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Palestinian Language Learners' Learning Strategies: A Case Study of Medical Students

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The topic of learning strategies has often been researched in the contexts of second language acquisition and language pedagogy. New developments in these fields and change in the characteristics and needs of new learner populations in different contexts call for additional research in this area which is characterized by change and variability. The objective of this study is to throw more light on the issue of strategy use in specific contexts, namely, the Palestinian one. It hence looks at the strategy preference and use by a group of 73 freshman medical students (how sample was selected). The researchers employed Oxford's Strategy Inventory to Language Learners (SILL) as an instrument to survey the frequency of use of different strategy categories and the specific strategy types that belong to them. SPSS program was used to analyse the data. Results show that compensation strategies are the most frequently used by Palestinian medical students, followed by the metacognitive, cognitive, memory, social and affective respectively. These results might provide insight into "good learner strategies" as these medical students are usually considered high achievers since they have obtained the highest scores in the Palestinian high school exit exam (Tawjihi). Results of this study clearly imply that learners in specific contexts may show different trends, hence, more research in specific contexts around the world is called for. Also, learners in such specific contexts need special guidance in using the strategies that they do not show high competence in.

Keywords: language learning strategies, strategic competence, medical students, EFL in the Palestinian context, college students

INTRODUCTION

Learning strategies have been frequently investigated in the fields of second language acquisition and pedagogy. Interest in this topic has stemmed from the second language acquisition researchers' focus on the language learners' inner mechanisms as well as from the educators' move towards learner-centred learning. The assumption was that if we could understand what successful language learners do in contrast to unsuccessful

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learners then such information could be utilized to improve our teaching practices. This has lead early research to try to establish the link between strategy use and success in language acquisition (Rubin, 1975).

It has been noticed all along that in addition to language ability, learners need to have additional skills such as planning, asking questions, establishing connections, differentiating between main ideas and supporting details, thinking about own progress and monitoring it, etc. Such processes are examples of the components of the strategic competence that aid the learner in acquiring language or using it. Researchers found that there is a close connection between frequent strategy use and progress in language learning (Griffiths, 2003; Oxford, 1990). They further found that there is a relationship between a learners' level of success in language learning and the types of strategies used as well as frequency of their use (Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary& Robbins, 1999; Rubin, 1987). Although there are differences between strategies used by high and low achievers, researchers also found that both groups share common strategies that they usually bring to the learning situation from previous learning contexts and experiences.

This study attempts to contribute to the area of strategy research by investigating strategy use among Palestinian students. It is worth mentioning that these students currently start learning English from the first grade for an average of four hours a week. English competence is considered to be key to academic and professional success as most university programs use it as a language of instruction and it is a requirement for many governmental and nongovernmental jobs.

The goal of this study is to investigate the type and frequency of strategies used by Palestinian college level high achievers, in addition to analysing the sub-strategies used by these learners. Oxford SILL inventory (1990) was used to achieve this goal. Oxford's strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) classifies direct and indirect learning strategies on the basis of how much each is used in language learning. Direct strategies consist of memory strategies which are generally used in remembering and recalling vocabulary, cognitive strategies used for understanding and producing text, and compensation strategies used for making up for the gap in knowledge. Indirect strategies on the other hand include metacognitive strategies which help in manipulating learning processes, affective strategies which help in managing the emotional state, and social strategies which facilitate learning in a group. As for the reliability of Oxford SILL as reflected in the internal consistency measured by Cronbach's alpha, it has been showed to exceed the acceptable value of .60 or .70 in the majority of studies (Hair et al., 1998; Landau & Everitt, 2004).

The group of learners chosen in this study are medical freshman students who are doing a language requirement course. They were considered high achievers by the researchers because they scored high grades in the High School Exit Exam (Tawjihi) .This exam is a national level test that secondary school students sit for in their final year of study. It contains several streams such as the scientific, literary, commercial, agricultural, etc. Participants in this study are graduates of the scientific stream with high grades and averages.

