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# The relationship between standardised test performance and language learning strategies in English Second Language: a case study

ABSTRACT

The English language proficiency of South African learners is integral to academic achievement, career development and functioning in a multilingual society. Against this background, this article reports on an empirical investigation of the relationship between (1) performance in standardised reading/writing tests in English Second Language (ESL) and (2) the use of language learning strategies (LLSs). The focus of the study on LLSs was determined by the importance of self-directed learning in outcomes-based education (OBE). A literature study investigated the role of and interplay between contextual factors and learner factors in the development of English Second Language proficiency and their relationship with the ESL learner's language learning strategies. The empirical inquiry comprised a case study of an underachieving Grade 11 learner in a secondary school in KwaZulu-Natal. The latter was chosen on the basis of poor matriculation results. Data gathering took place by means of the application of two standardised tests, the Writing Performance Test in English and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, an individual interview using a structured interview schedule and observation in the teaching and learning environment. It was found that a significant relationship between language proficiency (in terms of performance in standardised reading and writing tests) and LLS use can only be assumed with some confidence in respect of memory and cognitive strategies, but not in respect of compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. The implications for language teaching in Curriculum 2005 context are briefly indicated.

**Key words:** standardised test performance, language learning strategies, English Second Language, KwaZulu-Natal, underachievement, secondary school, case study

## Introduction

The English language proficiency of South African learners is essential for their general academic success, career prospects and choice and successful adaptation to the demands of a multilingual society. In South African schools, most learners learn English Second Language (ESL) as a school

subject and also use it as the language of teaching and learning (Van der Walt & Dreyer 1995: 306). Despite the use of ESL across the curriculum, it has been shown that a significant number of learners pass through the school system without achieving adequate levels of ESL proficiency (Lazenby 1996: 30). Limited English proficiency makes the learner dependent on the teacher for learning even when this dependence is unnecessary. However, the problem is not unique to South Africa. In 1992, of the approximately five million learners who received specialised education in the form of compensatory education in the United States of America, 1,5 million received remedial education in English language proficiency (French, Ellsworth & Amarusso 1995: 35). In South Africa it has been estimated that as much as 50 percent of the school-going population experiences barriers to learning related to lack of language proficiency (Booyse 1995: 52). Factors contributing to this situation can be categorised in terms of contextual and learner factors.

Against this background, the article reports on a case study based on data in Mahlobo's (1999) doctoral thesis. His broad research aim was to investigate the influence of contextual and learner factors on the development of ESL among South African secondary school learners. A specific aim was to investigate which language learning strategies (LLS) promoted the development of ESL proficiency in senior secondary school learners. These aims were addressed by means of a literature study and an empirical investigation. The latter investigated possible significant relationships between ESL performance in standardised reading and writing tests (ie receptive and productive ESL skills) and self-reported LLS use, based on the assumption that knowledge of such relationships could constructively inform LLS guidance. In this article the gist of the empirical investigation is given by focusing on only one of the participants selected by means of purposeful sampling. Finally, the article makes pertinent recommendations on the role of language learning strategies in ESL teaching and learning.

## Contextual and learner factors

Mahlobo (1999: 26–70) discusses the role of **contextual factors** in the development of ESL. These can be classified into three categories, namely societal factors, the home/family context and school/classroom factors. Regarding the societal context of the learner, the status of the second language, institutional support and sociocultural factors have a profound influence on the development of proficiency in a second language. *Status* can be defined as the position and role of the target language group as defined by other language groups. The target language group's social, economic, political and technological dominance plays a significant role in making the language of the group more attractive to learn (Schumann 1986: 222). *Institutional support* refers to the degree to which the target language group is represented in mass media, religion, government or industry. The higher the representation a group has in these institutions, the more frequent the use of its language is in them, and thus the greater the exposure of the language and the higher the status in the community (Garrett, Giles & Coupland 1989: 219). *Sociocultural factors* also influence the degree of social enclosure and social cohesiveness of the ethnolinguistic group. The lower the social cohesiveness and social enclosure of a group, the easier it is for such a group to learn a second language (L2) (Schumann 1986: 379). Moreover, if bilingualism is a valued cultural norm in the community, it is easier for language learners to acquire L2. Finally, the belief held in the community about the L2 as a tool for social and economic advancement is influential in facilitating or inhibiting the development of second language proficiency (Svanes 1987; Vila Barreto 1985). In South Africa, English is the language of economic, technological and political discourse and this, among other things, provides a strong incentive for learners and parents to value English proficiency. However, the past history of racial segregation, which led to ethnically

