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Chen Jiao, Malini Ganapathy, Hongjing Chang

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## A Comparative Study of Language Learning Strategies Use Between High and Low EFL College Achievers

Chen Jiao

School of Languages, Literacies and Translation Universiti Sains Malaysia Penang, Malaysia

Email: [jjaochen@student.usm.my](mailto:jjaochen@student.usm.my)

Malini Ganapathy

School of Languages, Literacies and Translation Universiti Sains Malaysia Penang, Malaysia

Email: [malinik@usm.my](mailto:malinik@usm.my) (Corresponding Author)

Hongjing Chang

School of Languages, Literacies and Translation Universiti Sains Malaysia Penang, Malaysia

Email: [vickychang@student.usm.my](mailto:vickychang@student.usm.my)

### Abstract

Language learning strategy (LLS) not only benefits adults' cognitive and thinking development but also is important for developing students' independent learning skills and hence plays a significant role in college English learning. The study attempted to investigate the differences and similarities of LLS use and preference between high achievers and low EFL college achievers. The study employed a quantitative method in that 518 college participants are selected to engage in the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire. The statistic analysis was employed to the six dominions: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. The results indicated that the preference of high and low EFL college achievers using LLS is basically similar. The level of high achievers using LLS was higher than that of low EFL college achievers. The study revealed the respective characteristics of the research population and made a useful attempt in the field of research on LLS of high achievers and low EFL college achievers. Further research may involve hidden influence factors of LLS use between the high and low achievers.

**Keywords:** Language Learning Strategy, High Achievers, Low Achievers

### Introduction

English is an essential language for communication in the modern world. As a result, effective communication ability in English is becoming increasingly crucial in various aspects of life. In the light of Oxford (1990), language learning strategies (LLS) are approaches that enable language learning easier, faster, more pleasurable, more self-directed, more efficient, and more transferable to new conditions. She emphasized that LLSs are significant for language

learning because they are instruments for positive and autonomous participation. Even some researchers found that there is an obvious positive correlation between LLS and English proficiency, which means that learning LLS can be effective for EFL learners' language learning (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Shang, 2021). However, many college English low achievers find it challenging to learn and improve their English proficiency.

However, it can be found that research on the LLS of below-average students has been relegated, either because of the limited research conditions or the lack of attention paid to them, and that few comparative research has been carried out on the use of LLS among high and low college achievers. This study is based on the analysis of questionnaire data from a technical and vocational college. The study built similarities and differences between the use of high and low EFL achievers English learning strategies among college students, and to find out the essential learning and training patterns behind them, to make a useful exploration of the study of LLS. In addition, exploring efficient English learning strategies, Techniques, and methods plays a significant role in pedagogical studies for a lot of English teaching practitioners and learners (Ganapathy et al., 2021). Ehrman et al (2003) also state that the application of LLSs is correlated to students' individual varieties and learning conditions (Ehrman et al., 2003). Therefore, learners need to adopt effective strategies to develop their English studying process. The study aims to compare the LLS use between high and low college achievers.

## Literature Review

### Categorization of LLS

To adapt a suitable category of LLS for the research, it is required to summarize and present the current categories. Specifically, according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), strategies can be metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies; while Oxford (1990) categorized LLS into six main types: memory, cognitive, metacognitive, social, compensation, and affective strategies; Cohen and Wen (2012) divided LLS into two kinds: LLS and Language using strategies, Cheng and Zhen (2002) further developed metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social strategy and affective strategies, which have similarity to (O'Malley and Chamot's, 1990). Cognitive strategies are activities that contain direct learning, such as memorization and summarization. Metacognitive strategies refer to the ways used to plan, control and evaluate studying processes. Social/affective strategies, on the other side, involve the employ social and mental methods to improve language learning. Because different results of the LLS categories reflect different views and approaches, as it may provide some references for the research. LLS are techniques that students utilize to prompt and enhance their English language learning. A large number of studies have shown that English LLS differs among students based on various factors such as motivation, personality, learning style, and culture. Research also suggests that high English achievers prefer to use a more comprehensive range of learning strategies contrasted to below-average learners (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

In addition, Amerstorfer (2018) states in a new view that Oxford's (1990) SILL/SLL is not yet obsolete, but may require to fit into a particular new context, an innovate mode, other research approaches, as well as incorporating strategies for learning language via technology. Additionally, Lai Yanqing (2018) conducts a study on correlations among every strategy, she stresses that 13 strategies are obviously positively correlated, and among them, 12 strategies are striking at the  $p < .01$ . The most prominent item is the correlation between metacognitive

and affective strategies. However, there is also a pair of correlations that is not very significant, namely, the correlations between communicative strategies and compensatory strategies. Consequently, this study adapts Oxford's (1990) categorization of LLS to its fundamental research category because of the above statement.

