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An Investigation of the Use of Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies in Foreign Language Learning

Norhayati Idris[1], Haslinda Md Isa[2], Nik Nur Nadhirah Zakaria[3], Nor Azhar Mohd Taib[4], Saidah ismail[5] & Noor Hanim Rahmat[6]

[1,2,4,5]Akademi Pengajian Bahasa Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam Selangor, [3]School of Languages, Literacies & Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang, [6]Akademi Pengajian Bahasa Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Johor Kampus Pasir Gudang

Abstract

Learning foreign language is challenging, especially so without a proper learning approach to the language. Therefore, one should equip oneself with suitable language learning strategies. Teachers should be perceptive of different language learning strategies in learners and which strategies they benefit the most. This quantitative research is carried out to investigate how learners use cognitive and metacognitive strategies in learning French as a foreign language. The instrument used in the study is a survey adapted from Wenden and Rubin (1987). 189 respondents were purposively chosen to answer the survey. The survey has 3 main sections: demographic profile, 19 items on Cognitive components and 11 items on the use of Metacognitive self-regulation. The findings of this study revealed that both cognitive and metacognitive strategies were adopted by students in learning French. Harmonious balance was observed between both strategies. Cognitive strategies were often used for rehearsal, elaboration, followed by organisation and then critical thinking. For metacognitive strategies were used often in planning and self-evaluation. This is then followed by monitoring. For future research, different learning strategies used by learners in learning a foreign language, especially in a specific learning context can be analysed to attain a more comprehension results.
Keywords: Cognitive Strategies, Metacognitive Strategies, Learning Strategies, Foreign Language Learning, French

Introduction
Background of Study

According to Point, Ng & Ting (2021), Foreign languages are learnt for various reasons ranging from personal enrichment to fulfilling job requirements. Learning a language from a strong economic country, for instance, will increase the competitiveness of graduates. On a personal level, as mentioned by Tar (2011), learning a foreign language allows learners to expand their worldview, give a deeper understanding on how people think and also develop

a better understanding of other cultures. Hence, this will help to avoid bigotry and stereotypes.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the education landscape. Online learning has become the way to go for teaching and learning to take place. This could present the best opportunity for anyone to learn a foreign language, as it can be remotely accessible via various online platform. The progress of mobile and wireless technologies also offers students a new learning environment, namely 'seamless learning', where students can learn whenever they want to in a variety of scenarios and that they can switch from one scenario to another easily (Ogata & Uosaki, 2012). Online learning could also provide an advantage when it comes to student's overall result. For instance, a study by Maarten et al (2021) shows that, performance in accuracy and response time on open answer questions went up, as a result of students being more focused at home.

In Malaysia foreign language learning is offered in various stages in the Malaysian education system. Children starts to learn another language, a part from their mother tongue, as early as pre-school. In tertiary education, various languages, for instance, Arabic, French, Mandarin, Japanese are offered as either an elective, a compulsory subject or as a Bachelor program. As this paper focuses on French, we can see a growing number of Malaysians learning French in schools and university. In University Teknologi MARA, French is offered as one of the compulsory foreign language subject, a pass is required in order to graduate. Every semester 1500-1800 students registered into French classes in UiTM.

Despite the advantages gained in learning foreign language, students reportedly faced difficulties in learning a new language. These difficulties could come from the learner, such as fear of learning a foreign language through direct learning due to unsuitable activities (Rahmat et al., 2021) or external factors such as non-implementation of policies to support the growth of foreign language learning and lack of learning materials and language immersion (Odiboh & Odafe, 2020).

Statement of Problem

The use of Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies in Foreign Language Learning contributes to several factors. According to Anthonysamy (2020) through her study entitled The Use of Metacognitive Strategies for Undisrupted Online Learning: Preparing University Students in the Age of Pandemic, learners have the ability to assess the understanding of the course content and they are able to give more effort in managing their learning process when using metacognitive strategies. According to Ariffin et al (2021) from the study entitled Discovering Students' Strategies in Learning English Online, learners were left isolated and they were required to be independent in the learning process. Moreover, they had to reduce anxiety and to make them feel capable, they also had to encourage, support and persuade themselves. On top of that, due to the pandemic situation, other obstacles like finance, technology, social as well as mental well-being need to be addressed with attention. Hence, this study is done to investigate the strategies learners use to learn a foreign language. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;
- How do learners use Cognitive strategies to learn French?
- How do learners use Metacognitive strategies to learn French?

Literature Review

Introduction

This section discusses the cognitive strategies in learning language, metacognitive strategies in learning language, how is the French language learnt, past studies and also the conceptual framework of the study.

Cognitive Strategies in Learning language

In the previous section, an introduction concerning cognitive strategies had been developed. For this section, the focus is mainly diverted towards the reason why cognitive strategies should be implied for learning a foreign language. Before proceeding to the detail for this section, a brief recap on what cognitive learning is will be elaborated on first. Based on the definition proposed, cognitive learning is an active style of learning that focuses on helping in learning how to maximize the brain's potential. This learning style facilitates connecting new information with existing ideas hence deepening the memory and retention capacity. The ability of the brain's mental processes to absorb and retain information through experience, senses, and thought is known as cognition.

Several studies have investigated how cognitive strategies impact students' aptitude in learning a foreign language. In a study led by Neo (2017), she analyzed the types of strategies generally utilized by students in one of the institutions of higher learning in Malaysia in the course of learning Spanish, and the relationship between the use of these strategies and other factors such as ethnicity, motivation and language proficiency level. The discoveries signify that generally most of the students prefer using metacognitive strategies rather than affective strategies but this strategy, metacognitive strategies, is not very common among the students. Normally students with high motivation levels will opt for language learning strategy than the students with lower motivation. Results from this study serve as guidance to both: learner and teacher because they can have some insight regarding different types of patterns found in acquiring a new language. As for teachers, this finding can guide towards better teaching techniques and helps in developing a better strategy in accommodating the students in learning the Spanish language.

In another study developed by Rahimi and Katal (2011), it portrays that learner who apply metacognitive strategies, which is having more consciousness in understanding what they are doing when learning, tend to be the most successful. This study gives a general outline concerning the theories and practices of metacognitive in language learning and how to implement this strategy to activate students' repertoires of metacognitive knowledge. Metacognition is defined as a construct that refers to thinking about one's thinking or the human aptitude to be conscious of one's mental processes. The results from this study prove that learners who are more conscious in knowing what they learn and invest more in it, especially implementing various strategies to find the solution, tend to be effective and fast-learner students. Based on this study, applying metacognitive strategies permit the students to plan, control and evaluate their learning which can help them towards a better achievement and a better future in a work field environment.

