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## An Investigation of Direct and Indirect Learning Strategies in Learning Foreign Languages

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### Abstract

Learning strategies are one of the multiple factors in accomplishing learners' objectives in acquiring a new language. Hence, the aim of this research is to investigate the strategies that language learners use during their language-learning process. The instrument for this quantitative research is a survey. It has three sections. The first section consists of 2 items on demographic profile, while the second section has 19 items on direct learning strategies. The last section has 22 items on indirect learning strategies. The respondents are 132 undergraduate students taking French as a third language at one of the public universities in Malaysia. The data collected from the respondents were then analyzed using SPSS. The findings show that rehearsal has the highest mean (3.8), but critical thinking has the lowest (3.5). The research also reveals that the help-seeking strategy has the highest mean (4.1), whereas the metacognitive self-regulation strategy has the lowest mean (3.5). From the correlation analysis, the research also indicates a significant association between direct and indirect strategies ( $r=.779^{**}$ ) and ( $p=.000$ ). In other words, this research proves that there is a strong relationship between direct strategies (which consist of rehearsal, organization, elaboration and critical thinking strategies); and indirect strategies (metacognitive self-regulation and resource management strategies) in foreign language learning. For future research, it is beneficial to determine if the gender of the learners influences the choice of learning strategies, as this would allow instructors to refine and alter their teaching approaches according to their audience.

**Keywords:** Direct Learning Strategies, Indirect Learning Strategies, Foreign Language Learning, Quantitative, SPSS

## Introduction

### Background of Study

In today's society, people learn foreign languages for various reasons. For some people, foreign languages help them to be more competitive globally (Lewis, 1999). For others, it allows them to ease their integration into the international scene (Zanne et al., 2022). Being a multicultural and multiracial country, mastering more than one language is not a novel phenomenon in Malaysia. Malaysians speak Malay, Mandarin, or Tamil (Shah & Bapoo, 2021). While Malay is Malaysia's official language, English is widely spoken as a second language (Ismail et al., 2018). Therefore, to equip graduates to be more competitive in the global arena, many universities in Malaysia offer a third language course to their students, such as Japanese, Korean, French, German, Arabic, Spanish, and Italian (Zanne et al., 2022). Yet, not everyone can become a successful language learner. According to Lewis (1999), motivation, hard work, and good learning strategies contribute when learning a second or third language. Rahmat (2020) added that to be a successful language learner, a student must use more than one language strategy.

### Statement of Problem

Language learning strategies have been found to enhance academic achievement and language proficiency in foreign language learning. The effective use of appropriate learning strategies can aid learners in mastering the target language efficiently and effectively, whether inside or outside the classroom (Wong & Nunan, 2011). Habók and Magyar's (2017) study supports this view. It found that learners with higher language proficiency tended to use a wide range of learning strategies, which positively influenced their foreign language marks. Similarly, Oflaz's (2019) study showed that a higher number of learning strategies used by learners in foreign language learning was associated with better academic achievement. As such, it is crucial to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how learners employ language learning strategies in foreign language learning to attain their desired state.

Extensive research on language learning strategies has led to the identification and categorization of various strategies within a comprehensive classification system. To systematically organize individual language learning strategies within this broader classification system, strategies were first differentiated according to whether they directly impact learning tasks or have an indirect impact. Following this, the strategies were further divided into a classification system. Oxford's (1990) six types of learning strategies were dominant in the study of language learning strategies. Although the classification system of language learning strategies is primarily developed for research purposes, it is essential not to overlook the students' learning objectives to gain a comprehensive understanding of this system. In the context of learning a foreign language, students' learning goals, such as fulfilling school graduation requirements, traveling to a country where the target language is used, or studying in a foreign country, may differ. The learning context and students' goals determine the language tasks that learners face and subsequently influence the appropriate language learning strategies to be employed. As a result, different sets of learning strategies and further classification systems of learning strategies can coexist for researchers (Chamot, 2004).

Several studies have indicated that learners' choice of learning strategies may be influenced by a variety of individual factors such as their level of motivation, gender, attitude toward the target language, language proficiency, and learning objectives (Chanderan & Hashim, 2022;

Macatuno-Nocom, 2022; Puteh et al., 2022; Platsidou & Sipitanou, 2014; Liyanage & Bartlett, 2011). In a literature review on language learning strategy issues by Derakhshan et al (2015), one of the challenges in this area is accounting for the individual characteristics of learners. Given the complex nature of individual differences, learners may utilize a wide range of learning strategies when learning a foreign language. Accordingly, it is imperative to gather additional data to enhance our comprehension of how individual factors shape the selection of learning strategies.

In the study of language learning strategies, the choices made by learners are influenced by individual characteristics and learning goals. Factors such as proficiency and motivation level may lead to the use of a wide range of learning strategies, and various classification systems coexist from the perspective of researchers. However, prior research has shown that students often fail to derive benefits from their use of learning strategies, as they tend to repeatedly employ ineffective strategies (Rovers et al., 2018; Blasiman et al., 2017). Additionally, most students do not primarily rely on learning strategies considered to be optimal from a scientific perspective (Endres et al., 2021; Bjork et al., 2013). Thus, it is essential to understand the preferred learning strategies used by learners in foreign language learning within a specific context and learner characteristics to enrich the literature on language learning strategies in foreign language learning.