enclosed residential areas, as well as the rural-urban differences in the prevalence of the use of English has implications for the exposure of L2 learners to English and the subsequent development of proficiency (Mahlobo 1999: 44).

Regarding the impact of the home/family context on the learner, the development of proficiency in L2 is clearly linked to the family's socioeconomic status (Ehrman 1996). A higher socioeconomic status positively affects the family's ability to provide the resources which enrich language learning (Schneider & Lee 1990). Moreover, high parental aspirations for the learner, a positive family value system as well as effective parent involvement in the learner's schooling enhances L2 acquisition (Majoribanks 1989: 162; Redding 1992: 62). In the light of these findings, Mahlobo (1999: 49) stresses that in South Africa a significant number of learners come from disadvantaged family backgrounds. Although parents from poor socioeconomic circumstances may cherish high educational aspirations for children, they often lack the resources to actually support the learner's learning and become effectively involved in the school (Van Wyk 1996).

As far as the school-classroom context of the learner is concerned, a large body of research, both local and international, indicates that language proficiency in L2 is positively influenced by a sound culture of teaching and learning (Calitz 1998; Chrispeels 1992) and the availability and proper use of educational resources (Naidu 1998), particularly the availability of appropriate textbooks (Mahlobo 1995). Moreover, the teacher-learner ratio affects the quality of language teaching. The teacher's application of the principle of individualisation is hampered in a large class (Fraser, Loubser & Van Rooy 1993). Finally, it is essential for language teachers to be proficient in English and for them to have acquired adequate TESL skills and approaches (Hayes 1995; Van der Walt 1996).

The role of **learner factors** in the development of a second language is highlighted in terms of *independent* learner factors (ie learner factors that are not influenced by the context from which the learner comes and/or in which ESL learning takes place) and *dependent* learner factors (ie learner factors that are completely or partly subject to the influence of the context from which the learner comes or in which ESL learning takes place). Independent learner factors include the learner's age, first language, language aptitude, intelligence, personality and cognitive style. In the senior secondary school phase these factors can no longer be significantly influenced by the context in which second language learning occurs (Mahlobo 1999: 83).

Dependent learner factors include *motivation*, levels of *confidence* and *anxiety* regarding language learning, *attitudes* to the L2 as well as *language learning strategies* (LLSs). In terms of *motivation*, the second language learner is driven by both integrative and instrumental motivation. The former refers to the desire to learn the L2 in order to communicate, interact with and become a member of the L2 community and these motives play a significant role (Ellis 1994: 509). Instrumental motivation is provided by the utilitarian purposes of the language, such as the desire to learn English in order to cope with the demands of society, find employment or improve social status (Vila Barreto 1985). Furthermore, the greater the success achieved by the learner in learning L2, the more motivated he or she becomes (Baker 1996: 101). Learners' levels of *confidence* in learning the language function interactively to heighten or lower feelings of *anxiety*. The greater the confidence, the less anxious and the more motivated the learners become to exert themselves to learn the L2 (Skehan 1991: 281). In addition, the learner's *attitudes* towards language learning involve the attitude towards the L2 cultural group, the value of the language and the enjoyment or lack thereof when learning, as well as his or her attitude towards the teacher. Positive attitudes will enhance language learning (Vila Baretto 1985: 72).