Metacognitive Strategies in learning Language

Many past studies have been done on Metacognitive Strategies in learning languages. The study by Cubukcu (2008) was done to determine the effectiveness of systematic direct

instruction of multiple metacognitive strategies designed to assist students in comprehending text specifically, the reading comprehension and vocabulary achievement. In this study, 130 third-year university students have been taught metacognitive strategies for reading in a five-week program they have joined voluntarily. The students have used the reading logs to reflect on their own thinking processes as they have been engaged in reading tasks. Their reading comprehension and vocabulary has been investigated to determine whether instruction that incorporated metacognitive strategies has led to an increase in the reading comprehension of expository texts. The findings of the study have implications for learners, teachers, and teacher educators and can assist teachers in accomplishing their challenging task of teaching English in EFL contexts where learners have less exposure to language compared to ESL contexts. It shows that teachers can help learners use different metacognitive strategies to facilitate their vocabulary learning. This study also provides evidence for the benefits of metacognitive strategy training and confirmed that reading comprehension could be developed through systematic instruction in metacognitive language learning strategies.

Another study by Ahmed, Sahail & Yousef (2013) is on the exploration of metacognitive listening strategies awareness and its relationship with listening comprehension. This study aimed at investigating the relationship between listening comprehension and metacognitive awareness among Jordanian EFL learners. The study was conducted on a convenient sample of 386 (207 female and 179 male) 10th graders from public schools in Amman, the capital city of Jordan. The participants, with an average age of 16-years old, were native speakers of Arabic who had been learning English for ten years. Their proficiency level, as reported by their teachers, is low intermediate. In this study, it is recommended that metacognitive strategies awareness be emphasized in listening comprehension instruction and should be targeted in classroom instruction. It shows that metacognitive strategies play an important role in many cognitive activities related to language use in oral communication

How is the French Language Learnt?
Learning French is challenging, especially without a proper approach to the language. One should equip themselves with suitable skills and strategies before starting the lesson. According to Halim, Abd Rahim, and Mansor (2017), students from Universiti Putra Malaysia study the French language using coping strategies, study skills strategies, social strategies, and cognitive strategies. Meanwhile, a study by Zainul (2015) shows that students in six residential schools resort to social strategies to learn French although they did use other strategies. The strategies classified by Oxford (1990) include cognitive strategies, memory strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, and affective strategies. The study also shows that those who perform better in class tend to use strategies upon learning French.

Past Studies
Past Studies in Problems in Learning French
Many studies have been done to prove the advantages that could be gained from learning a foreign language, but despite the advantages, learners often face difficulties. The study by, Point, Ng & Ting (2021) investigates the difficulties faced by students in learning French as a foreign language. It focuses on the perception of students learning French as a Foreign Language in Malaysia. Questionnaire data were collected from 80 undergraduates enrolled in French Levels 1 and 2 courses. The results showed that the relative difficulty of

mastering language skills in French, from the most difficult to the easiest, are writing, speaking, reading and listening. Results found that the students struggled with writing and speaking at Level 2 more than at Level 1 because of an increased vocabulary range, greater grammatical complexity and longer texts. The results suggest that the difficulties are not much in comprehension of the language but more towards expressing themselves whether in speaking or writing.

In another study, Odiboh & Odafe (2020), examine the challenges of French language from the perspective of Junior Secondary School Three (J.S.S. 3) students in Benin Metropolis. Data was collected from a total of 120 students from three Local Government Areas in Benin Metropolis using the Instrument for Assessing French Language Acquisition (IAFLA). Data was analysed using the sample t-test (t-test). Results revealed that the negative attitude of teachers, lack of instructional materials, the status of French as a foreign language in Nigeria amongst others are problems facing the study of French language amongst Junior Secondary School three (J.S.S 3) students in Benin Metropolis.

Odiboh & Odafe (2020) also mention that difficulties in language acquisition, could be from the learner or from other external factors not dependent on the learner. A weak input and a weak effective filter accounts for difficulty in language learning. The affective filter is the student's motives, attitudes and educational stress, while the input is what the learner takes in. As explained by Krashen's (1982) Theory of language learning, only comprehensible input is effective in increasing proficiency. The more learners understand the input, the better the language acquisition will be.

Past Studies in Learning Language using Cognitive Strategies
Many studies have been done to investigate the use of cognitive strategies in learning of foreign language. As noted by Yusri et al. (2013), the use of cognitive strategies is moderate among learners. The study is done to investigate to what extent the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in learning oral Arabic. It also explored the significance difference between these two strategies in terms of gender and different language levels. The participants were 187 learners from all faculties at UiTM, Malaysia and data were collected using questionnaires adapted from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ).
Another recent study on learners' strategies in learning English online by Ariffin, Abdul Halim and Darus (2020) revealed that metacognitive strategies are ranked at the highest preference of learners who were high users of Online Language Learning Strategies (OLLS) and cognitive strategies were the lowest choice strategies used by these learners although it is still relatively high among all strategies. The OLLS questionnaires were employed for data collection which involved 112 participants who studied English at the Diploma level.

Past Studies in Learning Language using MetaCognitive Strategies
Numerous studies were conducted to investigate the benefits of utilizing metacognitive strategies in learning a foreign language. The study by Ghee, Ismail and Kabilan (2010) explores the proficient use of language learning strategies used by foreign language learners based on genders and achievement groups. This study gives a global sight on the different preferences of language learning strategies used by unalike gender as well as different achievement groups. 165 students from eight Mandarin classes from a public

university in Malaysia were invited to take part in the study. They were required to complete a questionnaire adapted from Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL version 7). The data attained was examined using frequency counts, average means and standard deviation to identify the strategies used as well as the students' demographic information. An independent sample T-test was used to compare the strategies utilized by the genders. The results portrayed that female students used more learning strategies than male students. The results also showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the high achievement group and low achievement group in operating compensation strategies. The findings of this study allow exploring how the learners used different learning strategies to achieve their academic requirements.

Another study conducted by Abdul Halim et al (2017) analyzed Malaysian students' perception regarding the types of learning strategies employed in learning these two foreign languages: French and Japanese. For this research, a total of 100 students of French and Japanese languages were used as the respondents. To conduct this study, a quantitative method of data collection by employing the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was utilized as an instrument to investigate the frequency of language learning strategies used by learners of both languages. The main objective in conducting this study is to find the similarity and differences of strategies employed in French and Japanese. The result portrayed that the students of Japanese and French were perceived to frequently use cognitive and metacognitive strategies and the least used were affective and memory strategies. This study shows that educators have to consider the existence of language learning strategies in all learners and which strategies they apply the most.

Conceptual Framework
This study is rooted from the categories of cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies by (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Cognitive strategies are one type of learning strategy that learners use in order to learn more successfully. Cognitive strategies include repetition, organising new language, summarising meaning, guessing meaning from context, using imagery for memorisation. Rahmat (2021) involves the learner trying to understand the learning content at his or her own level. In the context of this study, the cognitive strategies that learners use in the learning of a foreign language include rehearsal, organisation, elaboration, and critical thinking.