The present study aims to investigate the learning strategies employed by beginner-level learners of French as a foreign language, utilizing Oxford's (1990) and Wenden and Rubin's (1987) learning strategies, as different classification systems may coexist. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions:

- How does the use of direct strategies influence the learning of foreign languages?
- How does the use of indirect strategies influence the learning of foreign languages?
- Is there a relationship between direct and indirect strategies in learning foreign languages?

## **Literature Review**

### *Direct and Indirect Learning Strategies*

Zafar and Meenakshi (2012) stated that language learners differ from one another. Their differences can be their age, sex, aptitude, motivation, learning styles, personality, and learning strategies. According to them, learning strategies are the strategies used by learners during the language learning process. Oxford (1990) revealed two main categories of learning strategies: direct and indirect strategies. The direct learning strategies consist of memory, cognitive, and compensation, whereas the indirect learning strategies include meta-cognitive, affective, and social strategies. A study by Brown (2000) indicates that the choice of learning strategies is different from learner to learner. According to the researcher, the choice depends on the learner's motivation, personality, cognitive style, the specific context of use, and opportunities for learning.

### *Strategies for Learning Foreign Languages*

Language learning strategies are crucial when it comes to language acquisition. These learning strategies have been under study as early as the 1970s. From numerous perspectives, many experts and researchers have their definitions of language learning strategies. According to

Rigney (1978), language learning strategies are the behaviors, steps, or techniques used by learners to facilitate learning. This definition was also agreed upon by (Oxford & Crookall, 1989). According to them, language learning strategies are the learners' ways to improve their learning through their actions, behaviors, and techniques. The study by Ghani (2003) has defined the students' frequent use of specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques to improve their L2 acquisition as language learning strategies. Language learning strategies can make learning new languages easier to internalize, store, retrieve, or use.

#### *Past Studies on Demotivation for Learning Language*

Demotivation is one of the reasons for failure or poor performance in foreign language acquisition. Researchers have conducted many studies concerning foreign language learning motivation, but not many on demotivation. Çankaya (2018) stated that demotivation is a relatively new issue among researchers. According to her, class characteristics and class environment are the main factors in demotivation.

Different from Çankaya's (2018) findings, Quadir's (2017) study indicates that teachers have the strongest influence on students' demotivation. Quadir (2017) investigated the sources of student demotivation to study English in Bangladesh. The respondents were 36 students from three different universities. The respondents were interviewed to explore the demotivators they experienced in high school. An interview guide was developed following the L2 demotivation factors listed by Dörnyei. Her findings reveal seven dominant factors of demotivation, which are teachers, learners' previous experiences, private tutors, attitudes of group members, institutional facilities, textbooks, and students' and family members' attitudes towards English study.

#### *Past Studies on Motivation for Learning Foreign Languages*

Numerous investigations about foreign language learning have been undertaken, particularly concerning the issue of learner motivation. The significance of learner motivation during language learning is widely acknowledged and is frequently cited as a strong predictor of academic achievement (Bakhtiyarovna, 2021). Additionally, motivation is a significant factor that affects the utilization of learning strategies in foreign language learning. A learner with a high level of motivation is likelier to use a diverse range of learning strategies than a learner with low motivation, which results in more effective foreign language learning (Chang & Liu, 2013).

Macatuno-Nocom's (2022) research reveals that motivation is a crucial factor affecting the utilization of learning strategies in foreign language learning. Macatuno-Nocom (2022) investigated the significant relationship between learners' motivation and learning strategies in foreign language learning. It involved 279 respondents learning Mandarin as a foreign language. A survey questionnaire based on Gardner's and Dörnyei's theories of motivation was employed to collect data. The results indicated that the level of motivation impacts the selection and the variety of learning strategies used by learners.

Budiarti (2022) researched the relationship between language learning strategies and a set of student variables. The study involved 99 participants learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia. The findings revealed that the participants used metacognitive strategies more frequently than cognitive strategies. Lin et al (2021) investigated the effect of motivational and learning strategies on literal and inferential comprehension in L2 Chinese reading. The respondents were 547 international students learning Chinese as a foreign language. The results show a significant correlation between motivational strategies and learning strategies.



The studies mentioned above imply that motivation is a crucial predictor of language achievement and that it has an impact on learning strategies. Moreover, the diverse array of learning strategies can improve learners' performance.

### Conceptual Framework

This study is rooted from direct and indirect learning strategies by (Oxford, 1990). According to Oxford (1990), direct strategies are strategies that contribute directly to learning. Direct strategies are strategies such as memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. Next, Oxford (1990) also said that learners use indirect strategies. Indirect strategies are strategies like metacognition, affective and social strategies. To increase success in language learning, learners are encouraged to use more than one language learning strategy (Rahmat, 2020).

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. In the context of this study, the use of direct strategies (Oxford, 1990) includes using cognitive components (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Indirect strategies include the use of metacognitive self-regulation and resource management (Wenden & Rubin, 1987).