### Empirical Studies of LLS

For the last 20 years, 68 empirical research papers were published by Chinese researchers about LLS in some important journals at home and abroad, which are sorted out in the light of the research subjects and research perspectives, as listed in Table 1. Based on the research perspectives, 19 papers are geared toward the macro perspective, and 49 papers toward the micro perspective. Namely, the macro perspective means that the research scope is the overall concept and correlation of LLS, while the micro perspective is specific to learning certain knowledge or skill of different strategies, such as listening, vocabulary, and reading strategies, etc (Wen & Wang, 2004).

Table 1  
*Categories of Empirical Studies on LLS*

Research perspective	Research Scope	Research Subjects					Number of papers
		English Major learners	Non-English majors learners	Vocational College Learners	Elementary School Learners	Below-Average Learners	
Macro perspective	Perception & Preference of LLS:	1	2	0	4	0	7
	Correlation Between Variables	2	3	1	5	1	12
Micro perspective	Listening With LLS	3	3	1	5	1	13
	Speaking With LLS	2	1	0	1	0	4
	Reading With LLS	2	3	1	5	1	12
	Writing With LLS	1	2	0	3	0	6
	Vocabulary With LLS	3	4	1	5	1	14
Total		14	18	4	28	4	68

Intuitively, it can be reasonable that the research of LLS would diversify from different scopes and perspectives. Considering the research participants of LLS: as listed in Table 1, numerous previous researchers conducted their studies among elementary school EFL students on the whole class (Kazi et al., 2022), whereas, below-average EFL learners are not paid attention to (Griffiths, 2018; Wu & Zheng, 2021). At present, the existence of numerous EFL students with low achievement in colleges is an incontestable fact. (Murphy, 2017; Rose & Washbrook, 2019). English has become a big stumbling block for some below-average students, which made them feel to be defeated and lose confidence in English study. Specifically, Griffiths (2018), the LLS expert explored the relationship between proficiency of LLS and learners' better performance and development, as the experiment approach is employed among several elementary students. Besides, according to Table 1, most empirical studies investigated the effect between the specific English skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing) and LLS exposure by students in the classroom.

Subsequently, it is intuitively to discover from previous studies, there is an obvious population gap, namely, few empirical studies that investigate the effect of LLS exposure on low EFL achievers. Additionally, limited studies on the utilization of LLS between high and low EFL achievers. However, there is little comparative research on the use of LLS among high and low EFL achievers. This study is particularly concerned with the present authentic educational background of China due to the increasing international exchange for college learners all over the world, as below-average EFL learners also have the opportunity. Therefore, based on the statistics and analysis of the questionnaire data, this study takes a college with national characteristics as the research site and aims to comprehensively examine the similarities and differences between the use of LLS of good and below-average college students, and the perspective the underlying essential laws, to make a beneficial exploration of English learning strategy research. Finally, bearing in mind the above-mentioned gaps, the fundamental aim of the study is to apply the theories of LLS (Oxford, 1990 & 2003; O'Malley, 1990) to compare the differences and similarities of LLS use between high and low EFL college achievers.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a comparative research design to examine the differences in the English learning strategies used by high and low EFL college achievers. The study involved 120 participants selected through random sampling from two colleges. The participants completed the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), a standardized questionnaire that assesses LLS. The SILL measures six sub-strategies of LLS: memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensation, social and affective strategies. Furthermore, the study applied a depth interview of 20 participants according to the results of the questionnaire to testify and provide supplementary evidence for the quantitative findings.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: What are the current situation and preferences of the use of LLS by high and low EFL college achievers?

RQ2: What are the differences and similarities in the use of LLS between high and low EFL college achievers?