Next, metacognitive strategies are what the learners do when the "think about how they are thinking". These strategies help learners to become self-regulating learners and also to develop a strong sense of urgency in their learning. Rahmat et al (2021) found that some learners have the capacity to use metacognitive scaffolding in their learning. These include using scaffold to (a) plan, (b) monitor, and evaluate their learning. In the context of this study , metacognitive learning strategies include planning, monitoring and also self-evaluation.
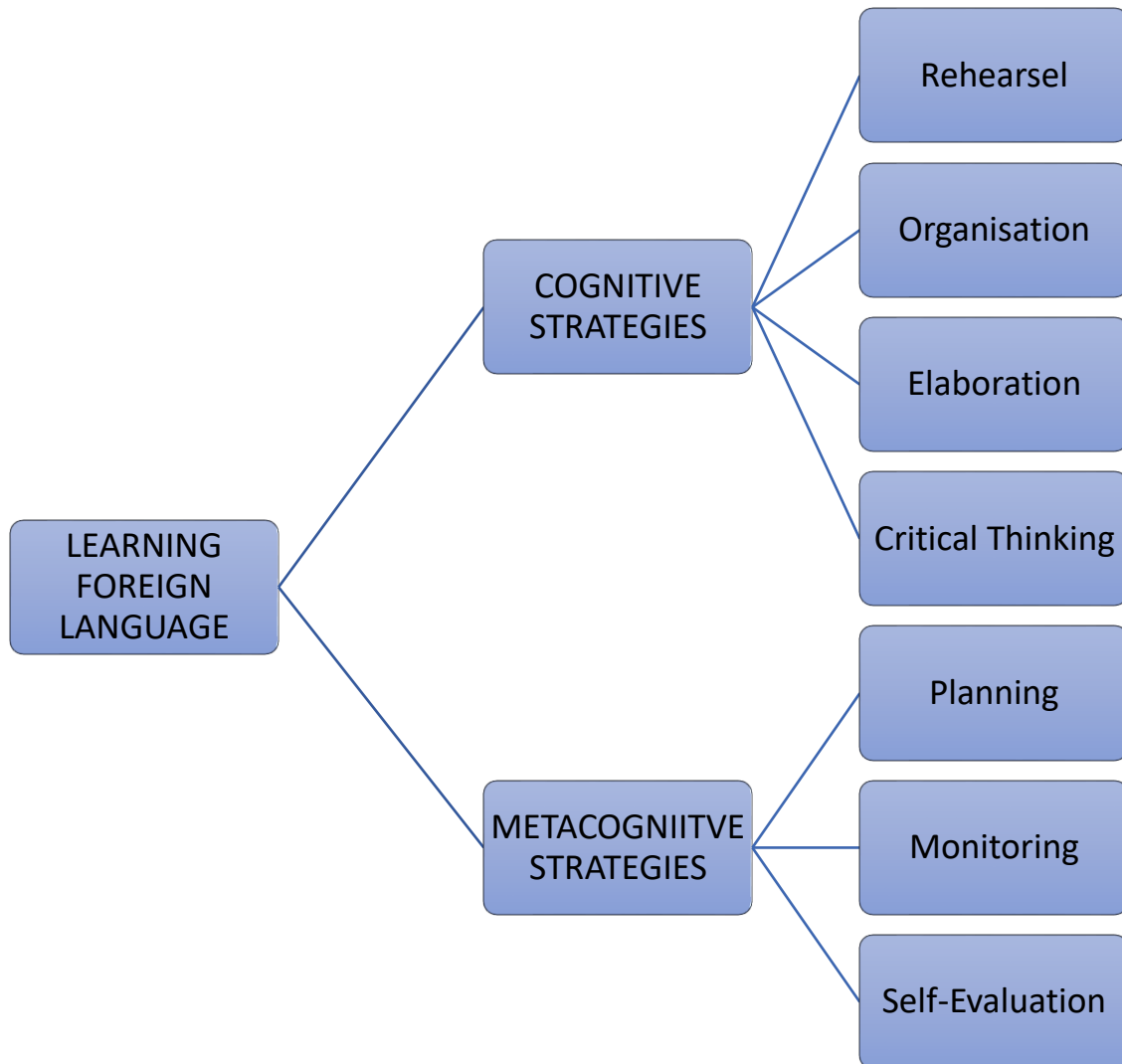
Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study
(Source: Wenden & Rubin1987)

Methodology

This quantitative research is done to investigate how learners use cognitive and meta cognitive strategies when they learn French as a foreign language. The instrument used is a survey adapted from Wenden & Rubin (1987). 189 respondents were purposively chosen to answer the survey. The survey has 3 main sections. With reference to Table 1, section A has items on the demographic profile. Section B has 19 items on Cognitive components and section C has 11 items on the use of Metacognitive self-regulation.

Table 1: Distribution of Items in the Survey

A	COGNITIVE COMPONENTS	(a)	Rehearsal	4	19
		(b)	Organization	4	
		(c)	Elaboration	6	
		(d)	Critical Thinking	5	
B	METACOGNITIVE SELF-REGULATION	(a)	Planning	4	11
		(b)	Monitoring	4	
		©	Self-Evaluation	3	
					30

Table 2-Reliability Statistics of the Instrument

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.937	30

Table 2 presents the reliability statistics for the instrument. SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach alpha of .937 thus showing a high internal reliability of the instrument used. Data is collected online via goggle form. Data is then analysed using SPSS version 26. Analysed data is presented in the form of percentages and mean scores to answer the 2 research questions

Findings
Findings for Demographic Profile
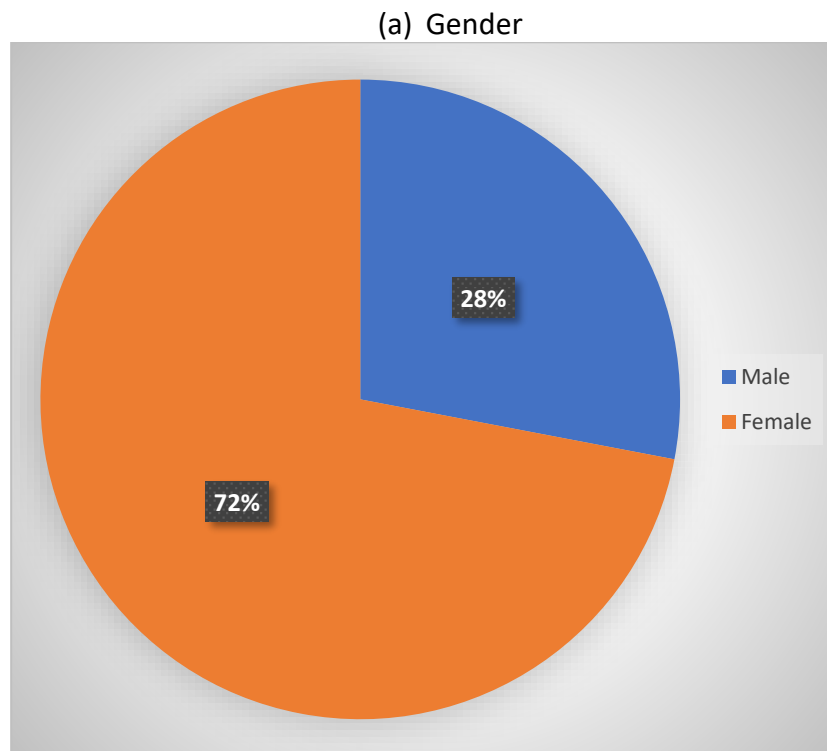
(a) Gender

Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

From the above figure 2, out of 189 respondents, female respondents contributed the highest at 72% whereby Male respondents at 28%
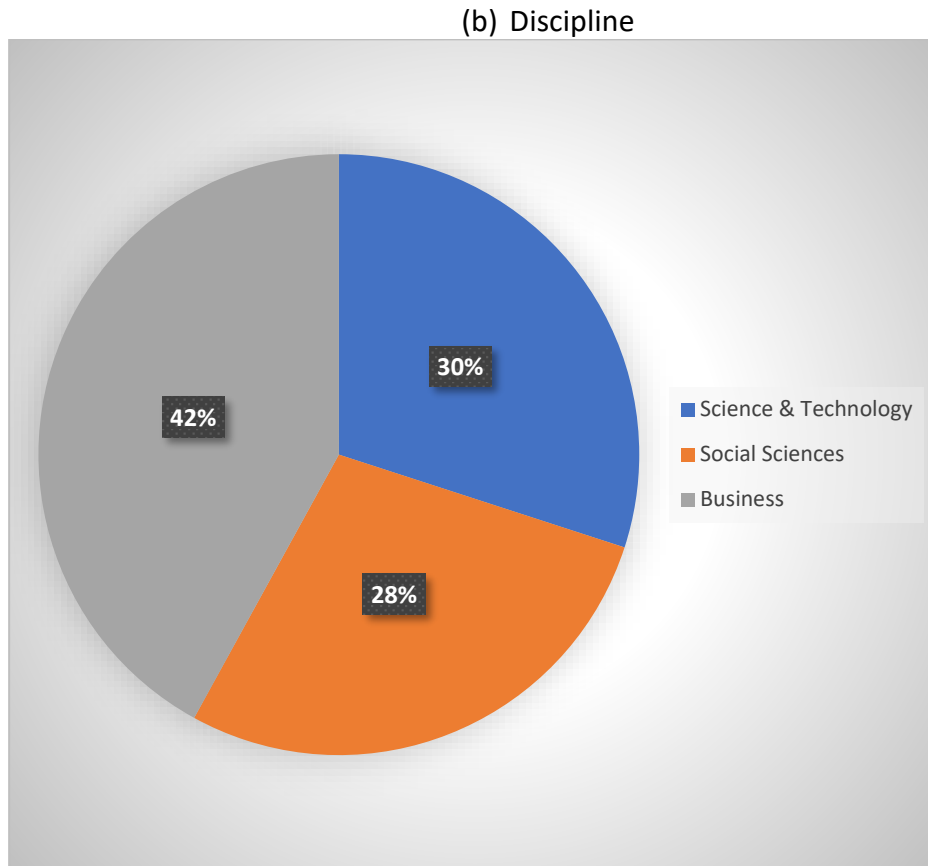
(b) Discipline

Figure 3- Percentage for Discipline

From the above figure 3, the most percentage at 42 % was from the respondents from Business. Next is the respondents from Science & Technology (30%) and finally respondents from Social Sciences (28%)

Findings for Cognitive Strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 1-How do learners use Cognitive strategies to learn French? In the context of this study, cognitive strategies include (a) rehearsal(4 items) , (b) organisation (4 items), (c) elaboration (6 items), and (d) critical thinking (5 items).
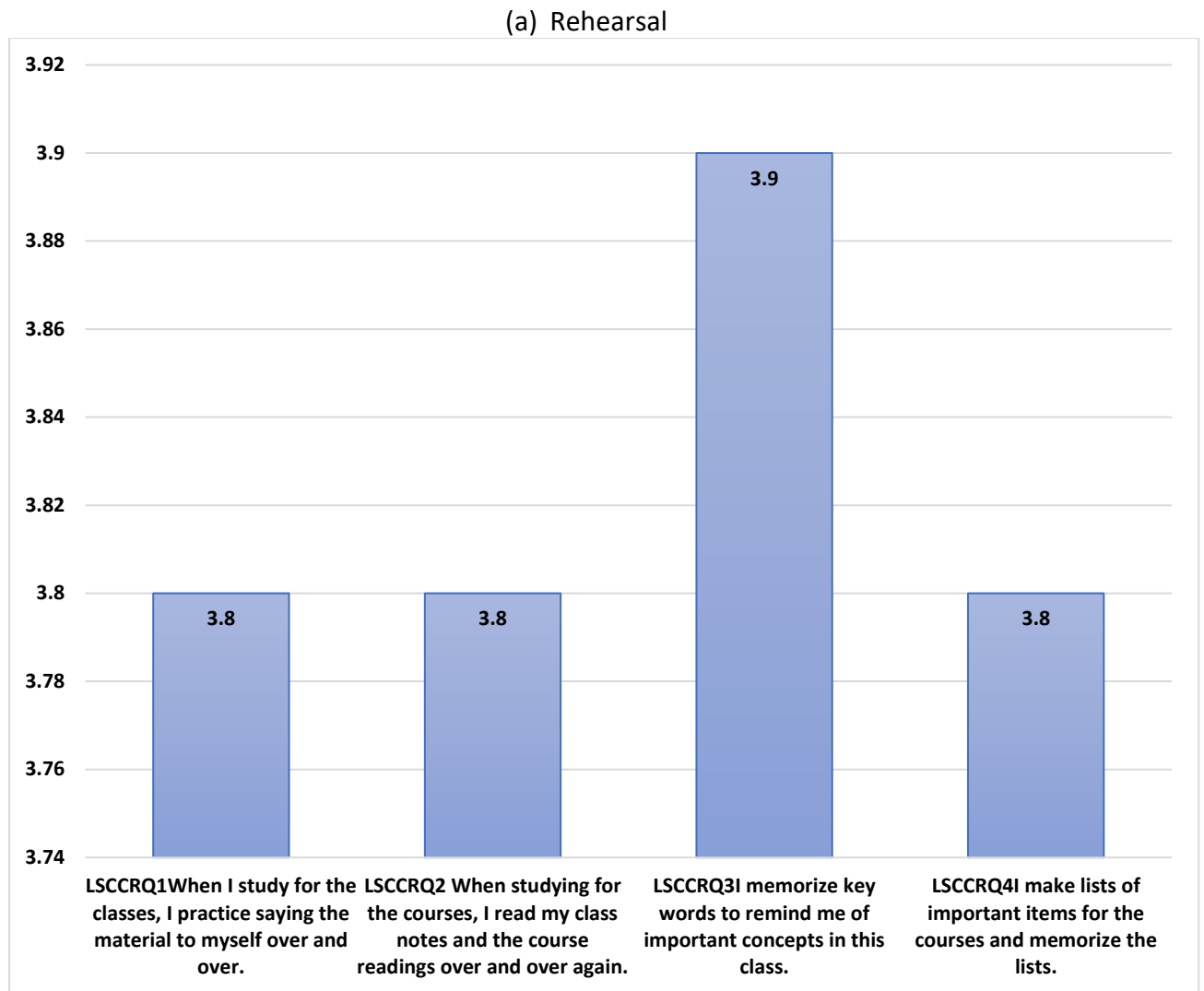
(a) Rehearsal