It is of high significance to investigate the topic of learning strategies in Palestine due to the lack of research about the issue in the Palestinian context despite its rising importance as a result of the increasing focus on leaner autonomy in education. Learner autonomy has become more important recently especially in scientific colleges and fields where English is predominantly the language of instruction and students have to do a lot of self study assignments on their own. Despite the big amount of research available on learner strategies, there is noticeable lack of studies on certain contexts such as the Palestinian one. Moreover, most of the previous research on strategies tackles the students' use of general strategy categories and does not delve into the more specific sub categories. This general focus does not help in developing a clear perspective on specific points of weakness and strength that would aid instruction.

Objectives of the Study

Under the general goal of exploring the type and frequency of strategies used by Palestinian high achievers, this study aims at specifying the following:

1. The Strategy categories most and least frequently used by Palestinian high achievers, i.e., medical students.
2. The Specific strategies under each category most and least selected by medical students.

Research Questions

This study aims at providing answers for the following questions:

1. What are the categories of strategies most frequently used by Palestinian high achievers, in this case, medical students?
2. What are the categories of strategies least frequently used by Palestinian medical students?
3. What are the specific strategies under each category most frequently selected by medical students?
4. What are the specific strategies under each category least frequently selected by medical students?

Review of Literature

The learners' inner mechanisms have been the subject of research for psychologists since the middle of the 20thcentury (Piaget, 1954; Vygotsky, 1978), yet research in the field of language learning strategies (LLS) goes back to the 1970s when researchers in second language acquisition (SLA) investigated the strategies used by "good language learners". The assumption was that if we could understand what successful language learners do in contrast to unsuccessful learners then such information could be utilized to improve our teaching practices. This has lead early research to try to establish the link between strategy use and success in language acquisition (Rubin, 1975).

A popular definition of language learning strategies (LLS) was proposed by Oxford (1990) who stated that strategies are "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more

transferable to new situations" (p.8). Several classifications of LLS were suggested by different researchers. O'Malley et al (1985), for example, classified language learning strategies into three groups: cognitive, metacognitive and socioaffective. Rubin later categorized LLS into three types: learning-oriented, communication-oriented and social-oriented (1987).

Oxford (1990) provided the most elaborate classification when she categorized learning strategies into direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are closely related to the target language thus having a direct influence on learning, and they include cognitive, memory and compensation strategies. Memory strategies involve the use of memory aids to remember details, cognitive strategies focus on analysis while compensation strategies may entail coining new words. As for the indirect strategies, they support language learning without being directly involved with the target language and they include metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Metacognitive strategies involve evaluating one's own performance, affective strategies focus on self-motivation techniques and social strategies entail cooperation with partners.

Chamot et al. (1999) stated that "differences between more effective learners and less effective learners were found in the number and range of strategies used, in how the strategies were applied to the task; and in whether they were appropriate for the task" (p.166). Hence, it was clearly noticed that different kinds of learners chose different strategies to reach their learning goals. In most cases learners do that unconsciously, yet based on what they feel to be more beneficial, fun, or practical.

Weinstein & Palmer (2002) argued that learning strategies are basically psychological processes that learners employ to achieve a cognitive purpose. These processes include beliefs, feelings, and actions that promote acquiring a new language and developing its skills. Cohen and Macro (2007) emphasize that strategies are consciously selected based on the learner's belief of what will be more useful in a particular task and for a particular purpose. Dornyei (2005) agrees with this view and argues that students' access strategies that their experience tells them would be helpful for fulfilling tasks and achieving learning purposes. By contrast, Blasiman et al. (2017) believes that despite the huge research available in this area, it is still unclear how students choose some strategies over others and how they use the strategies they've chosen. Griffith (2013) emphasizes that although LLS are conscious thoughts purposefully chosen to solve language related problems, students may unconsciously use them sometimes as they tend to choose them automatically or mechanically with more practice or experience. Oxford (2017) argues that both general learning strategies and English learning strategies are problem oriented. This makes them both purposeful and conscious.

Lynch (2010) goes back to emphasizing the role of strategy use in academic success. He believes that these strategies help students achieve their academic goals, but it is not clear which academic areas are influenced more than others by learning strategies and whether this influence is consistent.

