxford University Press.
- Savage, K. L., Bitterlin, G., & Price, D. (2010). *Grammar matters: Teaching grammar in adult ESL programs*. Cambridge University Press.
- Schmidt, R. (1995). Consciousness and foreign language learning: A tutorial on the role of attention and awareness in learning. In R. Schmidt (Ed.), *Attention and awareness in foreign language learning (Technical Report 9)* (pp. 1–63). Second Language Teaching & Curriculum Center, University of Hawaii.
- Vandergrift, L. (1997). The Cinderella of communication strategies: Reception strategies in interactive listening. *The Modern Language Journal*, 81(4), 494–505. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1997.tb05517.x>
- Zarrinabadi, N., Rezazadeh, M., & Chehrazi, A. (2021). The links between grammar learning strategies and language mindsets among L2 and L3 learners: Examining the role of gender. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 20(2), 347–364. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2020.1871356>
- Zhou, Z. (2017). The investigation of the English grammar learning strategy of high school students in China. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 7(12), 1243–1248. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0712.11>