### **Research Participants**

Notably, a combination of stratified and cluster sampling methods was used in the current research. A total of 518 students in 14 classes were randomly selected from the freshman students who took college English courses in the first semester of the case college. Significantly, the sample size was determined by published tables, the population size of the case college is about 10000, so when the sample size is 370, the confidence level is 95%,  $t=1.96$ ; when the sample size is 625, the confidence level is 99%,  $t=2.58$  (Singh & Masuku, 2014; Adam, 2020) So the population size of the study has good Representation. Then 150 good EFL students and 161 below-average EFL college students were selected, froming a total of 311 students. The participants both good and low achievers generally have been exposed to English for nearly 12 years. The reason for selecting freshman as participants is that they have just entered college and have not forgotten the English language they learned in high school. Moreover, their English scores in the National College Entrance Examination and the English test paper are set by the national famous experts, which has very good reliability and validity and can represent their true English level. According to their scores, students with 70 points or below are classified as students with learning difficulties, and students with 90 points or

above are classified as learners with learning disabilities. Because the case college is a low-level vocational college, as students generally have low scores and achievement. Therefore, the number of students with learning difficulties is far more than that of students with good learning performance.

### **Research Instrument**

The research instrument is the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) designed by Rebecca Oxford (1990) who is a famous applied linguist in America, with a total of 50 items. It has a certain authority and tool value (Ellis, 1994). The questionnaire requires subjects to answer in the form of multiple-choice questions. Students should fill in the questionnaire truthfully according to their use of English learning strategies, and fill in 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 from the corresponding options at the end of each question, which is the scoring method of Likert's five-level scale. The corresponding meanings of these numbers are: completely nonconforming, basically nonconforming, sometimes conforming, basically conforming, and completely conforming. After the questionnaire was collected, the research team tested the internal consistency of the questionnaire to check its reliability. The results showed that when all 50 test items entered the statistical test, the Cronbach's Alpha value of the questionnaire was 0.940. This shows that the questionnaire has good internal consistency and high reliability, which can ensure the scientific and credibility of this study.

As a measuring instrument, the structural reliability and validity of the SILL scale have been valued by scholars at home and abroad, and many scholars have also conducted factor analysis on it (Xiao, 2021; Carmen, 2018). Another study shows that Oxford's SILL scale is consistent with the structure of college students' language learning strategies (Yao et al., 2021).

Table 2

*Significance Tests for Differences of LLS Use Between High and Low Achievers*

Items of LLS	High achievers		Low achievers		Mann-Whitney	Wilcoxon	Z	Sig. Bilateral
	Means	SD	Means	SD	U	W		<i>p</i>
Memory Strategy	3.20	.43182	2.51	.43885	3382.000	16262.000	-11.403	.000
Cognitive strategy	3.29	.43830	2.51	.37188	2217.000	15097.000	-12.799	.000
Meta-cognitive strategy	3.66	.50052	2.77	.54453	2896.000	15776.000	-12.002	.000
Compensation strategy	3.45	.60279	2.50	.45273	2856.000	15736.000	-12.032	.000
Affective strategy	3.20	.55228	2.43	.45951	3726.500	16606.500	-11.000	.000
Social strategy	3.52	.57613	2.76	.48909	4196.500	17076.500	-10.428	.000
Average Means	3.37	.36524	2.56	.32036	1409.000	14289.000	-13.767	.000

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The study administers a SILL survey to explore the difference in LLS use in college in China. The overall instructions were offered to an instructor at the college. The questionnaires were distributed during regular class time by the instructor after several concise introductions and explanations about the purpose and application of the study. The questionnaires were collected after the participants finish New College English class immediately. All the participants noticed that they did not to be afraid and there were no correct or wrong responses to the questions. They were also informed that their factual answers on the questionnaires would influence their English scores. Additionally, the whole procedure of the data analysis is completely confidential. After finishing the SILL, the English instructor collected all the questionnaires and gave them to the researchers to analyze data.