An interesting observation by Griffiths (2013) shows that more proficient language users employ strategies more frequently. They tend to use a variety of strategies that are of

different types. Similarly, Castillo and Cordora (2014) show that EFL learners with higher proficiency use cognitive and metacognitive strategies more often than less proficient ones.

In the Palestinian context, Abu Shmais (2003) investigated language learning strategy use by 99 English major students at An-Najah National University. Results of her study show that metacognitive strategies were the ones most frequently used by her students while compensation strategies were least resorted to.

In the context of al-Jouf University, Saudi Arabia, Maha Alhaysouni looked at strategy use by 134 English major students. She noticed that the ones most frequently selected were cognitive, metacognitive and compensation, while affective and memory strategies were least frequently used by her participants. She also looked at the influence of gender and duration of English study on the results and found that female students and the students with longest period of English study employed strategies more frequently although the differences were not significant in either case. In the Palestinian context, Khalil (2005) compared strategy use by school and university students and found that proficiency level and gender have an influence on trends of strategy selection by Palestinian students.

Riazi and Rahimi (2005) looked at strategy use in the Iranian context and found that Iranian students' level of strategy use was medium. These students employed metacognitive strategies most frequently while cognitive, affective and compensation received medium attention. As for the memory and social strategies they were least used by participants of their study.

METHOD

Participants

The sample of this study consists of 73 freshman medical students currently studying at Palestine Polytechnic University (PPU). The percentage of females was 68.49% (50 students) of the sample while males were 38.5 % (23). All participants studied at Palestinian public schools where English is taught starting from the first grade, i.e., they studied English as a school subject for 12 years before joining college. They are considered "good learners" because of their high average (above 95%) in the school exit exam (Tawjihi). In the Palestinian context, high achievers in this exam usually opt to study medicine because admission into medical schools is highly competitive at the national level. The Exit exam is made up of eight components English being one of them. The components are largely scientific for the Science stream students, i.e., Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology in addition to Islamic religion and languages. As for the Literary Stream, the components include History, Geography, Basic science, Religion and languages. Only Science stream students are allowed into medical schools according to the regulations of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific research. It is also worth mentioning that females represent the majority of the population from which the sample was drawn because they constitute about 75% of the total population of medical students at PPU.

The researchers depended on Oxford's categorization of strategy use first presented in her taxonomy (1990) which classified strategies into direct and indirect and which later evolved into her Strategy Inventory for Language Learners (SILL). This latter inventory was implemented for strategy instruction and development in many second and foreign language contexts around the World. This taxonomy is a form of survey that consists of 50 statement with which the students show frequency level of strategy use on a Likert scale that ranges from 1-5, i.e., one means not used at all while 5 means always used. investigated in this research study include: memory related strategies (MEM), cognitive strategies (COG), compensatory strategies (COM), metacognitive strategies (META), affective strategies (AFF) and social strategies. As mentioned above, these strategies include both the direct and indirect strategies first suggested and later developed by Oxford (SILL).

Procedures and Data Collection

The instrument was first developed on the basis of Oxford's SILL then it was translated into Arabic, the students' native language, to ensure complete comprehension of the items and more accurate responses. The instrument was translated by the researchers who are proficient in English and native speakers of Arabic. After that the translated version was given to an Arabic editor to review the language. The instrument was later piloted on a small group of students (12 students). A few items were later rephrased for further clarification on the basis of the pilot study results. The researcher then visited the two sections where the students study English and provided a brief explanation of the research idea and invited the students to participate on voluntary basis. The participants are freshman medical students who have scored above 95% in the Secondary Exit Exam (Tawjihi). Students were also asked to fill out and sign a form that shows their consent to participate in the study, and then copies of the instrument were distributed and filled out during the same visit.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results will be discussed in the same order of the research questions:

Question One

1. What are the categories of strategies most frequently used by Palestinian medical students?

Results of this question are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Means and standard deviation of category use frequency