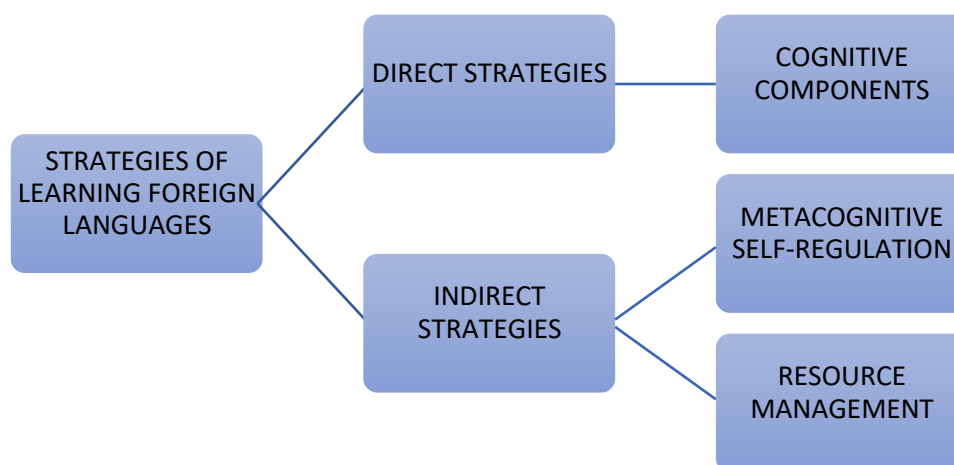


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study-  
An Investigation of Direct and Indirect Learning Strategies in Learning Foreign Languages

### Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore the direct and indirect strategies used by learners. A purposive sample of 132 participants responded to the survey. The instrument is adapted from direct and indirect learning strategies by (Oxford, 1990). These two learning strategies are then scaffolded onto the learning strategies by Wenden and Rubin (1987) to reveal the instrument as shown in table 1. The instrument used is a survey. It has 3 sections. Section A has 2 items on demographic profile. Section B has 19 items on direct strategies and section C has 22 items on indirect strategies.

Table 1

*Distribution of Items in the Survey*

	CATEGORIES LEARNING STRATEGIES (Oxford,1990)	LEARNING STRATEGIES (Wenden & Rubin, 1987)		SUB-CATEGORIES	NO ITEMS	TOT ITEMS
B	DIRECT STRATEGIES	COGNITIVE COMPONENTS	(a)	Rehearsal	4	19
			(b)	Organization	4	
			(c)	Elaboration	6	
			(d)	Critical Thinking	5	
C	INDIRECT STRATEGIES	METACOGNITIVE SELF-REGULATION				11
		RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	(a)	Environment Management	5	11
			(b)	Effort Management	4	
			(c)	Help-Seeking	2	
						22
						41

Table 2

*Reliability of Survey*

### Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.943	41

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .943; thus, revealing good reliability of the instrument used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

## Findings

### Findings for Demographic Profile

#### Q1. Gender

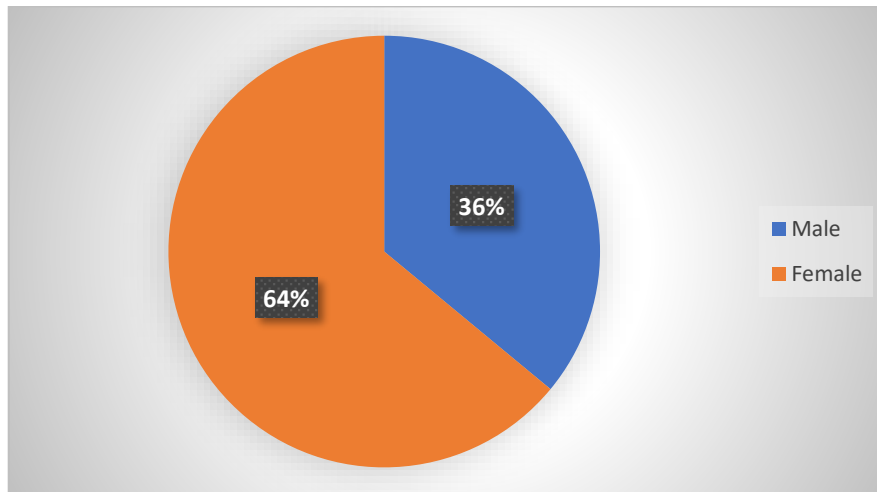


Figure 2-Percentage for Gender

The data in Figure 2 shows that 36% of the 132 respondents are male students and 64% are female students.