Figure 4- Mean for Rehearsal

This study (refer to figure 4) shows that most respondents tend to memorize keywords to remind them of important concepts in their class (3.9). Furthermore, the same number of respondents prefer to practice saying the material to themselves over and over (3.8) and read their class notes and the course readings over and over again (3.8) when studying. Respondents also make lists of important items for the courses and memorize the lists (3.8).
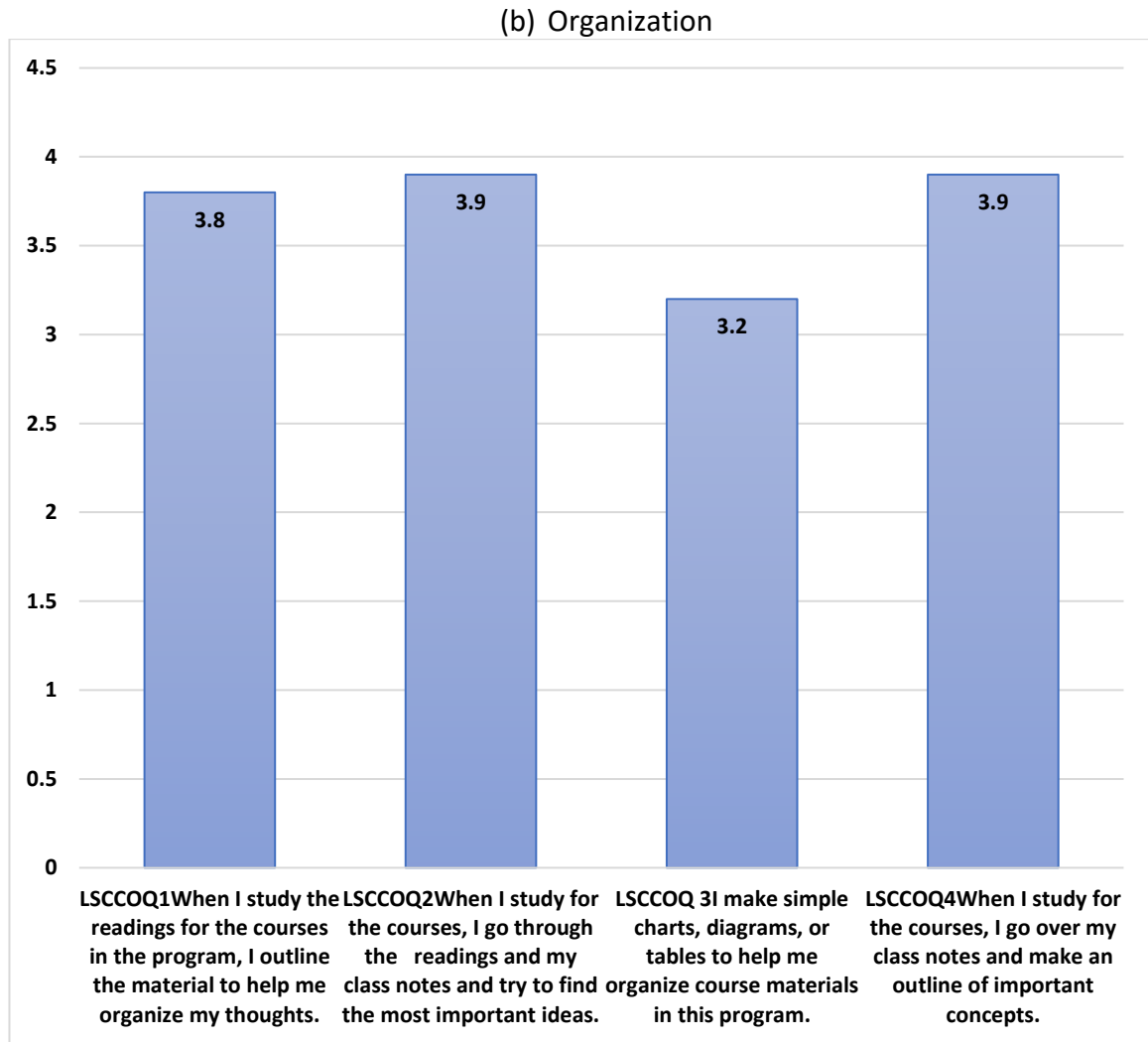
Figure 5-Mean for Organisation

This study (refer to figure 5) shows that the highest mean of 3.9 shows that respondents go through the readings and their class notes and try to find the most important ideas when studying for the courses. The same mean of 3.9 also signifies that respondents go over their class notes and make an outline of important concepts when they study for the courses. The majority of respondents also outline the material to help them organize their thoughts when they study the readings for the courses in the program (3.8). However, only a few respondents make simple charts, diagrams, or tables to help them organize course materials in this program (3.2)
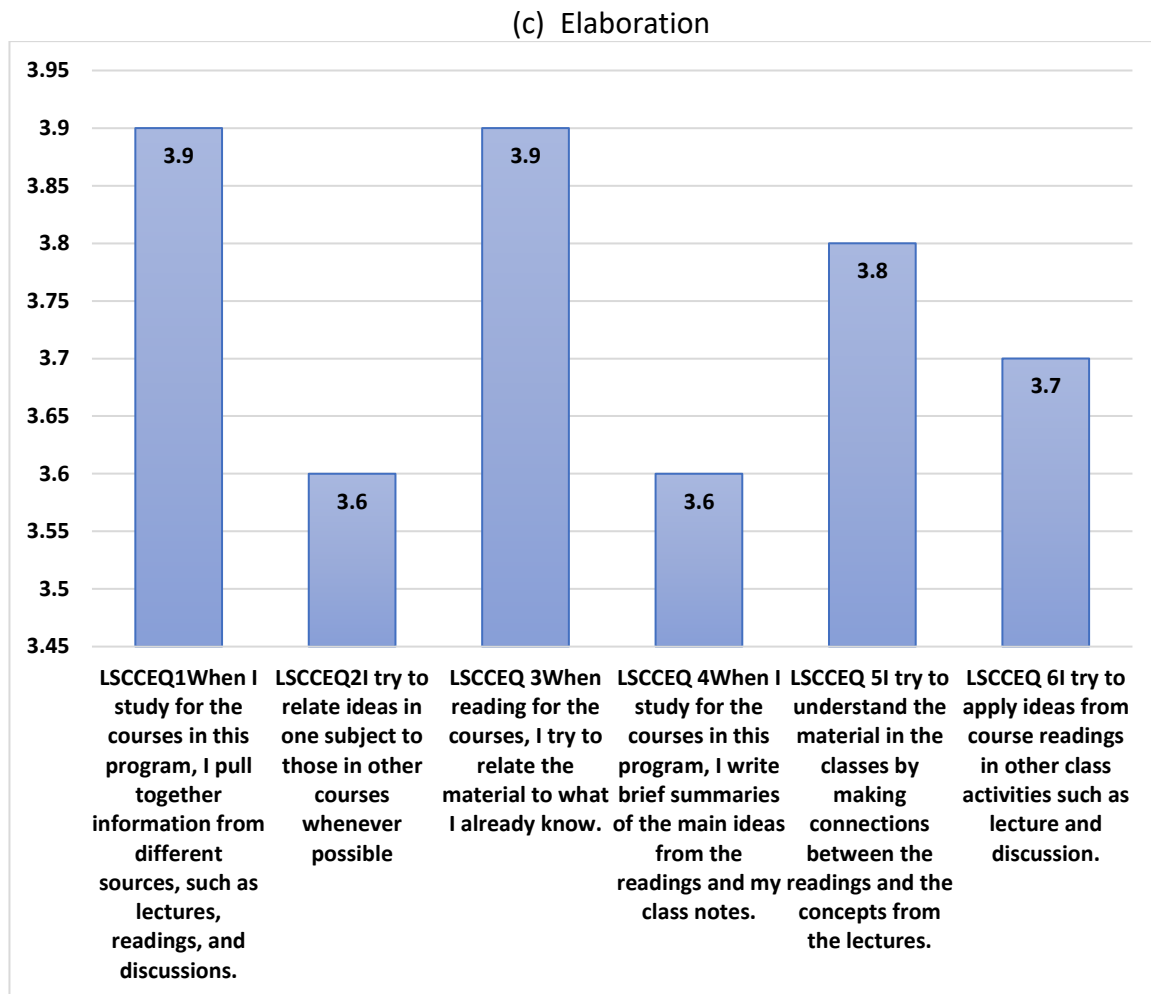
Figure 6- Mean for Elaboration

