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## LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES IN DIFFERENT ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION LEVELS

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Learning strategies are procedures or techniques that learners can use to facilitate a learning task. While some learning strategies are observable, most strategies are mental processes that are not directly observable. The investigation of personality factors is often mentioned to be important for gaining deeper insights into learning strategies. In this article we discuss the relationship between personality factors such as language anxiety, self-concept, previously achieved language learning experience and language learning strategies in different EFL education levels. A total of 833 Croatian learners took part in this exploratory study: 330 primary school learners, 309 secondary school learners and 194 university undergraduates. All the subjects learned EFL as a compulsory school subject or university course. Four instruments were used for this study: language learning anxiety, self-concept, previously achieved language learning experience, and use of language learning strategies. The One-way Analysis of Variance indicated that the mean of the scores regarding the use of learning strategies significantly differ among the three groups. Furthermore, the results indicated that there was a significant relation between language anxiety, self-concept and previously achieved language learning experience with language learning strategies.

Key words: English as a foreign language, learning strategies, education levels

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Teachers and researchers have all observed that some language students are more "successful" than others. Some individuals appear to be more endowed with abilities to succeed; others seem to lack those abilities. This observation led the researchers to describe and investigate variables that account for some of the differences on how students learn. These variables include, among others, the language learning strategies and personality.

The choice of strategies is related to a number of variables, such as cultural background, educational experiences, attitudes, motivation, language learning goals, career orientation, age, and gender (Dörnyei, 1990; McLaughlin, 1990). Learning strategies are procedures or techniques that learners can use to facilitate a learning task. The investigation of personality factors is often mentioned as important for gaining deeper insights into learning strategies.

## **LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES**

Language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task – used by students to enhance their own learning (Oxford, 1993). While some learning strategies are observable, most strategies are mental processes that are not directly observable.

The important part they play in second language acquisition has been noted by many second language acquisition researchers. Skehan (1989) considered language learning strategies one of the most important factors accounting for individual differences in second language acquisition. In Gardner and McIntyer's model (1993), second language proficiency is determined by situational variables, language learner characteristics, and learning strategy use. Learning strategies are seen as particularly important in the enhancement of autonomy because the use of appropriate strategies allows learners to take more responsibility for their own learning (Dickinson, 1987).

Strategies are especially important for language learning because they are the tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communication ability.

Appropriate learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence in many instances (Wenden and Rubin, 1987; Chamot and Kupper, 1989; Oxford and Crookall, 1989; Cohen, 1990; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

Language learning strategy research, according to Oxford (1993) and Oxford and Crookall (1989), has shown that:

- 1) strategies are used by students at all instructional levels;
- 2) more proficient learners tend to use strategies in a more task-related, more learning-style-specific, and more organized way than less proficient learners;

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3) strategy use is associated with motivation, ethnicity, learning style, and other variables;

4) strategies can be taught through well-designed learning strategy instruction; and

5) both students and teachers can become more aware of the potential of language learning strategies.

It appears that skilled learners tend to select strategies that work well together in a highly orchestrated way, tailored to the requirements of the language task. Less skillful learners might use similar strategies with similar frequency, but without the careful orchestration and without appropriate targeting of the strategies to the task (Oxford, 1993).

Although considerable research suggests that appropriately used learning strategies influence language achievement, leading to an overall gain in second language proficiency, or in certain language skills, no one most commonly occurring pattern of strategy use exists for either successful or unsuccessful learners, suggesting that a number of factors are responsible for strategy use (Oxford, 1990). The use of different types and numbers of strategies may depend on the kind of learner and setting in which learning occurs and the language task to be completed, suggesting a need for more studies on different learners in different settings.

According to the researchers (Oxford and Nyikos, 1989; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1993), the use of language learning strategies is related to increased language achievement and proficiency.

But we have to emphasize, that language learning strategy research, for all its promise, is, as Skehan (1989) pointed out, still "embryonic", with conflicting methods used in different studies. Although "the research to date is clear in demonstrating that the effective use of strategies is associated with high levels of achievement in a second language" (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993, 218), nevertheless we need to replicate studies using similar instruments and processes and discover the complex causal mechanisms of language learning strategies as related to proficiency and achievement (Oxford, 1989).