The questionnaire was administered to participants of the English course after the normal teaching of each class, spending about 15 to 20 minutes out of their time conducting it. The questionnaire SILL was distributed to a total of 518 learners and 518 were returned, with a 100% return rate. Additionally, the valid questionnaires are 501 (questionnaires with the same, missing, or multiple choices are regarded invalid, the effective rate was 95%). The questionnaires were collected by the instructor. After the questionnaires were collected, the researchers applied descriptive statistics via SPSS 26.0. The statistical methods of descriptive statistical analysis and independent sample *t*-test were utilized to quantify the 370 valid questionnaires involved in the research. The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics in SPSS 26.0.

**Results**

The results indicated that high EFL college achievers used a more comprehensive range of learning strategies than below-average students. Specifically, good learners reported utilizing more metacognitive, memory, and cognitive strategies than below-average students.

However, both groups reported using similar levels of compensation, social, and affective strategies.

Table 3  
*English Language Experience Information of Participants*

Category	Description	High EFL achievers		Low EFL achievers	
		n	%	n	%
Gender	Female	12	8.0	1	0.6
	Male	138	92.0	149	99.4
Years of English Study	8-9	2	1.3	19	12.7
	10-11	140	93.3	131	87.3
	12-13	8	5.3	0	0.0
Experiences Taking English Proficiency Test (CET-4)	Yes	138	92.0	41	27.3
	No	12	8.0	109	72.7
Experiences of LLS Learning	Yes	135	90.0	21	14.0
	No	15	10.0	129	86.0

The study adopted a random sampling method, from which, 150 high EFL achievers and low achievers were selected respectively in light of the results of the questionnaire. Considering the results of Table 3, good female EFL students (8.0%) are better in English than below-average students (0.6%). In terms of past year's English learning studies, 1.3% of the good EFL students reported having studied English for 8-9 years, while below-average students (12.7%); for 12-13 years, good EFL students account for 5.3%, while below-average students (0.0%), which indicates that below-average students consumed less time on English. In light of experiences of taking English proficiency test (College English Test-4), good EFL students (92.0%) were reported to have considerable more experience than below-average students (27.3%). As for experiences of LLS learning, good EFL students (90%) were distinctively reported to have more experiences of LLS learning than below-average students (14.0%).

In the study, quantitative statistics were conducted on the use of LLS by good and below-average EFL students respectively. Subsequently, the differences in their overall level of strategy use and their differences in six strategy dimensions, including memory, cognition, compensation, metacognition, emotion and social strategies, with 50 items, were compared, and significance tests were done for their differences. The results are displayed in Table 4:



Table 4

Statistical Analysis on the Use of LLS Between Two Groups.

Note: S1 sands for the first sub-item of strategy; SD=Standard Deviation; S-A=Memory

Strategies	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10	S11	S12
High achievers	3.17	2.932.36	3.192.50	3.26	3.48	2.91	2.46	2.89	3.04	3.81	2.80	3.15
Low achievers	2.28	0.57	0.69	2.59	2.72	2.41	2.26	2.39	2.47	3.19	2.34	2.40
High-Low	0.89	0.40	0.49	0.67	0.76	0.50	0.20	0.50	0.57	0.62	0.46	0.75
SD	0.63			0.47	0.54	0.35	0.14	0.35	0.40	0.44	0.33	0.53

Strategies	S13	S14	S15	S16	S17	S18	S19	S20	S21	S22	S23	S24
High achievers	3.15	2.83	3.43	2.74	2.89	3.43	3.35	3.35	3.35	3.41	2.96	3.57
Low achievers	2.63	2.41	2.93	2.27	2.30	2.51	2.58	2.70	2.70	2.53	2.51	2.72
High-Low	0.52	0.42	0.50	0.47	0.59	0.92	0.77	0.65	0.65	0.88	0.45	0.85
SD	0.37	0.30	0.35	0.33	0.42	0.65	0.54	0.46	0.46	0.62	0.32	0.60

Strategies	S25	S26	S27	S28	S29	S30	S31	S32	S33	S34	S35	S36
High achievers	3.04	3.13	3.48	3.19	3.61	3.09	3.31	3.30	3.48	2.93	2.91	3.04
Low achievers	2.58	2.73	2.88	2.49	2.88	2.58	2.69	2.72	2.91	2.55	2.50	2.56
High-Low	0.46	0.40	0.60	0.70	0.73	0.51	0.62	0.58	0.57	0.38	0.41	0.48
SD	0.33	0.28	0.42	0.50	0.52	0.36	0.44	0.41	0.40	0.27	0.29	0.34