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Memory	73	1.89	4.67	3.1674	.63778
Cognitive	73	2.00	4.43	3.3630	.54551
Compensation	73	1.67	5.00	3.5402	.63292
Metacognitive	73	2.00	5.00	3.4871	.61381
Affective	73	1.00	4.67	2.6941	.69445
Social	73	1.17	4.33	3.0315	.72951
Valid N	73				

Upon examining results of the statistical analysis of the medical students' performance in category selection (Table I), one notices that compensation strategies showed the highest mean (M= 3.54) while the affective strategies showed the lowest mean (M= 2.69). This category of strategies is often used by low proficiency learners to make up for gaps in their competence. As for our specific group of medical students this result is rather surprising because they are the best students or highest achievers in terms of high school grades and average. The only explanation could be that the proficiency of Palestinian students in general has not been high due to the large focus on rote learning as well as on seen passages and familiar questions in the high school exit exam (Saidam, 2016). This is also clear in the teacher and standardized assessment practices.

Table 1 above also shows that the second category of strategies selected by medical students is the metacognitive (M= 3.48). Metacognitive strategies which are usually related to managing one's own learning, self-direction and planning seem suitable for this type of learners who have fared well in the scientific stream and have obtained the highest average in their school and college exams. One may even argue that they have employed such strategies not only in language learning but in all other academic subjects and they stand behind their high achievement across all subjects.

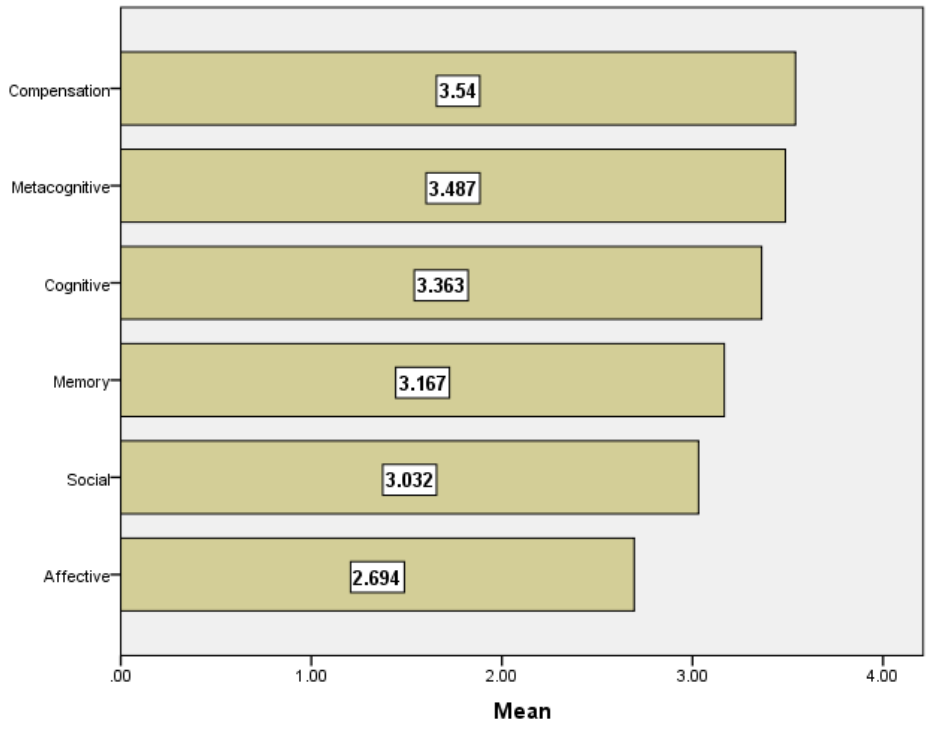

Figure 1
The descending order of strategy categories according to frequency of use

Question 2

What are the categories of strategies least frequently used by Palestinian medical students?