#### Q2 Discipline

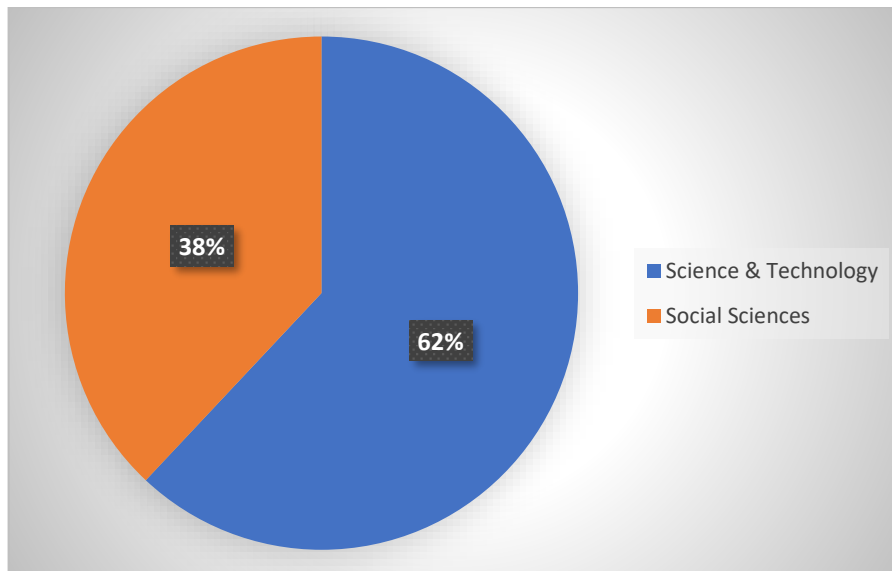


Figure 3-Percentage for Discipline

Figure 3 shows that 62% of the 132 respondents are from the science and technology discipline and 38% are from the social sciences.

## Findings for Direct Strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 1: How does the use of direct strategies influence the learning of foreign languages? In the context of this study, direct strategies are measured by sub-components of (a) rehearsal, (b) organization, (c) elaboration, (d) critical thinking.



(a) Rehearsal (4 items)

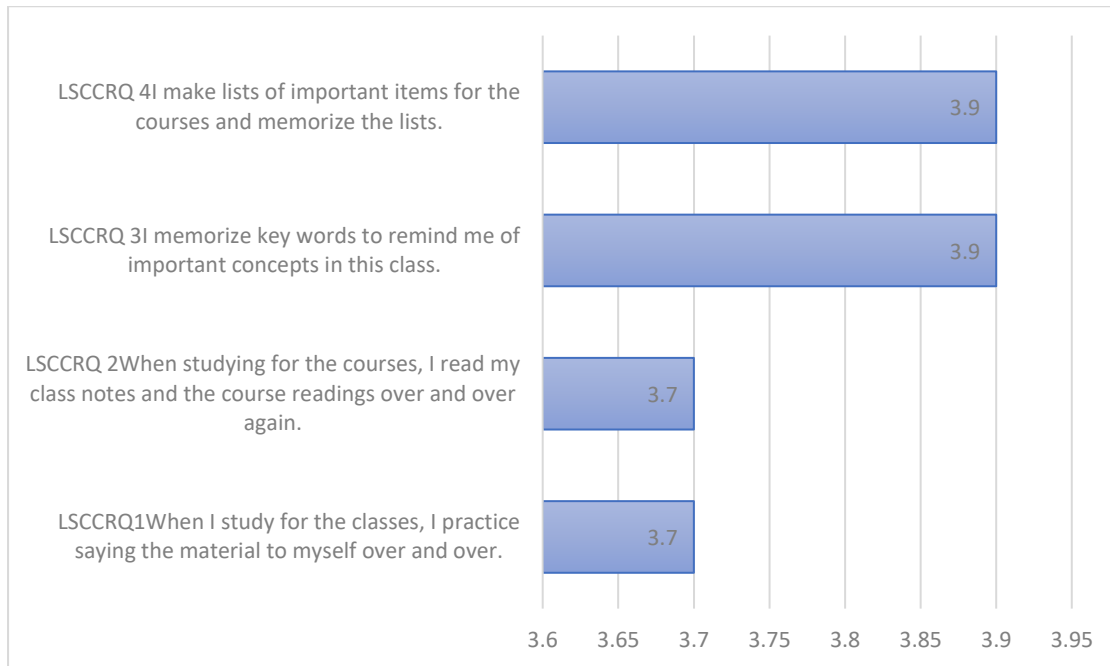


Figure 4- Mean for Rehearsal

Figure 4 presents the mean score for rehearsal. Based on all 4 items, the mean scores ranged from 3.7 to 3.9. This shows that the respondents practiced rehearsal when learning a language. The items LSCCRQ 3 and LSCCRQ 4 recorded the highest mean score ( $M=3.9$ ). The data indicated that the respondents often memorized keywords strategies to remind them of important concepts in class. They also often made lists of important items for the course and memorized the lists.

(b) Organization (4 items)