Strategies	S37	S38	S39	S40	S41	S42	S43	S44	S45	S46	S47	S48
High achievers	3.09	3.22	3.26	3.22	3.31	3.11	2.91	3.30	3.39	3.33	3.09	3.43
Low achievers	2.67	2.57	2.75	2.60	2.78	2.65	2.54	2.72	2.86	2.78	2.63	2.95
High-Low	0.42	0.65	0.51	0.62	0.53	0.46	0.37	0.58	0.53	0.55	0.46	0.48
SD	0.30	0.46	0.36	0.44	0.37	0.33	0.26	0.41	0.37	0.39	0.33	0.34

Strategies	S49	S50	S-A	S-B	S-C	S-D	S-E	S-F	Total Strategy
High achievers	3.19	3.17	3.04	3.19	3.34	3.15	3.19	3.27	3.19
Low achievers	2.60	2.61	2.44	2.57	2.71	2.64	2.67	2.74	2.63
High-Low	0.59	0.56	0.60	0.62	0.63	0.51	0.52	0.53	0.56
SD	0.42	0.40	0.42	0.44	0.45	0.36	0.37	0.37	0.40

strategy; S-B=Cognitive strategy; S-C=Compensation strategy; S-D=Metacognitive strategy; S-E=Affective strategy; S-F=Social strategy

(1) Overall Strategy Use

The level of use of micro-strategies by good college students was significantly higher than that of below-average EFL college students. After a preliminary examination of the levels of use of 50 specific strategies by high and low EFL college achievers, it was found that high EFL achievers used each strategy at a much higher level than below-average college students, as the differences range from 0.40 to 0.92. High EFL achievers used all 50 strategies at a higher level than low achievers, and the results of the significance test for differences showed that a total of 50 items between the two were statistically significant, accounting for 100% of all items tested, which indicates that there is a substantial difference in the level of use of the 50 strategies between the two groups. This indicates that there is a substantial difference in the level of use of these 50 strategies.

The above result displays that the below-average students paid less attention to methods and strategies, such as memorizing words by rote, which is time-consuming and laborious; going against the law of language learning, ignoring listening and speaking training, forming dumb English, resulting in half the effort in English learning; higher forgetting rate, resulting in a certain point of knowledge once the teacher speaks students will know, but students independently apply the phenomenon of doing it wrong frequently; and so on (Chakrabarty,

& Saha, 2014). Considering instructors' teaching, numerous teachers used to apply the Grammar Translation method and Cramming approach in their English classes, which ignored LLS teaching and training.

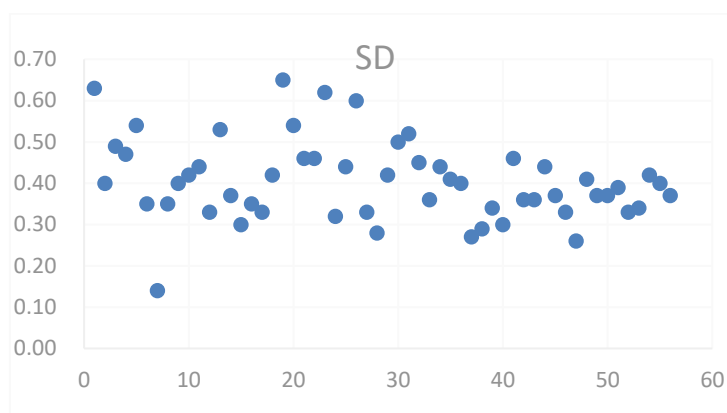


Figure 1: *SD (Standard Deviation) of sub-strategies*

The SD is a measure of the dispersion of the mean of a series of data. A large SD means that the values are more different from their mean; a small SD means that the values are closer to the mean. The standard deviation results of sub-strategies are listed in Table 5, as the SD value fluctuates around 0.4, which ranges from 0.2 to 0.7.

However, as listed in Figure 1, the SD accurately indicates that the dataset shows more variability and differences, which means there are big gaps and differences between high and low EFL achievers.