## PERSONALITY FACTORS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

### Previous learning experience

Students' self-concept is very important in language learning. We define self-concept as the cognitive or thinking aspect of self (related to one's self-image). It generally refers to "the totality of a complex, organized, and dynamic system of learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds to be

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true about his or her personal existence" (Purkey, 1988). Self-concept is partly the result, on the one hand, of past experiences and, on the other, of the learner's perceptions of other peoples' (especially significant others') reaction to him.

Self-esteem is the affective or emotional aspect of self and generally refers to how we feel about or how we value ourselves (one's self-worth). Self-concept can also refer to the general idea we have of ourselves and self-esteem can refer to particular measures about components of self-concept. Some authors even use the two terms interchangeably.

There are several different components of self-concept: physical, academic, social, and transpersonal (Huitt, 2004). Our academic self-concept relates to how well we do in school or how well we learn. There are two levels: a general academic self-concept of how good we are overall, and a set of specific content-related self-concepts that describe how good we are in math, language, arts, etc.

Self-concept has a great influence on language learning success or failure. Good language learners are often those who know how to control their emotions and attitudes about learning. Negative feelings can stunt progress, even for the rare learner who fully understands all the technical aspects how to learn a new language. On the other hand, positive emotions and attitudes can make language learning far more effective and enjoyable.

The sense of efficacy that underlies self-concept is reflected in attitudes (mental dispositions, beliefs, or opinions), which influence the learner's motivation to keep on trying to learn. Amber (Oxford, 1990) found that unsuccessful language learners had lower self-esteem than successful language learners.

In present research, the academic self-concept refers to how capable the subjects thought they were in learning English as a foreign language.

## **Anxiety**

Although foreign language anxiety has been the subject of research for many years, only in the past two decades has it been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994). Foreign language anxiety is a complex phenomenon that occurs at each stage of the language learning process (i.e., input, processing and output).

Anxiety at the input stage (i.e. input anxiety) refers to the apprehension that students experience when they are presented with a new word or phrase in the target language. The level of input anxiety depends on the student's ability to, concentrate on, and encode external stimuli. Anxiety experienced at this stage may reduce the effectiveness of input by limiting the anxious student's ability to attend to material presented

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by the instructor and reducing the student's ability to represent input internally. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), students with high levels of input anxiety may ask their foreign language instructors to repeat sentences more often than do their low-anxious counterparts, or they have to re-read material in the target language several times to compensate for missing or inadequate input.

Anxiety at the processing stage (i.e. processing anxiety) refers to the apprehension students experience when performing cognitive operations on new information. The amount of processing anxiety encountered appears to depend on the complexity of the information, the extent on which memory is relied, and the level of organization of the presented material (Tobias, 1986). According to Tobias (1977), anxiety at this stage can impede learning by reducing the efficiency with which memory processes are used to solve problems. Moreover, high levels of processing anxiety may reduce a student's ability to understand messages or to learn new vocabulary items in the target language (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994).

Anxiety at the output stage (i.e., output anxiety), involves the apprehension students experience when required to demonstrate their ability to use previously learned material. In particular, anxiety at this stage involves interference that appears after processing has been completed, but before it has been reproduced effectively as output (Tobias, 1977). According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), high levels of anxiety at this stage might hinder students' ability to speak or write in the target language.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) note that the three stages of anxiety are somewhat interdependent. That is, each stage depends on the successful completion of the previous one. Indeed, not only are high-anxious students likely to be more prone to interference at all three stages, but such interference is most probably cumulative (Tobias, 1977, 1986).

Anxiety sometimes arises in response to a particular situation or event (situational or state anxiety), but occasionally it is a permanent character trait, as in a person who is predisposed to be fearful of many things (trait anxiety). The kind of anxiety we ordinarily see in the language classroom is situational or state anxiety rather than trait anxiety. Most language learners who are anxious are not displaying a generalized personality characteristic, but are instead reacting to certain aspects of the language learning situation (Horwitz, 1988).