Table 1 above shows that the affective strategies are the ones least frequently used by Palestinian Medical students (M= 2.69). According to Oxford classification, this category refers to one's ability to lower own anxiety, or to motivate oneself. These students, one may argue, have coped with anxiety throughout their academic lives; hence, language learning tests may not have provoked their anxiety as other more challenging tasks may do. These students are also highly confident because of their outstanding academic achievement throughout their school years and this category of strategies albeit used may not be of huge relevance in their situation. They usually receive plenty of encouragement and their achievements enjoy recognition and celebration from teachers and families (Farran, 2018), hence, they may not feel an urgent need to resort to such strategies.

Social strategies are the ones which build on communication with others and interacting with them. Distinguished students in the Palestinian context always work under pressure due to the high expectations from others (Saidam, 2016). This may leave little time for socialization. One may hence argue that these students are usually self-sufficient with high levels of intrapersonal intelligence rather than interpersonal and social skills.

Questions Three and Four

What are the specific strategies under each category most frequently selected by medical students?

What are the specific strategies under each category least frequently selected by medical students?

This section discusses the specific strategies under each category presented in descending order in terms of their frequency of use. Questions three and four and discussed under each category because it is easier to look at the tables and compare means this way.

Compensation strategies

As mentioned earlier the compensation category was the one most frequently used by the Palestinian medical students. Table 2 below shows the descriptive statistics for the compensation strategies.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics of the compensation strategies

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses	72	1	5	3.60	1.002
2. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures	73	1	5	3.47	1.237
3.I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English	73	1	5	3.59	1.065
4.I read English without looking up every new word	73	1	5	3.34	1.227
5.I try to guess what the other person will say next in English	73	1	5	3.18	1.005
6.If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing	73	2	5	4.05	.896
Valid N	72				

Specific strategies selected most under this category were paraphrase (M=4.05)and guessing meaning from context (M=3.60).Ability to paraphrase is related to upper proficiency levels where the student develops his\her vocabulary range and ability to access several choices in order to express a certain meaning. Ability to guess from context is also enhanced when the students have a high number of memorized vocabularies that they accumulated over the years. The more vocabulary a student knows in a certain text, the more capable he\she will be of guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words in the same text. Furthermore, the fact that these students have been good learners throughout their lives partially explains their confidence in their ability to guess and paraphrase correctly.

The two strategies least selected by the medical students under the compensatory model were prediction (M= 3.18) and skipping new words (M=3.34). Ability to predict what the person is going to say next develops when the student is familiar with conversational routines and is often involved in authentic interaction that shows natural discourse flow. Although the Palestinian syllabus contains plenty of dialogues that show these routines and different discourse types, it seems that students do not practice them frequently enough to develop the ability to predict efficiently. Skipping unfamiliar words is also a strategy that learners need to be taught in order to become faster and more efficient readers. It seems that students did not receive enough training in these strategies during their school and college years.

Metacognitive Strategies

As for metacognitive strategies, the specific strategies most frequently used were reflection (M= 4.17) and paying attention (M=4.04). Students indicated that they think about their progress in learning English and that they pay attention whenever someone speaks in English. Table three below shows the descriptive statistics for the metacognitive strategies.

Table 3
The descriptive statistics for the metacognitive strategies

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English	73	1	5	3.33	1.155
2.I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better	73	1	5	3.85	.923
3.I pay attention when someone is speaking English	73	1	5	4.04	.949
4.I try to find out how to be a better learner of English	73	1	5	3.89	.966
5.I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English	73	1	5	2.55	1.093
6.I look for people I can talk to in English	73	1	5	2.96	1.111
7.I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English	73	1	5	2.97	1.093
8.I have clear goals for improving my English skills	73	1	5	3.62	1.126
9.I think about my progress in learning English	73	2	5	4.18	.788
Valid N	73				

As good learners, medical students are often involved in self-reflection and evaluation because they have clear goals to achieve and they are often involved in continuous competition with others.

The strategies least selected by medical students were planning schedule (M= 2.54) and looking for conversation partners (M=2.95). These students have a very busy schedule and they are usually burdened by many projects and assignments which leave little room for allocating specific time for language development. As for looking for conversation partners, one may argue that they do not have time for that and they probably do not consider it to be a priority taking into account their hectic schedule.