Regarding the *LLSs* employed by the learner, Brown (1987: 79) defines these as specific methods of approaching a language learning task which vary intra-individually, from moment to

moment, task to task and individual to individual. The learner uses the strategies in order to facilitate language acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information (Dreyer 1992: 38). Various useful categorisations of LLS have been made (cf Mahlobo 1999: 103). A comprehensive categorisation is that of Oxford (1990) who categorises LLSs in terms of direct and indirect strategies. *Direct* LLSs are memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. *Indirect* strategies are classified as metacognitive, affective and social strategies (Oxford 1990: 290). Literature indicates a significant correlation between the use of LLSs and the development of L2 proficiency (Mahlobo 1999: 104). A further discussion of LLSs is included in the ensuing section dealing with the findings of this research.

The influence of both contextual and individual learner factors is theoretically related to the ESL learner's language learning strategies (LLSs) as indicated in figure 1.
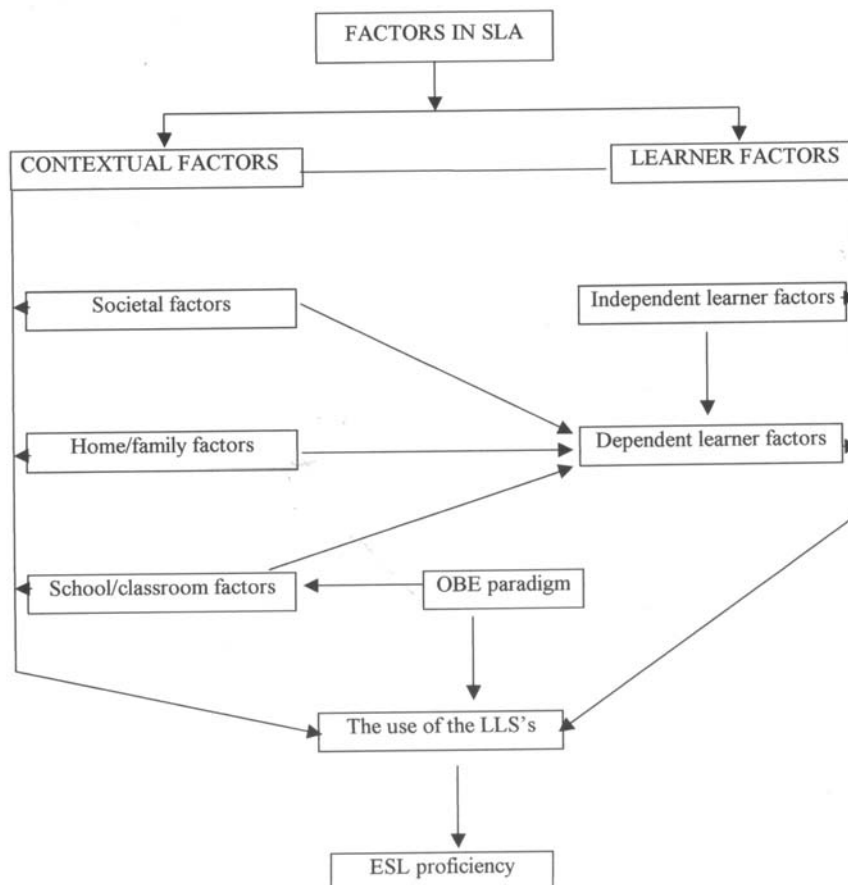


**Figure 1: Interaction among contextual and learner factors determining LLS in second language acquisition (Mahlobo 1999: 124)**

## Research design

The empirical investigation reported in this article focuses mainly on the LLSs employed by an ESL learner in a South African secondary school, with due consideration of context. The focus of the study on LLSs was determined by the importance of self-directed learning in outcomes-based

education (OBE). The facilitative role of the teacher in the OBE paradigm necessitates identification of a learner's LLSs and guidance on effective LLS use, thereby helping learners to become increasingly independent in their learning (cf Oxford 1990: 10).