This study (figure 6) shows that most respondents are comfortable pulling together information from different sources when studying for the courses in this program (3.9). Besides that, respondents try to relate the material to what they already know when reading for the courses (3.9). Respondents also try to understand the material in the classes by making connections between the readings and the concepts from the lectures (3.8). However, these respondents are less likely to relate ideas in one subject to those in other courses whenever possible (3.6) nor to write brief summaries of the main ideas from the readings and their class notes (3.6). Despite that, respondents did try to apply ideas from the course readings in other class activities (3.7).
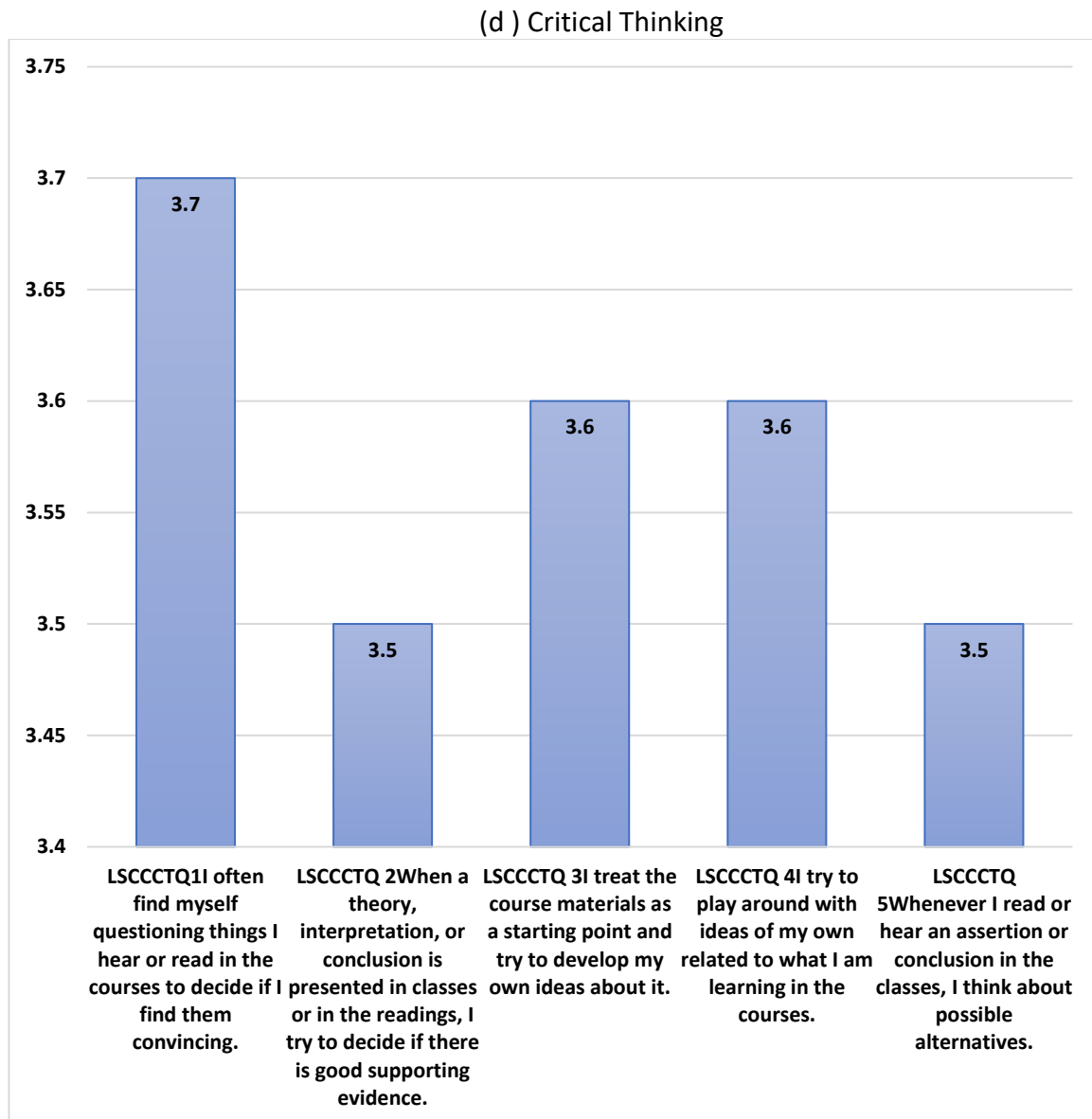
Figure 7- Mean for Critical Thinking

This study (figure 7) shows that most learners find themselves questioning things they hear or read in the courses to decide if they found them convincing (3.7). Others relatively think about the possible alternatives whenever they read or hear an assertion or conclusion in the classes (3.5) and try to decide if there is good supporting evidence when a theory, interpretation, or conclusion is presented in classes or in the readings (3.5). Besides that, a fair amount of respondents treat the course materials as a starting point and try to develop their own ideas about it (3.6). The same amount of respondents also tries to play around with ideas of their own related to what they are learning in the courses (3.6).