## (2) Preferences for Strategy Use

As listed in Figure 2, it shows a comparative result of LLS use of the questionnaire. As it can be discovered, the Means values in both groups fluctuated up and down by almost the same amount and displayed a parallel pattern; that is, the LLS that high achievers usually utilize are also often utilized by low achievers, and the LLS that high achievers use at a high-frequency rate, low achievers use them at a high-frequency rate too. Additionally, the LLS use preferences between high and low EFL college achievers are basically similar. The above table shows that the preferences of LLS used by high college achievers are, in descending order (from highest to lowest), compensatory strategies ( $M=3.34$ ) > social strategies ( $M=3.27$ ) > cognitive strategies ( $M=3.19$ ) = affective strategies ( $M=3.19$ ) > meta-cognitive strategies ( $M=3.15$ ) > memory strategies ( $M=3.04$ ), while those used by low EFL college achievers are social strategies ( $M=2.74$ ) > compensatory strategies ( $M=2.71$ ) > affective strategies ( $M=2.67$ ) > meta-cognitive strategies ( $M=2.64$ ) > cognitive strategies ( $M=2.57$ ) > memory strategies ( $M=2.44$ ). In general, high and low EFL achievers tended to be better at compensatory strategies and social strategies, while memory strategies were the least used of the two groups.

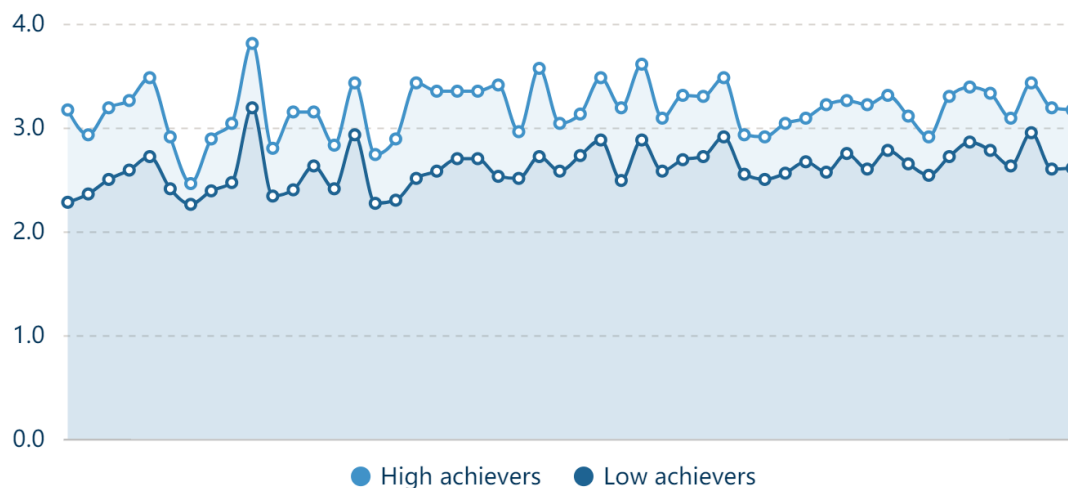


Figure 2: *High and Low Achievers Mean Scores Comparison. Strategies 1-50*

To be specific, “S5”, “S15”, and “S24” are the most used strategies by high achievers, the Means are  $M=3.48$ ,  $M=3.48$ ,  $M=3.57$  respectively, (i.e. using similar pronunciations to remember words; watching English TV or movies; guessing the meaning of unfamiliar English words). Students’ learning strategies mainly come from teachers’ teaching strategies. Hence, the formation of learning strategies mainly comes from classroom teaching, and at present the teachers of foreign language teaching methods in China put a lot of energy into the input of declarative knowledge, neglecting the cultivation of students’ learning strategies, so the current situation of colleges in China is not conducive to the formation of good learning strategies for students (Kyungsim & Alexandra, 2007). According to Table 4, students in both groups are weak at memory strategies, which are ( $M=3.04$ ) and ( $M=2.44$ ), so it needs to be strengthened by instructors.