## Sampling and data collection procedure

The sample of Mahlobo's investigation (1999) consisted of Grade 11 learners from two senior secondary schools in the Newcastle district of KwaZulu-Natal. To allow for the influence of school context, the researcher opted for selecting the schools according to their performance in Grade 12 examinations in the previous years (1996–1997). On this basis of this, a secondary school that had performed well and one that had performed poorly were selected. Within each school, a Grade 11 class was randomly selected and the learners in these classes then wrote the Reading Performance Test in English (Advanced Level) (Roux 1996). The results were used to select four learners per school for participation in the empirical study, namely two high-performance learners and two low-performance learners based on the results of the standardised test. The eight participants (eventually seven, after one participant dropped out at an advanced stage) thus identified subsequently wrote the Writing Performance Test in English (Advanced Level) (Roux 1997) and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford 1990). The latter is a Likert-scale, self-report inventory that assesses the frequency with which the participant uses a variety of LLSs when learning an L2 (Oxford 1990: 293). After the researcher had administered and scored the test and the SILL inventory, individualised interviews with participants were also conducted on the basis of the researcher's SILL findings. The interviews were based on an open interview schedule, the SILL-Based Interview (SBI) schedule, comprising 28 open items, which the researcher had designed. The SBI schedule constituted a refined version of the SILL because it contained probing questions based on each learner's responses to the SILL items. The aim of the interviews was to clarify ambiguities evident in the participants' responses to the SILL and provide additional background data. Responses to the questions in the SBI interview schedule were scored in the same way as the SILL inventory. Finally, detailed observation was undertaken in each of the two schools to obtain insight into the teaching and learning environment. The following aspects, inter alia, were observed and recorded by means of field notes: the management of the school; the conduct of teachers and learners; discipline; the attitude, proficiency and skills of teachers teaching English to the Grade 11 learners; and the provision of resources.

As mentioned previously, this article reports in detail on only one of the seven participants, Mpume (pseudonym). The participant was one of the poor performers in the unsuccessful school, representing the proverbial Aworst-case scenario@ which was deemed the most appropriate for the purposes of this article.

## Findings

### Contextual data

Mpume was a 17-year-old girl from a Zulu-speaking family. Because her father had passed away, her mother, who worked in Johannesburg as a domestic servant, supported her. Her ambition was to train as a chemical engineer after completing Grade 12. Her half-yearly scholastic marks (as percentages) are indicated in table 1.

**Table 1: Academic performance data**

| Subject | % |
|---|---|
| Zulu | 92 |
| English | 57 |
| Mathematics | 19 |
| Biology | 32 |
| Home economics | 13 |
| Physical science | 13 |

Observation of Mpume's school environment gave ample proof of a lack of a culture of teaching and learning. The teachers' lack of professionalism was manifested by some teachers who ignored the siren used to signal the beginning of teaching periods. They either did not go to class or did not leave the class to give way for another teacher. Moreover, it was impossible to determine the teachers' attendance rate because even those who were present did not comply with signing the attendance register. The first teaching period of the day and the periods directly after assembly and lunch were seriously disrupted by a constant stream of latecomers.

Mpume's ESL teacher displayed a complete lack of focus in her work and poor commitment. She had given the learners many language exercises to complete, but none of them had been marked. At the time of the investigation (August), only one test had been written. This single test served as the basis for determining the learners' mid-year performance in English (see table 1). Furthermore, the teacher was evidently unqualified. Observation indicated that she was unfamiliar with the communicative and task-based approaches in teaching ESL. As expected, learner indifference towards the teacher was obvious.

## Learner performance in the standardised reading test

The Reading Performance Test (Advanced Level) as developed by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) is a standardised test aimed at determining the testee's reading performance in Grades 10 to 12 (Roux 1996: 1). The test is applicable to L1 as well as L2 speakers, although different norms apply for these groups. Questions are based on prose passages, advertisements, a film review, a cartoon, and two cloze-test passages. In total, the test consists of 50 multiple choice items. The skills tested, the number of items per skill and Mpume's performance in terms of correct responses per skill are indicated in table 2.