Cognitive Strategies

Table four below shows the descriptive statistics for the cognitive category. According to this breakdown, the most frequent strategies were skimming (M=4.19) and vocabulary repetition (M=3.95) while the least frequent were text summarizing (M=2.79) and text writing (M=2.82). Medical students may be used to skimming since they have always had a heavy academic load where they had have to read plenty of long texts during their school days as scientific stream students as well as in college courses where they cover plenty of material in all their courses. Efficient skimming also requires the ability to connect ideas together and to synthesize information which are also points of strength among these distinguished students. As for vocabulary, repetition seems to be a convenient strategy that they have developed over the years in order to cope with the huge amount to information they are regularly exposed to. Summarizing and text-writing were probably least selected because of these students' tight schedule which does not allow them to have enough time for additional activities such as writing things down and it might be much more efficient to commit them to memory.

Table 4
Descriptive statistics for the cognitive strategies.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.I say or write new English words several times	73	1	5	3.96	1.073
2.I try to talk like native English speakers	73	1	5	3.53	1.214
3.I practice the sounds of English	73	1	5	3.74	1.179
4.I use the English words I know in different ways	73	1	5	2.99	1.149
5.I start conversations in English	73	1	5	3.00	1.302
6.I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English	73	1	5	3.51	1.365
7.I read for pleasure in English	73	1	5	2.99	1.208
8.I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English	73	1	5	2.82	1.122
9.I first skim an English passage (read it quickly) then go back and read carefully	73	1	5	4.19	1.186
10.I look for words in my language that are similar to new words in English	73	1	5	3.25	1.382
11.I try to find patterns in English	73	1	5	3.16	1.143
12.I find the meaning of any English word by dividing it into parts that I understand	73	1	5	3.68	1.141
13.I try not to translate word-for-word	73	1	5	3.47	1.168
14.I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English	73	1	5	2.79	1.247
Valid N	73				

Social Strategies

Table 5 below shows the descriptive statistics for the Social category. The most frequently selected strategies under this category were repetition or clarification request (M= 3.52) and seeking native speaker correction (M=3.19), while the least frequent were practice with peers (M=2.59) and seeking help from English speakers (M= 2.91).Medical students have always been high achievers and this has reinforced their willingness to employ all strategies that would help them obtain high grades by focusing on and mastering all the details of the information they are exposed to. This might explain why they resort to repetition or clarification request. They cannot afford to lose any part of the idea or piece of the information. Seeking native speaker correction may be culturally motivated as there is generally deep respect in the Palestinian as well as other Arab cultures for the knowledge and expertise of the native speaker who is regarded as a reference in many cases. Practice with peers may not be a popular strategy first of all because these students do not have time for social interaction and probably because their intrapersonal skills go beyond their interpersonal ones. The help

of English speakers is not looked upon with high regard as these speakers may not be native and students may feel that their own proficiency exceeds that of other English speakers.

Table 5
Descriptive statistics for the social category strategies

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again	73	1	5	3.53	1.068
2.I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk	72	1	5	3.19	1.121
3.I practice English with other students	73	1	5	2.60	1.152
4.I ask for help from English speakers	73	1	5	2.93	1.251
5.I ask questions in English	73	1	5	2.97	1.080
6.I try to learn about the culture of English speakers	73	1	5	2.95	1.393
Valid N	72				

Memory Strategies

According to Table 6 below the most frequent memory strategies were visually related. The first among these was connecting words to images (M=3.84). The second frequently selected strategy was connecting words to contexts of occurrence, e.g., page, board or street sign (M=3.78). As for the least frequently used strategies under this category, using flashcards (M=1.87) came first followed by revision of lessons (M=2.74). One of the features quite noticeable about this generation of students who grew up with technological devices and web applications is that they are highly sensitive to visual stimulus. They enjoy classes which are supported by audio-visual media and feel less drawn to traditional paper and pencil activities such as note taking and summarizing. Flashcards fall within this traditional classification and the student's orientation towards more technologically oriented stimulus might explain their low popularity. Revision of lessons is another traditional activity that requires availability of extra time that these students may be unable to afford.