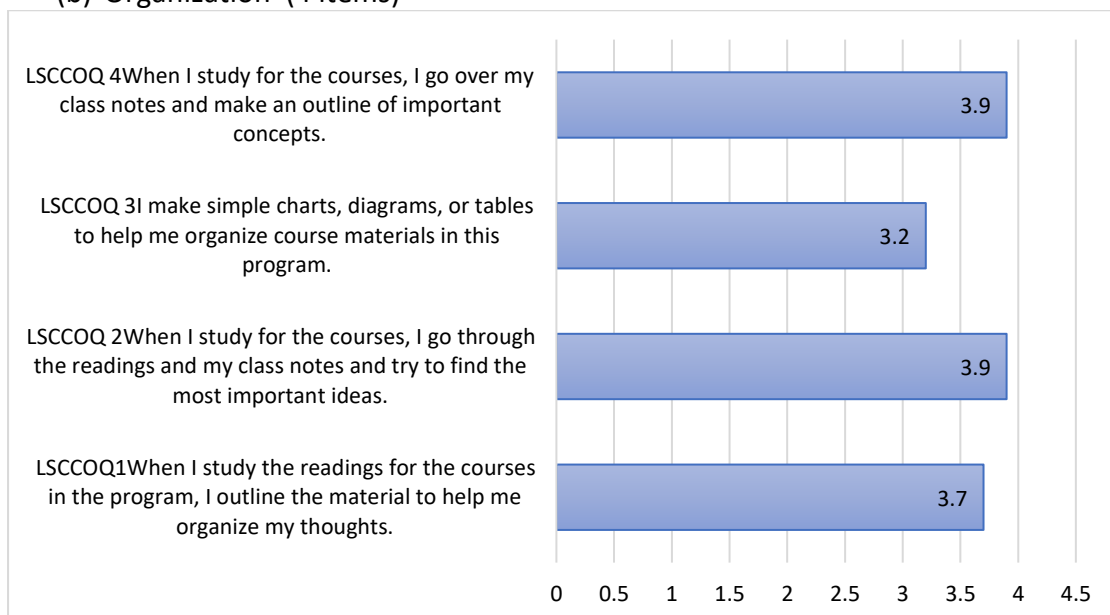


Figure 5- Mean for Organization

Figure 5 presents the mean score for organization. Based on all 4 items, the mean score ranged from 3.2 to 3.9. This shows that the respondents practiced organization when learning a language. The items LSCCOQ 2 and LSCCOQ 4 recorded the highest mean score ( $M=3.9$ ). The data indicated that the respondents often went through the readings and class notes and they tried to find the most important ideas. They also often went over their class notes and made an outline of important concepts. On the other hand, the item with the lowest mean score was found to be item LSCCOQ 3. The respondents sometimes made simple charts, diagrams, or tables to help them organize their course materials.

(c) Elaboration (6 items)

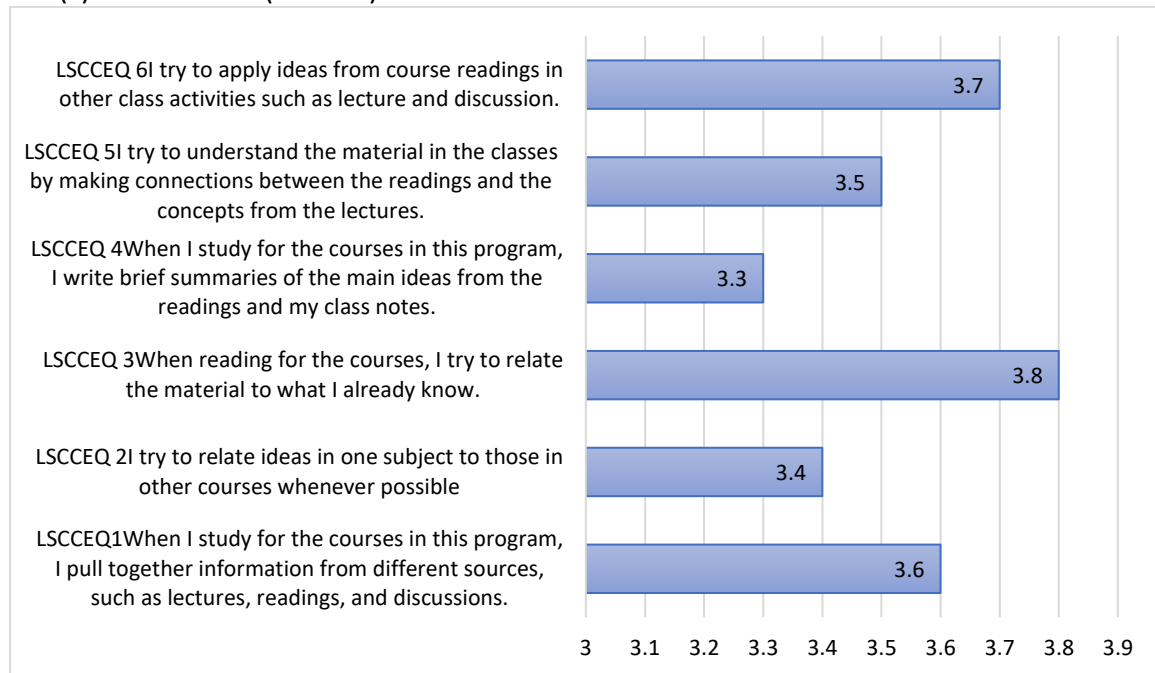


Figure 6- Mean for Elaboration

Figure 6 presents the mean score for elaboration. Based on all 6 items, the mean scores ranged from 3.3 to 3.8. This shows that the respondents practiced elaboration when learning a language. Item LSCCEQ 3 has the highest mean score ( $M=3.8$ ). The data shows that the respondents often tried to relate the material to what they already knew. On the other hand, item LSCCEQ 4 has the lowest mean score ( $M=3.3$ ). This shows that the respondents sometimes tried to write brief summaries of the main ideas.