Findings for Metacognitive Strategies

Next, this section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners use Metacognitive strategies to learn French? In the context of this study, metacognitive strategies refer to planning (4 items), mentoring, (4 items), and self-evaluation (3 items).
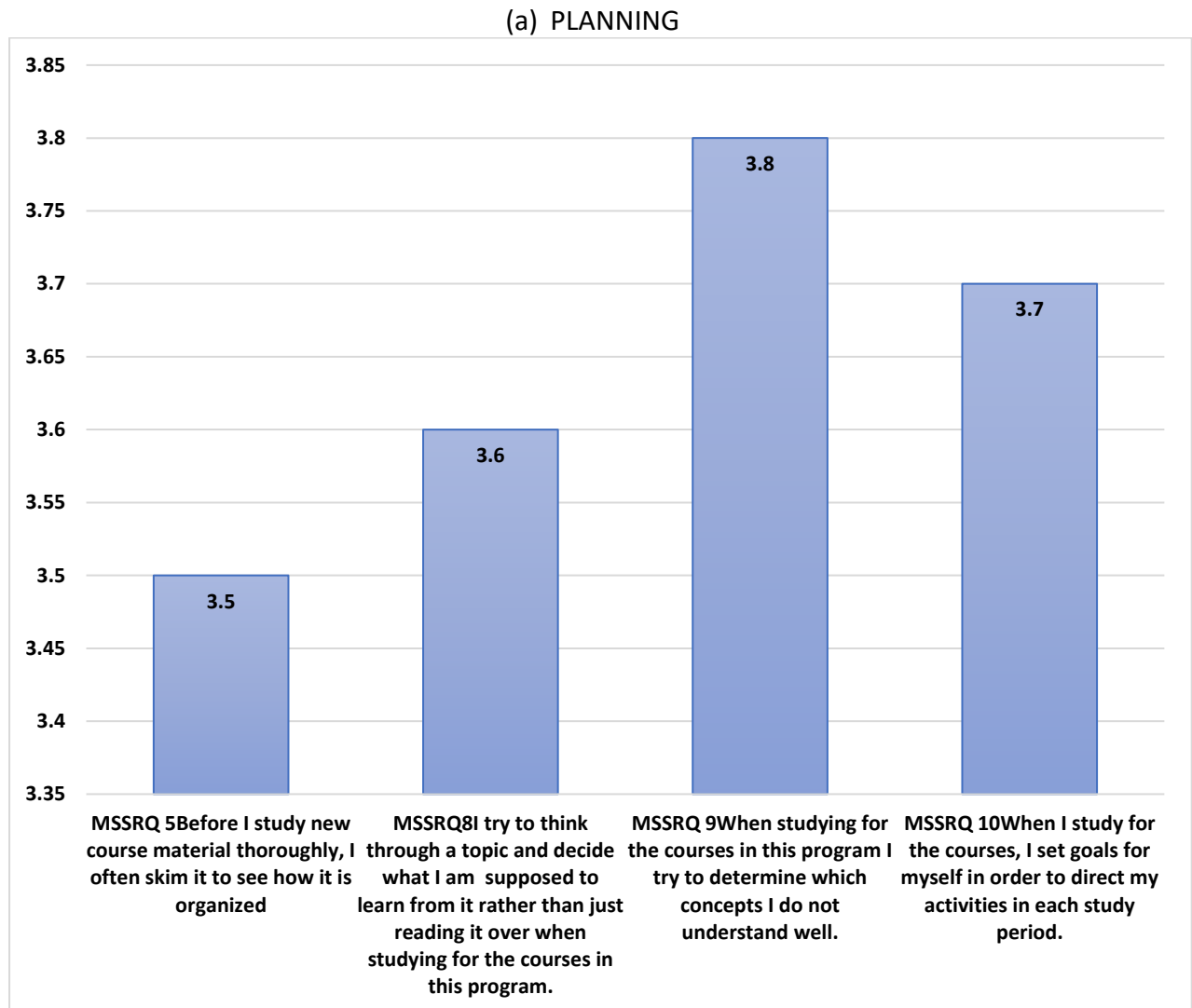
(a) PLANNING

Figure 8- Mean for Planning

With reference to the findings (refer to figure 8) in this study only, the highest mean reveals that respondents attempt to determine which concepts they do not comprehend (3.8). This is followed by others who set goals in order to direct class activities in the program (3.7). Others seek to reflect through a topic and choose what they are supposed to learn from it rather than just reading it over (3.6). The rest of them often skim new course material to grasp how it is planned before studying it thoroughly (3.5).
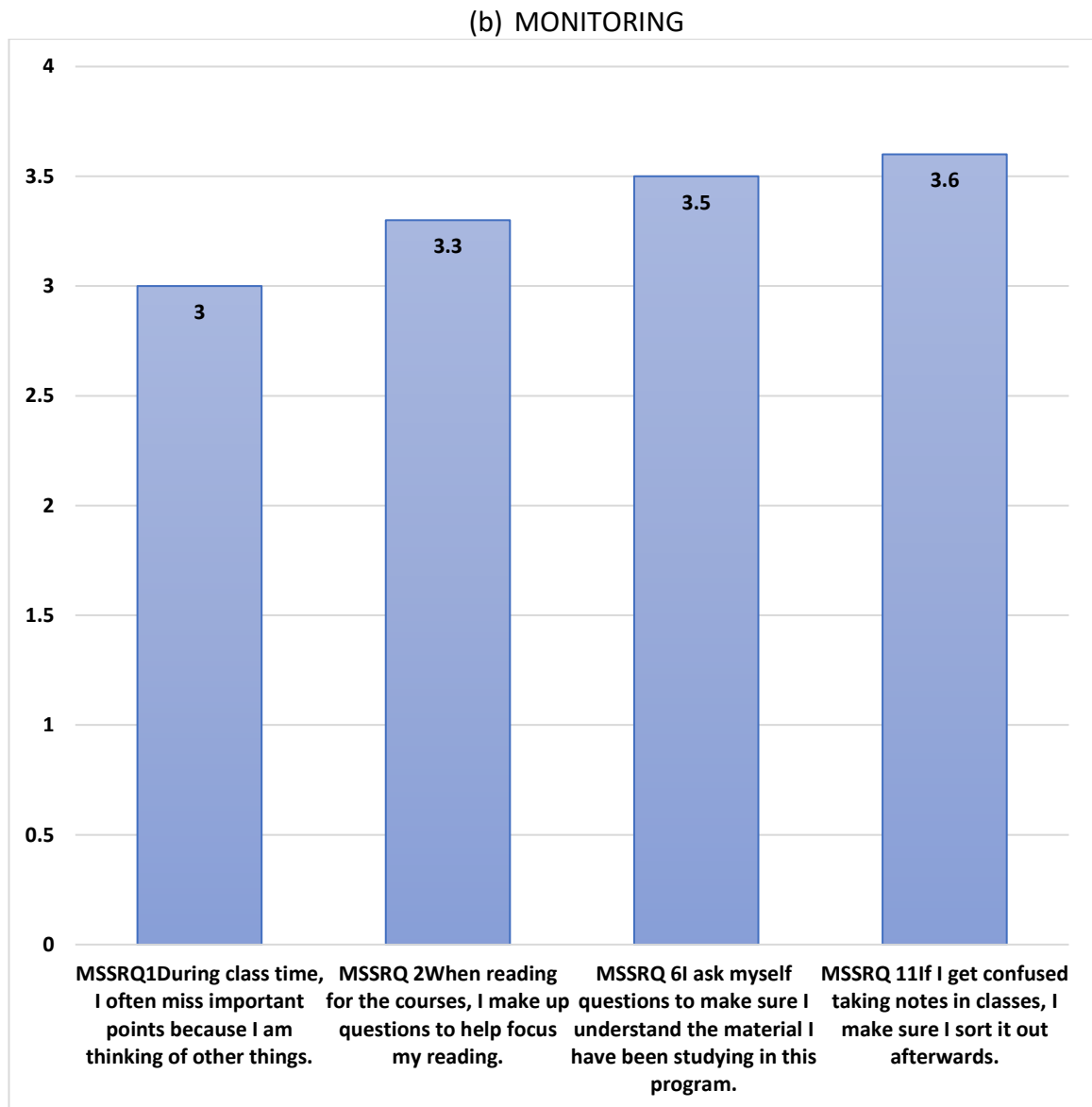
(b) MONITORING