**Table 2: Reading Performance Test data**

| Skills tested | Items | Mpume's performance |
|---|---|---|
| Recognising denotative meanings of words | 18 | 3 |
| Understanding details of content | 4 | 1 |
| Making general inferences based on the given text | 7 | 0 |
| Making inferences related to the writer's intention | 4 | 1 |
| Recognising inferences related to tone | 2 | 0 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Recognising correct use of punctuation | 1 | 0 |
| Recognising meaning of figurative language | 4 | 0 |
| Recognising correct use of tenses | 3 | 1 |
| Recognising correct use of pronouns | 1 | 0 |
| Recognising different types of discourse | 1 | 0 |
| Identifying source of material | 1 | 1 |
| Interpreting nonverbal conveyors of information | 2 | 1 |
| Recognising inferences to paralinguistic features | 1 | 0 |
| Recognising inferences related to atmosphere | 1 | 0 |

Evidently, Mpume generally performed poorly in all the skills except in identifying source of material and interpreting nonverbal conveyors of information.

## Learner performance in the standardised writing test

The HSRC's Writing Performance Test (Advanced Level) is a standardised test aimed at determining the testee's writing performance on the Grade10 to 12 level (Roux 1997: 1). This test, like the Reading Performance Test, is applicable to both L1 and L2 speakers. The test consists of four tasks that entail a description of a picture, the writing of a short report, the writing of a formal letter and a short structured essay. To write the test, a candidate is supplied with a test booklet, a pen and blank folio paper for planning answers. Three-point and nine-point writing scales (Roux 1997: 15–16) were used to score the test. The contents of the test as well as Mpume's performance per task are reflected in table 3.

**Table 3: Writing Performance Test data**

| Task | Skill(s) tested | Mpume's performance |
|---|---|---|
| Describing a picture of an accident | The ability to give a detailed description and to develop the description in a detailed way | 1 (marked out of 3) |
| Reporting on an incident in the shop | The ability to organise and express facts clearly and concisely, omitting insignificant detail | 1 (marked out of 3) |
| In the form of a formal letter, requesting more information in response to an advertisement | The ability to respond clearly and correctly in a given format | 2 (marked out of 9) |
| Writing an essay of at least three paragraphs on the advantages of modern transport | The ability to express views and to discuss issues on a given topic | 2 (marked out of 9) |

Mpume's performance was evidently extremely poor, and was classified as such according to the test norms. The following problems, inter alia, were the most conspicuous in her writing: poor paragraphing; failure to understand instructions and respond to the demands of the task; the use of unsuitable letter formats; poor spelling; lack of vocabulary; the tendency to string together

unrelated words and phrases; inconsistent use of tense structures; and the use of inappropriate words (such as ▲by@ instead of ▲buy@).

Mpume's performance level in the Writing Performance Test corresponds closely to her performance level in the Reading Performance Test (see table 2). However, the Reading Performance Test and Writing Performance Test performances differ conspicuously with her academic performance in English (see table 1).

## Learner's language learning strategies

LLSs were previously defined in the section dealing with contextual and learner factors. Furthermore, Oxford (1990: 8) points out that LLSs are actions to which the learners commit themselves in order to facilitate language learning and to make it more enjoyable, effective and transferable to new situations. As mentioned in the research design, Mpume's LLSs were investigated by using the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The validity and reliability of the SILL have been conclusively established (Dreyer 1992: 86) but, as will be indicated, some of the items apparently need reconsideration or refinement for local application. The SILL (version 7, ESL) is a Likert-scale, self-report inventory that assesses the frequency with which the participant uses a variety of LLSs. A typical SILL item asks the participant to indicate the frequency of strategy use on a five-point rating scale. The items, which are all strategy descriptions, were drawn from a comprehensive taxonomy of LLSs covering the four language skill areas of listening, reading, speaking and writing (Van der Walt & Dreyer 1995: 310; Oxford 1990: 293–296). The SILL consists of six parts, of which each represents a particular group of strategies as reflected in table 4.