(d) Critical Thinking (5 items)

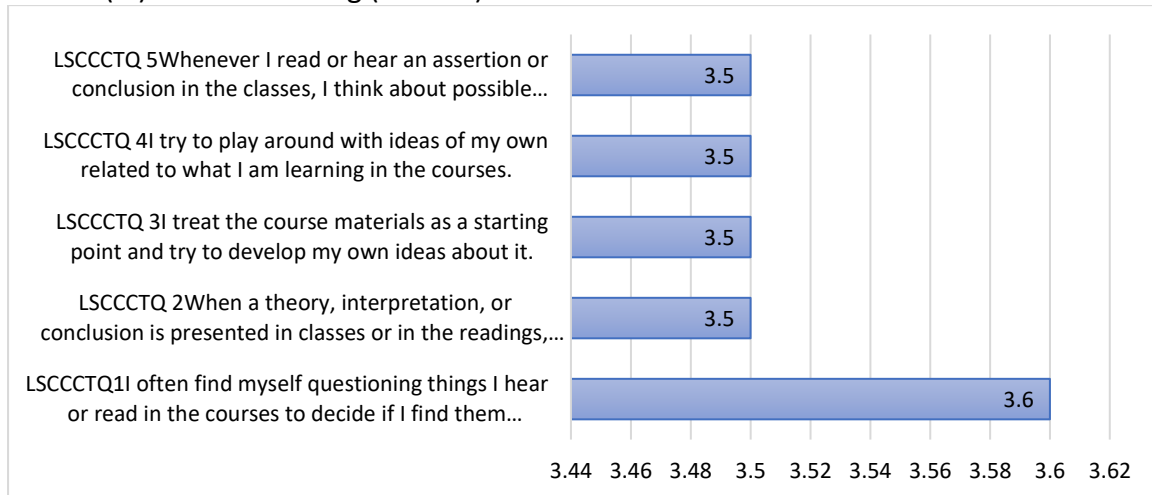


Figure 7- Mean for Critical Thinking

Figure 7 presents the mean score for critical thinking. Based on all 5 items, the mean scores ranged from 3.5 to 3.6. This means that the respondents practiced critical thinking when learning a language. Item LSCCCTQ1 recorded the highest mean score ( $M=3.6$ ). The data indicated that the respondents often find themselves questioning things they heard or read in the course to decide if they find them convincing. All the other items shared the same mean score ( $M=3.5$ ).

*Findings for Indirect Strategies*

This section presents data to answer research question 2: How does the use of indirect strategies influence the learning of foreign languages? In the context of this study, indirect strategies refer to (a) metacognitive self-regulation and (b) environment management, (c) effort management, and (d) help-seeking.

a) Metacognitive Self-Regulation (11 items)

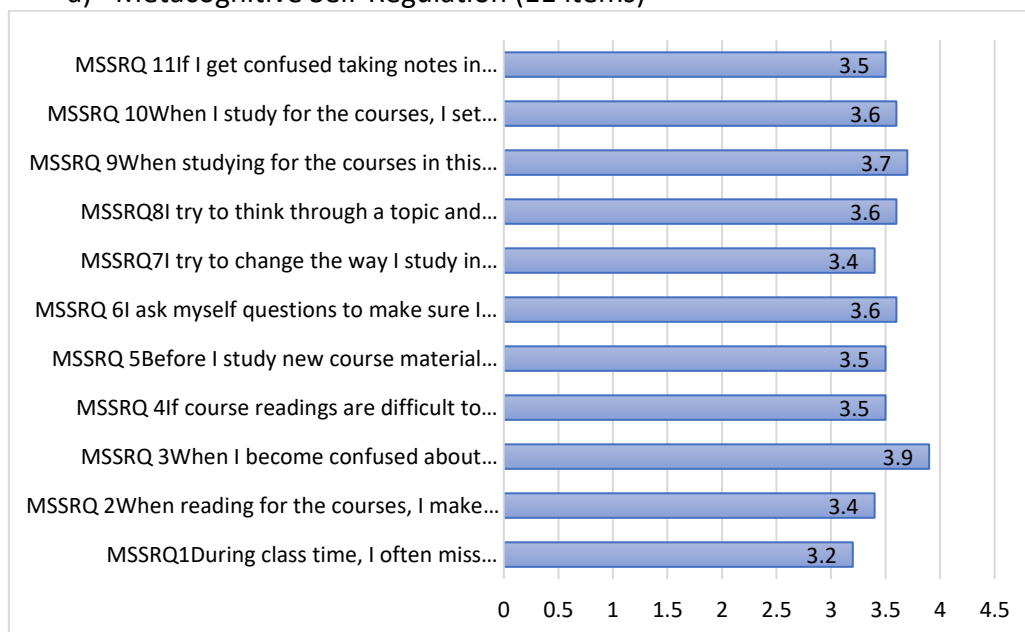


Figure 8- Mean for Metacognitive Self-Regulation

Figure 8 presents the means for metacognitive self-regulation influencing the learning of foreign languages. The mean scores ranged from 3.2 to 3.9, with eleven items. When learners are confused about something they are reading in class, they will try to figure it out, with the highest mean at 3.9. Furthermore, learners try to determine the concepts they need help understanding when they study for the courses ( $M=3.7$ ). The three items: MSSRQ6, MSSRQ8 and MSSRQ10, shared the same mean of 3.6. The lowest mean at 3.2 was recorded by the item MSSRQ1, which implies that learners miss important points because they do not focus enough during class time.