Research into language anxiety has been characterized by sometimes conflicting evidence from instruments applied in different languages, measuring different types of anxiety, language skills, levels of learning, and teaching methodology

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(Phillips, 1992, 15), so the results were unable to establish a clear picture of how anxiety affects language learning and performance (Horwitz and Young, 1991, 177).

More recent researches (Oxford and Ehrman, 1995; Mihačević Djigunović, 2001) have reported the influence of anxiety on the choice of language learning strategies. In this research we focused on speaking language anxiety of English as a foreign language.

The present study has two aims:

a) The first aim is to investigate the use of language learning strategies for oral communication in three different groups of learners of English as a foreign language.

b) The second aim is to explore the relationships between the use of strategies and different personality factors which may influence the choice of language learning strategies.

Hypothesis: The prediction is that learners, who studied the English language for a longer time, reported the use of more strategies than their younger colleagues. In addition, we also expect that some personality factors as academic self-concept, previous learning experience and language learning anxiety will influence the use of language learning strategies.

## METHOD

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### Participants

A total of 833 Croatian learners took part in this exploratory study: 330 primary school learners, 309 secondary school learners and 194 university undergraduates. All the subjects learned English as a foreign language as a compulsory school subject or university course. The primary school sample consisted of learners from three different schools (ranging from fifth to eighth grades; age 11 – 14). The secondary school sample included four classes (ranging from first to fourth year; age 15 – 18) from Croatian grammar schools. The undergraduate students (freshmen and sophomores) were members of Faculty of Economics and Tourism in Pula. The learners in primary school learned English as a foreign language for 2 to 4 years, those who were attending secondary school for 5 to 8 years, and university students for 9 to 11 years.

### Instruments

Four paper-and-pencil instruments were used for this study.

The use of *language learning strategies for oral communication* was assessed by means of a questionnaire developed by Kostić-Bobanović (2004). The questionnaire asked the respondent to report the frequency with which they used certain speaking language learning strategies. It consisted of six groups

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of strategies: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social.

- Memory strategies help learners enter information in long-term memory and retrieve it when necessary to communicate (using imagery, sounds, or both to remember new words). It is measured by three items, e. g. "I remember a new English word and an image or a picture of the word to help me remember the word". The results are ranging from minimum 3 to maximum 15. Cronbach's alpha for three study sample was from .50 to .57.

- Cognitive strategies involve formation and revision of internal mental models (reasoning, analyzing, and summarizing). It is measured by seven items, e. g. "I use familiar words in different combinations to make new sentences". The results are ranging from minimum 7 to maximum 35. Cronbach's alpha for three study sample was from .71 to .76.

- Compensation strategies are used to overcome lack of knowledge of the target language (using circumlocution). It is measured by seven items, e. g. "When I cannot think of the correct expression to say or write, I find a different way to express the idea, I use synonyms or describe the idea". The results are ranging from minimum 7 to maximum 35. Cronbach's alpha for three study sample was from .46 to .61.

- Metacognitive strategies help learners manage their learning (monitoring errors). It is measured by nine items, e. g. "I am aware of my English mistakes and try to correct them". The results are ranging from minimum 9 to maximum 45. Cronbach's alpha for three study sample was from .80 to .81.

- Affective strategies enable learners to control emotions and attitudes related to language learning (reducing anxiety). It is measured by ten items, e. g. "I laugh in order to relax, whenever I feel nervous about speaking English". The results are ranging from minimum 10 to maximum 50. Cronbach's alpha for three study sample was from .70 to .72.

- Social strategies facilitate interaction with others (cooperating with others, asking questions, and becoming culturally aware). It is measured by five items, e. g. "When I am talking with a native speaker, I try to let him or her know when I need help". The results are ranging from minimum 5 to maximum 25. Cronbach's alpha for three study sample was from .61 to .69.