Figure 9- Mean for Monitoring

Majority of the respondents (refer to figure 9) make sure that they systematize the notes later when they get confused during note-taking in classes (3.6). Besides that, a fair amount of respondents ask themselves questions to validate the understanding of the material in the program (3.5). Others moderately formulate questions to help concentrate on their reading (3.3). However, only few respondents confess that they miss important points because they are thinking of other things during classes (3).
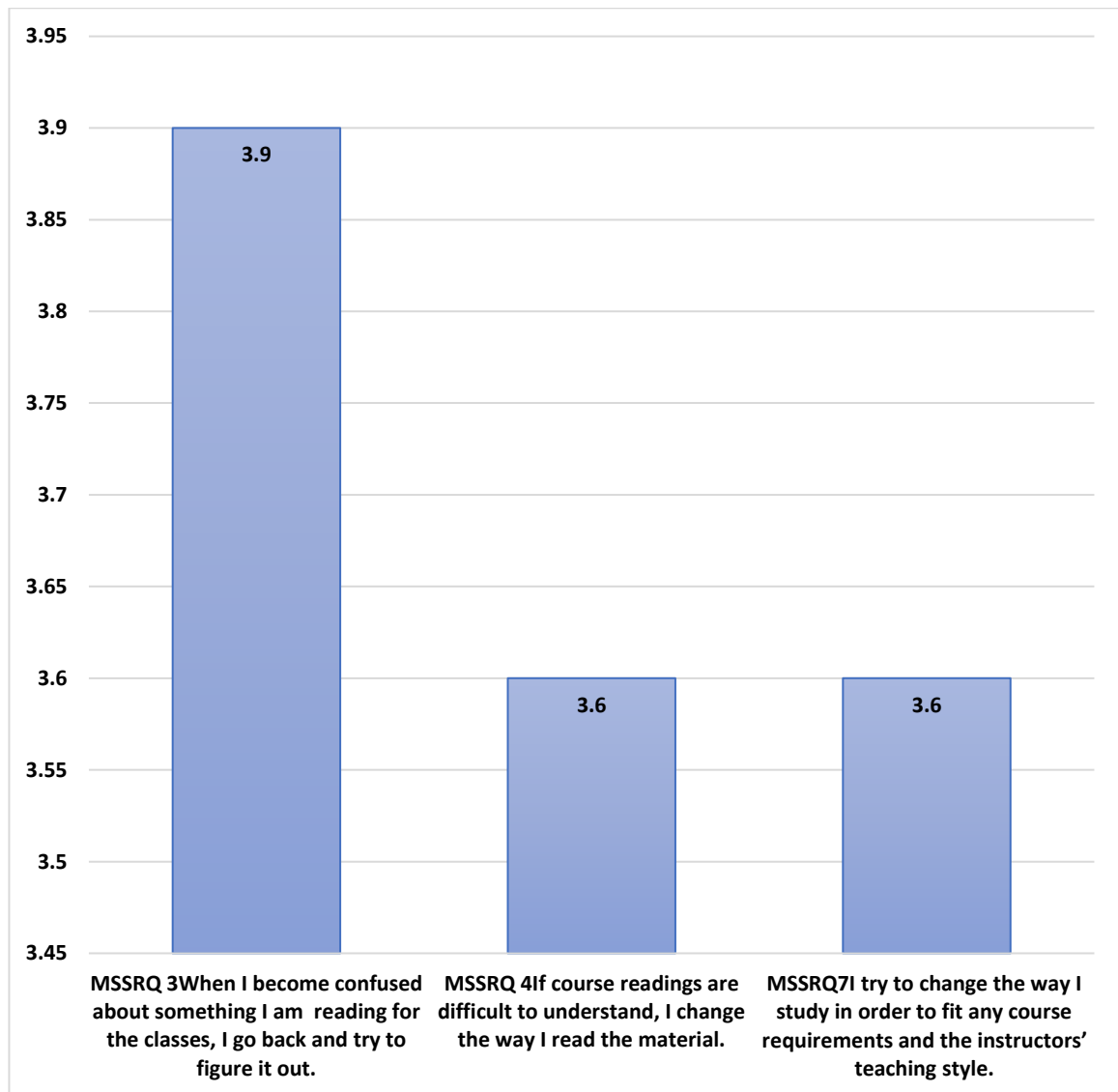
(c) SELF-EVALUATION

Figure 10-Mean for Self-Evaluation

When it comes to self-evaluation (refer to figure 10), the highest mean shows that respondents who become confused during reading activities in classes will try to make sense of it afterwards (3.9). The same means of 3.6 also outline that they try to alter the technique they read the material when readings are difficult to understand and they also adjust their strategy in order to assimilate into any course requirements and trainers' teaching style.

Conclusion
Summary of Findings and Discussion

Table 3-Total mean for Cognitive Strategies

	Mean
Rehearsal	3.8
Organisation	3.7
Elaboration	3.8
Critical Thinking	3.6

To sum up, data analysis from this study revealed interesting findings in the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies for foreign language learning. A condensation of the mean scores Table 3) for cognitive strategies showed that the most often used are rehearsal and elaboration, followed by organisation and then critical thinking. Next, for metacognitive strategies used (table 4), the most often used are planning and self-evaluation. This is then followed by monitoring.

Table 4- Total mean for Metacognitive Strategies

Planning	3.7
Monitoring	3.4
Self-Evaluation	3.7

The findings of this studies revealed that both cognitive and metacognitive strategies were used by students in learning French. There is a harmonious balance between both strategies. According to Ahmed, Sahail & Yousef (2013) metacognitive strategies play an important role in many cognitive activities related to language use, especially in oral communication. Comparing to other learning strategies, students prefer to use coginitive and metacognitive strategies. As mentioned by Abdul Halim et al (2017) students of Japanese and French were perceived to frequently use cognitive and metacognitive strategies compared to affective and memory strategies.

Pedagogical Implications and Future Research

This study provides positive implications that can improve the teaching and learning of French language. Findings revealed that teachers have to consider the existence of different language learning strategies in all learners and which strategies they apply the most. However, according to Ariffin et al (2021), the current online learning scenario could make learners felt isolated and required them to be independent in the learning process. In this situation teachers could help by proposing different activities to help the students. As proposed by, Rahmat et al (2021) perhaps teachers could plan interactions with less learners in a group to curb anxiety problem and proposed more scaffolded activities. Future research could look into the different learning strategies used by learners in learning a foreign language, especially in a specific learning context.

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