(b)Environment Management (5 items)

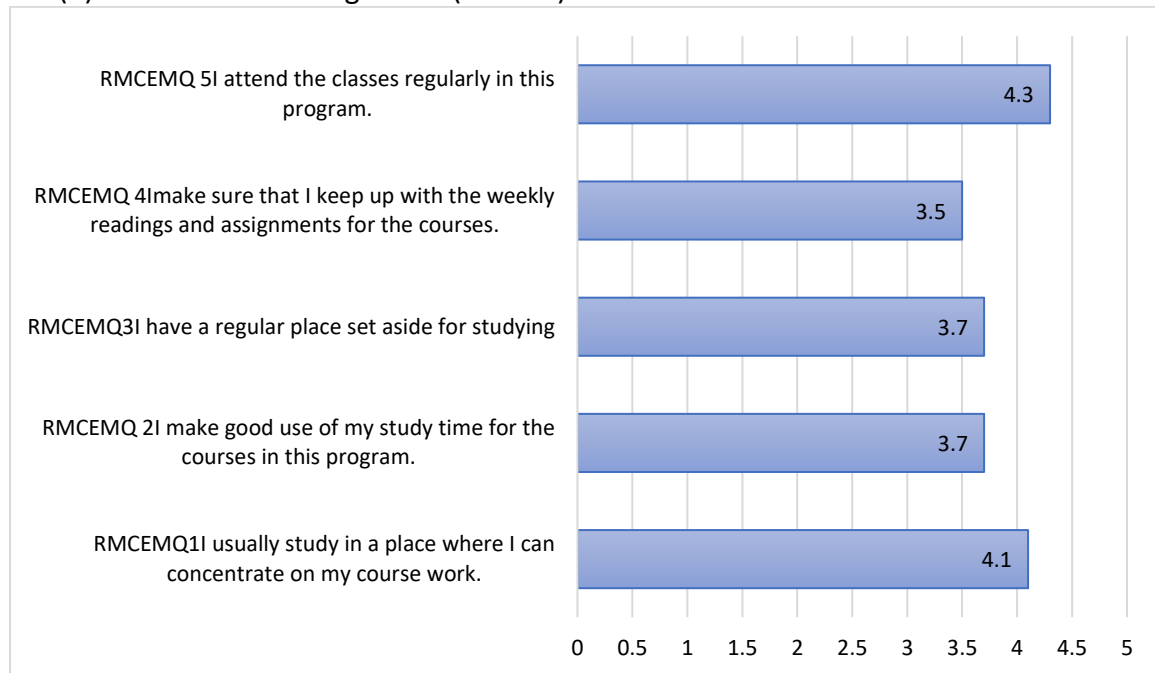


Figure 9- Mean for Environment Management

Figure 9 shows the means for environment management affecting the learning of foreign languages. The mean scores ranged from 3.5 to 4.3, with five items. Learners attend classes regularly, with the highest mean at 4.3. The two items: RMCEMQ2 and RMCEMQ3, shared the same mean of 3.7. The lowest mean at 3.5 was recorded by the item RMCEMQ4, which implies that learners ensure that they keep up with the weekly readings and assignments.

(c) Effort Management (4 items)