Table 6
Descriptive statistics for the memory category

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I think of relationships between what I already know and the new things I learn in English.	73	1	5	3.78	.975
2.I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them	73	1	5	2.77	1.137
3.I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word	73	1	5	3.85	1.089
4.I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used	73	1	5	3.74	1.054
5.I use rhymes to remember new English words	73	1	5	3.04	1.317
6.I use flashcards to remember new English words	73	1	5	1.88	1.178
7.I physically act out new English words	73	1	5	2.93	1.251
8.I review English lessons of	73	1	5	2.74	1.167
9.I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help remember the word	73	1	5	3.78	1.070

Affective Strategies

Table 7 below shows that for the affective category, the most frequent strategies were risk-taking (M=3.34) and anxiety control (M=3.28). As for the least frequently used strategies, they were using diaries to reflect feelings (M=2.02) and sharing feelings with others (M=2.32). Medical students are generally high achievers who have high confidence in their abilities and their superiority to others. This probably explains their readiness to take risks since they are aware that they are the best in the group and seeking help from others might not be of great help to them. Their long experience with anxiety during school and early college years may also explain their ability to control anxiety and their preference of this strategy over others. When we look at the least selected strategies, we clearly notice that traditional activities such as writing diaries falls within this group. Sharing feeling with others is not a popular strategy probably because these students are highly intrapersonal as shown in their other strategy selection and interpersonal activities do not take much of their time or attention.

Table 7
Descriptive statistics for the affective category

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English	73	1	5	3.29	1.275
2.I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake	73	1	5	3.34	1.157
3.I reward myself or treat when I do well in English	73	1	5	2.78	1.397
4.I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English	73	1	5	2.40	1.382
5.I write down my feelings in a language learning diary	73	1	5	2.03	1.247
6.I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English	73	1	5	2.33	1.202
Valid N	73				

CONCLUSION

Although the field of language learning strategies has been widely researched worldwide, certain contexts like the Palestinian one did not receive proper attention from local researchers. Studies involving good learner strategies outlined the differences between this highly competent group of learners and the less competent ones. Such differences were analysed in general terms and did not look at the specific features of this variance.

Results of this study slightly depart from results of studies on similar groups of learners. While previous researchers found that good learners tend to use cognitive and metacognitive strategies, this study shows that compensation strategies were the most frequently used by good language learners followed by metacognitive strategies. The present study, of course, has some limitations and results can be only generalized to similar students in similar situations. Another limitation of this study is that it did not explore the variable that influence strategy preference such as gender.

Compensation and metacognitive were the strategy categories most frequently used by Palestinian medical students. Under the compensation category, students used paraphrase and guessing from context most frequently. As for the metacognitive categories, students used the strategies of reflection and paying attention. These results provide a more detailed view than that of Griffith (2013) who argued that more proficient language users employ strategies frequently. They also slightly differ from Castillo and Cordora (2014) views whose results show that EFL learners with higher proficiency use cognitive and metacognitive strategies more often than less proficient ones.

In the Palestinian context, results of the current study are partially in congruence with those of Abu-Shmais (2003) whose results show that metacognitive strategies were the ones most frequently used by her students while compensation strategies were least

resorted to. It is worth mentioning in this context that Abu Shmais students were English major while the current study investigated strategy use by medical students. Another study by Khalil (2005) in the Palestinian context, also found that metacognitive as well as cognitive and social strategies were the ones most frequently used by proficient students. As for compensation strategies, which came on top in the current study, Khalil found that they came fourth, i.e., in middle position.

Current results also agree to a large extent with those of Alhaysouni who found that compensation, metacognitive and cognitive strategies were the ones most frequently used by Saudi English major students. They are partially different from results of Riazi and Rihani in the Iranian context who found that metacognitive strategies were most frequently used while the compensation strategies received medium attention.

Such variant results call for more research in this area which lies at the heart of learner centred language acquisition and learning. Future research should look carefully into the characteristics of the selected samples and should adopt a specific definition of "good learners" by adopting a unified language proficiency measure. Results of all research should be interpreted in light of these limitations.

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