**Table 4: Contents of the SILL**

| Part | Group | Strategy function |
|------|-------|-------------------|
| A | Memory strategies | Remembering more effectively |
| B | Cognitive strategies | Using all mental processes |
| C | Compensation strategies | Compensating for missing knowledge |
| D | Metacognitive strategies | Organising and evaluating your learning |
| E | Affective strategies | Managing your emotions |
| F | Social strategies | Learning with others |

Source: Oxford (1990: 293–296)

The strategies in the first three parts (A–C) are **direct strategies,** that is, strategies which involve the mental processing of the target language, whilst the **indirect strategies** (parts D–F) are those which underpin the process of language learning.

Participants have to answer in terms of how well each statement in the SILL describes them. For example, a participant is asked to respond to the following statement: ▲I use rhymes to remember new English words.@ The response options are: **Never true of me (1); Usually not true of me (2); Somewhat true of me (3); Usually true of me (4); Always true of me (5)**. The marks for the responses in each part of the SILL are added together to obtain a total for each part. The total is then divided by the number of items contained in that part to determine the participant's average use of that particular group of strategies. To obtain an overall strategy use average, the totals of different parts of the SILL are added up and then divided by 50 (see Oxford 1990: 299–300). The key for interpreting SILL average scores is provided in table 5.

**Table 5: Key for interpreting SILL average scores**

| Frequency | SILL averages | Evaluation |
|---|---|---|
| High | 4.5–5.0 | Always used |
| | 3.5–4.4 | Usually used |
| Medium | 2.5–3.4 | Sometimes used |
| Low | 1.5–2.4 | Generally not used |
| | 1.0–1.4 | Never or almost never used |

Source: Oxford (1990: 300)

Mpume's profile of average LLS use is presented in table 6.

**Table 6: SILL data – average strategy use**

| Strategies | Average | Frequency | Evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|
| Memory strategies | 3.0 | Medium | Sometimes used |
| Cognitive strategies | 3.6 | High | Usually used |
| Compensation strategies | 2.7 | Medium | Sometimes used |
| Metacognitive strategies | 4.0 | High | Usually used |
| Affective strategies | 3.7 | High | Usually used |
| Social strategies | 4.8 | High | Always used |

The data in table 6 reflect a frequency of LLS use which seems to contradict Mpume's mediocre performance in the Reading Performance Test and Writing Performance Test.

An SBI interview as described in the research design was conducted and probing questions used to explore unclear, ambiguous or implausible responses to the SILL. As in the case of the other participants, the interview revealed sometimes alarming discrepancies between Mpume's SILL responses (see table 6) and reality. Mpume's self-reported **frequent** use of LLSs (as indicated by the responses **Usually true of me/Always true of me** and verified in the interview) is summarised in table 7.

**Table 7: Strategies frequently used**

| Strategy | Items | Frequent use |
|---|---|---|
| Memory strategies | 9 | 2 |
| Cognitive strategies | 14 | 6 |
| Compensation strategies | 6 | 1 |
| Metacognitive strategies | 9 | 6 |
| Affective strategies | 6 | 2 |
| Social strategies | 6 | 5 |
| TOTAL | 50 | 22 |

The emerging profile of LLS use appears to be more realistic than the one presented in table 6.

Mpume's responses of **Always true of me/Usually true of me** to, inter alia, the following items were in fact not true:

- I *use rhyme to remember new English words*. (Memory strategy: representing sound in the memory.)
- *I try to talk like native English speakers.* (Cognitive strategy: naturalistic practising by imitating native speakers.)
- *I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.* (Cognitive strategy: analysing expressions.)
- *I write down my feelings in a language diary.* (Affective strategy: writing a language diary.)
- *I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.* (Social strategy: developing cultural understanding of the target language group.)