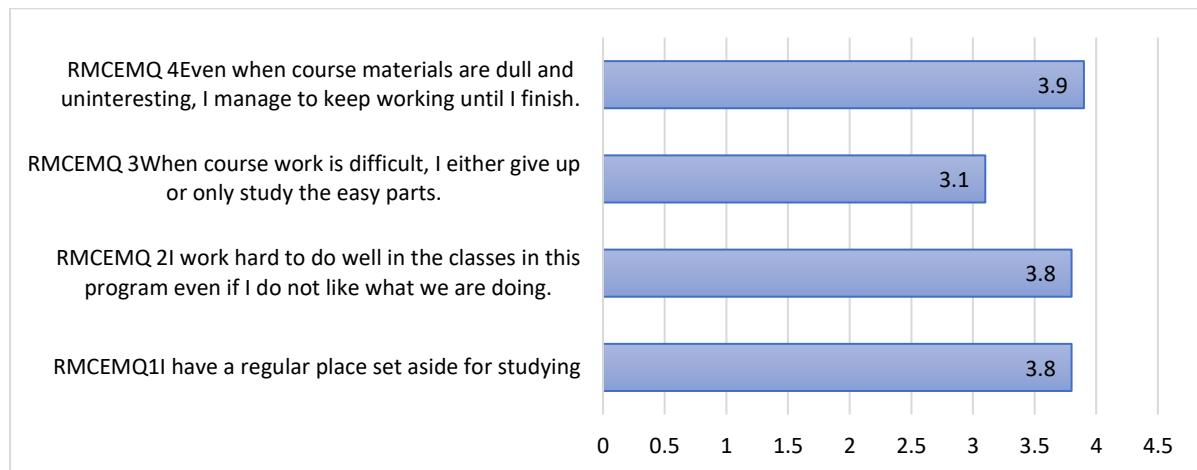


Figure 10- Mean for Effort Management

Figure 10 displays the means for effort management impacting the learning of foreign languages. The mean scores ranged from 3.1 to 3.9, with four items. Learners manage to keep working until they finish, even when course materials are uninteresting, with the highest mean at 3.9. The two items: RMCEMQ1 and RMCEMQ2, shared the same mean of 3.8. The lowest mean at 3.1 was recorded by the item RMCEMQ3, which implies that learners only study the easy parts or give up when the course work is difficult.

(d) Help-Seeking (2 items)

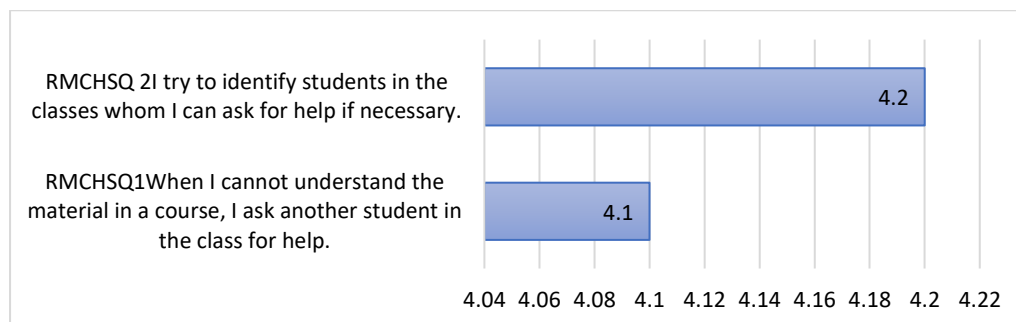


Figure 11- Mean for Help-Seeking

As shown in Figure 11, learners try to identify students in the classes whom they can ask for help, with the mean recorded at 4.2. Furthermore, learners ask another student in the class for help when they cannot understand the material ( $M=4.1$ ).

*Findings for Relationship between Direct and Indirect Strategies*

This section presents data to answer research question 3: Is there a relationship between direct and indirect strategies in learning foreign languages?

To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between direct and indirect strategies, data is analyzed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in table 3 below.

Table 3  
Correlation between Direct and Indirect Strategies

		TOTALMEAN DIRECT	TOTALMEANI NDIRECT
TOTALMEANDIRECT	Pearson Correlation	1	.779**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	132	132
TOTALMEANINDIRECT	Pearson Correlation	.779**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	132	132

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows there is an association between direct and indirect strategies. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between direct and indirect strategies ( $r=.779^{**}$ ) and ( $p=.000$ ). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between direct and indirect strategies.

## Conclusion

### Summary of Findings and Discussion

This research investigates the strategies used by learners during their language learning process. The analyzed data indicate that during the acquisition of the French language, the most used direct strategy is rehearsal ( $M = 3.8$ ), followed by organization ( $M = 3.6$ ). Meanwhile, the least used direct strategies are elaboration ( $M = 3.5$ ) and critical thinking ( $M = 3.5$ ). For indirect strategies, the highest mean is for help-seeking ( $M = 4.1$ ), and the lowest is for metacognitive self-regulation ( $M = 3.5$ ). This finding is different from the research by Budiarti (2022) which shows that the participants used metacognitive strategies more frequently than cognitive strategies. Thus, it confirmed several other studies that indicated that learners' choice of learning strategies could be influenced by a variety of individual factors such as their level of motivation, gender, attitude toward the target language, language proficiency, and learning objectives (Chanderan & Hashim, 2022; Macatuno-Nocom, 2022; Puteh et al., 2022; Platsidou & Sipitanou, 2014; Liyanage & Bartlett, 2011).

The result also reveals that there is a strong positive correlation between direct and indirect learning strategies during the French language learning process. It shows that indirect learning strategies aid and assist direct learning strategies during language acquisition and indirectly affect language learning.

### Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

This research examines the strategies used by language learners during their language-learning process. By knowing the language learning strategies used by students, instructors can improve their teaching approach to facilitate students' learning. For example, the study shows that help-seeking is the most used strategy among French learners. Instructors can use this finding to arrange more group activities, ensure the learning environment is more conducive to discussion, and also help facilitate social interaction between the students.



Furthermore, instructors can also prepare diverse activities to improve and increase students' motivation since previous research has shown that motivation influences and affects the utilization of learning strategies (Chang & Liu, 2013); Macatuni-Nocom, 20220; (Lin et al., 2022). If students have a high level of motivation, they will use a great number of direct and indirect strategies during their language learning, and these will boost and increase their performance as language learners.

However, one of the factors not taken into consideration in this research is whether gender plays a role in the choice of learning strategies. Hence, in the future, it is hoped that this research gap will be taken into account to allow instructors to adapt their teaching approaches accordingly, depending on the characteristics of their students and indirectly help the students learn more effectively and become successful language learners.

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