### (3) Level of Strategy Use

Regarding Oxford’s suggested methodology, the range of the mean value of every strategy reflects the frequency of the strategy used by participants. The results are as listed in Table 4: a mean value from 4.5 to 5.0 suggests “always use” the strategy; from 3.5 to 4.4 indicates “usually use” the strategy; from 2.5 to 3.4 indicates “average use” the learning strategy; from 1.5 to 2.4 indicates “not usually use” learning strategies; and from 1.0 to 1.4 indicate “seldom used” learning strategies. Hence, from the results in the above table, it can be found that although the level of strategy use of the good students was remarkably higher than that of the below-average students, the level of strategy use of both groups was not high and they both fell within the framework of “S7” (High achievers:  $M=2.46$ , Low achievers:  $M=2.26$ ).

To be specific, regarding the level of use of the six strategies: memory, cognition, compensation, metacognition, affection, and social strategy between high achievers and low EFL achievers, the level of use of all 50 sub-strategies was higher than that of the Below-average EFL college students, with a difference of 0.60, 0.62, 0.63, 0.51, 0.52 and 0.53 respectively, and the differences were statistically significant for all six strategies. These differences between the two groups displayed a statistically remarkable level of implication for all six strategies.

## Discussion

Considering the results, high and low EFL college achievers applied various language learning strategies to master English more efficiently, as high achievers utilized more strategies, comparatively than that of the low achievers. The study findings support previous research that suggests that high English learners use more learning strategies compared to low EFL learners (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2007). However, both groups used similar levels of social and affective strategies, indicating that these strategies may not be significant factors in determining English proficiency. The findings also indicate that metacognitive strategies are essential for English language learning success. Therefore, it is suggested that EFL learners are taught and encouraged to use a range of learning strategies to enhance their English learning process. High EFL achievers use more learning strategies and apply various LLS to master English more effectively, compared to low achievers, with high achievers applying more, averagely, than the below-average students. Besides, strong strategy awareness and use develops some aids for English learning proficiency that high achievers expose advanced abilities while studying a new language as previous studies have stressed (Sánchez, 2019).

Firstly, high achievers and low achievers have essentially the same preference for the use of strategies. Both groups used the compensatory strategies (High achievers,  $M=3.34$ ; Low achievers,  $M=2.71$ ) and social strategies (High achievers,  $M=3.27$ ; Low achievers,  $M=2.74$ ) better, mainly because the sub-items that make up the compensatory strategies and social strategies catered well to the needs of the college entrance examinations and college exams (Sánchez, 2019). As a result, the students used some of these strategies consciously or unconsciously in their regular English learning. The results of the survey and interviews also display that memory strategy was the least used of the two groups. This is mainly due to instructors' low awareness of strategies and the lack of effective strategy training for students. Most of the students interviewed said "The instructor always makes us memorize the words, teaches us via the grammar-translation method in English class, and then tests the words and punishes us by writing the words ten times if they failed to write them (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2007). It is clear that teachers have an inescapable responsibility for the low level of students' use of memory strategies.

Secondly, metacognitive strategies (High achievers,  $M=3.19$ ; Low achievers,  $M=2.64$ ), cognitive strategies (High achievers,  $M=3.19$ ; Low achievers,  $M=2.57$ ), and affective strategies (High achievers,  $M=3.15$ ; Low achievers,  $M=2.67$ ) listed as the second preferred strategies in both groups, as the  $M$  value of high achievers ranges from 3.15 to 3.19, while low achievers range from 2.54 to 2.67 (see Figure 2 and Table 4). Oxford (1990) stressed that cognitive strategies are significantly the most welcome and remarkable strategies for EFL students in mastering a foreign language is due to these strategies involve and afford straight and prompt presentation or use of input. High achievers probably easily utilize higher-level cognitive strategies like inducting, deducting, and encoding, possibly because of their developed English proficiency. They also chose strategies to engage in their English learning. However, low achievers were much less probably to look for chances to chat with English native speakers, read English materials, or discover multiple methods to enhance their English proficiency. This indicates that they have more exposure to classroom-based learning experiences which have made them practice less in oral English and also are in agreement with their records of anxiety associated with outputting (e.g. speaking or writing) their English out to others (Qi & Chen, 2014).