The interviews also revealed that the midpoint response **Somewhat true of me** was mostly chosen out of doubt, and actually reflected non-use of the strategy. In Mpume's case, this was true of all of her 14 midpoint responses.

A lack of clarity and ambiguities were also caused by the wording of some of the items. In the following examples there is a disturbing element of vagueness:

- *I pay attention when someone is speaking English.*
- *I look for people I can talk to in English.*
- *I notice it when I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.*

Furthermore, it was evident that Mpume (like most of the other participants) was not *au fait* with some of the terminology used in the SILL (eg *rhyme, flashcard, image, review*) and struggled to interpret some of the items (eg *I try to find patterns in English*).

The SILL data on Mpume clearly suggest the need for verification measures when applying the SILL in South African conditions. Although the SILL remains a valuable instrument for determining a learner's profile of LLS use (as a first outline and point of departure), further improvement can be achieved by subjecting it to rigorous item analysis in order to eliminate ambiguous items, as well as the items that are not relevant for a specific language group. For example, the item, *I look for words in my own language that are similar to the new English words*, may be useful for Afrikaans-speaking learners, but may not always be relevant to Zulu-speaking learners, where certain subject specific terms or technical jargon in the home language may not always be readily available (Lemmer 1996: 134). To sum up, there is a need to adapt the SILL in such a way that it is sensitive to the learner's age and level of cognitive development and also reflects conditions prevalent in and presuppositions relevant to the South African context. It also appears that care should be taken when doing data interpretation on the basis of SILL averages, which tend to give an over optimistic profile of LLS use (see tables 6 and 7).

**Discussion**

This research was conducted against the background of the work of various other researchers who have documented the significance of LLSs in second language acquisition (SLA). According to Oxford, Lavine and Crookall (1989: 34), LLSs are significant for the development of the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. To develop speaking and listening skills, social strategies (such as asking questions and cooperating) and compensation strategies (such as using gestures for unknown words) can be used. Competence in the skill of writing requires the use of metacognitive skills such as planning, self-evaluation and self-monitoring

(Oxford et al 1989: 34). In the South African context, Dreyer (1992: 63) shows that the appropriate use of LLSs results in improved language proficiency and self-reliance. Dreyer also maintains that the use of LLSs enables learners to participate in authentic communicative situations. In a study investigating the extent to which the use of LLSs affect language proficiency, Bialystok (1981) as cited by Dreyer (1992: 72) found that self-monitoring, practising and inferencing (guessing intelligently using linguistic and contextual cues), representing metacognitive, cognitive and compensation skills respectively, had a significant relationship with L2 proficiency. Dreyer (1992: 73) concludes that the more proficient the learner is, the wider the variety of strategies he or she will use.

In her study of the LLS profiles of Afrikaans-speaking, Setswana/Sotho-speaking and English-speaking first-year university students, Dreyer (1992: 124) found a significant relationship between the students' LLS use and L2 proficiency. In another study conducted to determine whether there is a significant mutual influence between the LLSs used by the learners and their level of L2 proficiency, O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper and Russo (1989: 21–46) found that the intermediate level students who participated in their study used proportionally more (34,9%) metacognitive strategies than the beginner students (who used only 27,4%). The same study further revealed that both beginner students and intermediate students used cognitive strategies more than metacognitive strategies. In another study, Dreyer (1996: 290) concludes that learners should be taught and thus encouraged to develop a wide range of LLSs, which will help them both in language learning and the mastery of academic material. The studies reviewed above indicate a significant relationship between L2 proficiency and the use of LLSs. However, none of them indicates a cause-effect relationship. There is no indication of what comes first: L2 proficiency or use of LLS? Furthermore, none of these studies shows the extent to which LLS use is or is not a function of language aptitude.

To what extent does Mpume's case correspond with the above exposition? Evidently, a comparison of her average use of LLS (see table 6) with her performance in standardised reading and writing tests (see tables 2 and 3) does not suggest a significant relationship between LLS use and ESL proficiency. However, a direct relationship becomes apparent when focusing on Mpume's self-reported **frequent** use of LLSs (see table 7), which reflects frequent use of less than half of the inventory of LLSs. An even more pertinent indication of the relationship between LLSs and ESL proficiency (in terms of reading and writing) is Mpume's self-reported frequent use of **direct** LLSs (ie memory, cognitive and compensation strategies – LLSs which involve mental processing of the language), namely only nine out of the total of 29 direct strategies (see table 7). However, the overall profile of Mpume's LLSs (see tables 6 and 7) suggests that she should have performed marginally better in the Reading Performance Test and Writing Performance Test, also considering her good performance in her first language as reflected in table 1. Further interpretation is therefore necessary.

In order to shed more light on the issue, a comparison of Mpume's self-reported frequent LLS use with that of the three best Reading Performance Test and Writing Performance Test performers in the sample (see section research design above) was made. This comparison is represented in table 8.

**Table 8: SILL data ⊂ comparison**

| Strategy | Items | Frequent use | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Participant 1 | Participant 2 | Participant 3 | Mpume |
| Memory | 9 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| Cognitive | 14 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 6 |
| Compensation | 6 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| **Total: Direct** | 29 | 15 | 17 | 15 | 9 |
| Metacognitive | 9 | 8 | 8 | 7 | 6 |
| Affective | 6 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Social | 6 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| **Total: Indirect** | 21 | 14 | 13 | 11 | 13 |
| TOTAL | 50 | 29 | 30 | 26 | 22 |

The data in table 8 are illuminating because they reveal the following:

(1)  Even the best Reading Performance Test Writing Performance Test performers in the sample did not report noticeably high frequencies in the use of **direct** strategies.
(2)  Only in respect of **memory** strategies, **cognitive** strategies and (insignificantly) **metacognitive** strategies, is a decline in accordance with Reading Performance Test/Writing Performance Test performance noticeable.

In summary, there appears to be **no** significant relationship between **indirect** strategies and Reading Performance Test/Writing Performance Test performance. The overall profile of LLS use as reflected in table 8 corresponds with the findings of Dreyer's (1992) study of the frequency of LLS use among three language groups of first-year university students which indicated only medium strategy use.

## Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the literature study and the empirical investigation:

-  Evidence from the literature showed that the learners' choice and use of LLSs reflect the influence of both contextual and learner factors.
-  The empirical investigation indicated that a significant relationship between language proficiency (in terms of performance in standardised reading and writing tests) and LLS use can only be assumed with some confidence in terms of **memory** and **cognitive** strategies.
-  Reflection on the basics of L2 learning leads to the following postulate: Effective language learning commences with and develops from the **memorisation** of vocabulary and language rules. The existence of basic memorised or internalised language knowledge and the incentive to increase this knowledge base are prerequisites for **effective** gradual and ever-increasing utilisation of **all** LLSs.
-  In the context of cooperative group work which is integral to the teaching strategies and principles of Curriculum 2005, it is crucial to note that stimulating **indirect** LLSs (eg affective

and social strategies) will have **no** effect on language proficiency if a sound language knowledge base is lacking.

- The case study data suggest that **all** learners, notwithstanding their language proficiency, are in need of guidance by teachers in order to improve LLSs. In practical terms, this equates with guidance on the planning and organisation of language learning in indicating to learners which LLSs apply to specific language learning tasks. Thus LLS guidance should be provided in the curriculum.

- The investigation demonstrated that the SILL is a useful instrument and parts of SILL could be used effectively by teachers as exemplified in the case study. This would enable teachers to establish individual and class profiles of LLS use and to sensitise learners to ineffective LLS use.

- Teachers should not only be proficient in the language they are teaching but should also be equipped to teach learners how to learn C in other words, to develop appropriate LLSs. However, owing to the present conditions in many disadvantaged South African schools, it would be naive to expect any large-scale involvement of language teachers in providing this kind of guidance without pre-service and in-service training for them.

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