Finally, memory strategies were the last used strategies by both high achievers and low achievers. That indicates that the two groups were not good at using memory strategies. Conversely, it seems to contradict the common hypothesis that Chinese students prefer conventional memory strategies such as dictation, rote learning, previous studies have also noted such conflicting findings (Al-Otaibi, 2004). This is mainly due to memory strategies being at the last list among overall in terms of favored strategies may have been that for the age of participants in this research, some of the memory strategies of Oxford's (1990) language learning strategy may not be regarded suitable by college learners (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). For instance, acting out new English texts and expressions or using some flashcards to understand the meaning of new words may be effective strategies preferred by low achievers. Thought-provokingly, the high EFL achievers were significantly more liable to do some revision of their English lessons than the low EFL achievers. Comparatively, considering the high EFL achievers, they preferred to approve visual and space strategies such as connecting new English words to some images or pictures, making mental maps of a situation, as the word could be utilized, remembering the location of new words, and expressions on English learning materials, on boards, or on road signs to facilitate them memorize new expressions. They tried to connect their previous knowledge to more positive meta-cognitive engagement.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the study highlights three major research findings from the data. Firstly, the college high achievers described remarkably a higher level of LLS use in their English learning than the low achieving group. Specifically, both groups used the compensatory strategies (High achievers,  $M=3.34$ ; Low achievers,  $M=2.71$ ) and social strategies (High achievers,  $M=3.27$ ; Low achievers,  $M=2.74$ ) better (i.e. guessing the meaning of unfamiliar English words; using words or phrases that means the same thing). Future studies may deeply investigate the factors that may generate some differences and similarities, and explore feasible instructional methods to decrease the gaps. Secondly, the strategic use of different groups could significantly change learners' motivation in various means. After a preliminary examination of the levels of use of 50 specific strategies by good and below-average EFL college students, it was found that good college students used each strategy at a much higher level than below-average college students, as the differences (Means value) ranges from 0.40 to 0.92. High EFL achievers used all 50 strategies at a higher level than low achievers, and the results of the significance test for differences showed that a total of 50 items between the two groups were statistically significant, accounting for 100% of all items tested.

In addition, the present research has developed empirical evidence on the differences and similarities of LLS use and preferences between high and low college EFL achievers. High achievers and low achievers utilized various items of LLS when studying the English language and displayed resemblances and differences in strategy use. Despite the background for regular English education seems to be equally beneficial according to classroom instructors' qualifications, teaching materials and resources in China, where students' educational background is not as much of a significant issue, high EFL achievers displayed frequent use of LLS than did by low achievers. This proved that high EFL achievers have the potential ability to master a foreign language which was emphasized by previous studies. (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2007; Qi & Chen, 2014) the findings of the study indicate that high EFL achievers use a more comprehensive range of LLS than below-average students. The results highlight the

significance of metacognitive, memory, and cognitive strategies in enhancing English language performance. Therefore, educators should provide instruction and support for learners to adopt and develop a range of learning strategies. Further research is needed to examine the factors that influence the choice and effectiveness of specific learning strategies among college learners.

The results of the study provide essential implications for EFL practitioners, researchers, and learners. It is significant for English instructors to realize and comprehend the differences and similarities in LLS use and preference between high and low achievers. Firstly, instructors should continually explore their students' LLS use level and preference via a quantitative approach (i.e. questionnaire survey) and qualitative approach (i.e. depth interview based on grounded theory). Secondly, because high EFL achievers used each strategy at a much higher level than low achievers, as the differences range from 0.40 to 0.92. High EFL achievers used all 50 sub-strategies at a higher level than low achievers, and the results of the significance test for differences showed that a total of 50 items between the two were statistically significant.

Hence, English instructors need to develop strategy-based and interesting courses model and lessons to facilitate learners' English learning. Particularly, English instructors should consider getting low EFL achievers interested in English by teaching them less challenging tasks or giving them more aids in their learning process. Second, to improve low achievers' strategy level, strategy use frequency, and motivation, teachers should train low achievers to use more strategies during mastering English. To improve high achievers' motivation, instructors need to promote learners to use more compensatory strategies ( $M=3.34$ ) and social strategies ( $M=3.27$ ) in English learning. Finally, the study reveals, at least to a certain extent, the respective characteristics of this part of the study population, and makes a useful attempt in the field of research on language learning strategies of high achievers and low EFL college achievers, which can provide useful implication for future research on language learning strategies of high and low achievers, especially for low achievers who are disadvantaged groups in English course.

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