The questionnaire asked the respondent to indicate in a multiple-choice fashion, the frequency of use (almost always to almost never on a five-point scale) of a given strategy.

*Self-concept* and *previous learning experience* were measured by means of modified subscales of the questionnaire developed by Knasel, Meed and Rossetti (2000).

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Self-concept was measured by a six-item subscale regarding the learner's actual concept of self, the degree to which the learner was satisfied with English as a foreign language achievement and a social component of self-concept (comparison with other learners).

Previous learning experience was measured by a six-item subscale regarding positive or/and negative past experiences during learning English as a foreign language. Cronbach's alpha for previous learning experience scale for three study samples was from .75 to .82. Cronbach's alpha for self-concept scale was from .79 to .85.

*Language learning anxiety* was measured by the five-item questionnaire developed by MacIntyre and Gardner (1989). The questionnaire referred to the learner's: embarrassment to volunteer answers in class, insecurity when speaking English in class, thought that others know English better than them, nervousness when speaking English in class, and fear of being ridiculed. Cronbach's alpha for three study sample was from .53 to .76.

The questionnaires were administered by researchers during regular English lessons. All the questionnaires were written in Croatian language, the subjects' mother tongue. Regarding the primary school sample, two girls were unable to fill out the questionnaires due to sickness.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the first research question, i.e., which strategies are used by three different groups of learners, we used the one-way analysis of variance. Table 1 shows the means obtained from each learner level on six subscales of speaking language learning strategies. The differences between the six subscales of strategies are relative and not absolute, because each subscale has a different number of items (memory 3, cognitive 7, compensation 7, metacognitive 9, affective 10 and social 5 items respectively).

The one-way analysis of variance indicates significant differences in language learning strategies among three different English as a foreign language levels. The Student-Newman-Keuls *post hoc* test indicates significant differences among primary, secondary and university samples in use of the following strategies: memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social. The use of all strategies is very interesting. As a matter of fact memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social strategies are used significantly more frequently in primary school and by the university students than in secondary school. The only group of strategies that is used irrespective of age are compensational strategies.



Strategies	Primary school (n=330)	Secondary school (n=309)	University (n=194)	F <sub>(2,832)</sub>	p	S-N-K
Memory	8.90	7.06	8.20	42.85	.001	1-2, 2-3, 1-3
Cognitive	23.58	20.19	21.36	39.85	.001	1-2, 2-3, 1-3
Compensation	20.63	20.83	21.49	2.31	n.s.	
Metacognitive	31.48	25.19	27.83	81.87	.001	1-2, 2-3, 1-3
Affective	25.73	21.41	23.16	37.42	.001	1-2, 2-3, 1-3
Social	16.55	14.33	16.01	26.91	.001	1-2, 2-3

**TABLE 1**  
Language learning strategies in three different English as a foreign language education levels

To explore the differences between personality factors (academic self-concept, anxiety and previous learning experience) in three different English as a foreign language education levels, we used the one-way analysis of variance (Table 2).

	Primary school (n=330)	Secondary school (n=309)	University (n=194)	F <sub>(2,832)</sub>	P
Academic self-concept	21.54	21.55	21.76	0.17	n.s.
Anxiety	13.9	12.09	12.91	5.63	.01
Previous learning experience	23.95	24.95	25.12	5.78	.01

**TABLE 2**  
Academic self-concept, anxiety, and previous learning experience in three different English as a foreign language education levels

There is no significant difference in academic self-concept among three different English as a foreign language education levels, but analysis of variance indicated significant differences in anxiety and previous learning experience.

The Student-Newman-Keuls *post hoc* test indicated significant differences regarding anxiety: the secondary school sample presented a lower level of anxiety than the primary and university samples. There is no difference in language learning anxiety between the primary and university samples.

The Student-Newman-Keuls *post hoc* test indicates significant differences regarding previous learning experience: the primary school sample presents less positive experience than do the secondary and university samples. There is no difference in previous learning experience between the secondary and university samples.

### Primary school group

The learning strategies questionnaire, academic self-concept, anxiety and previous learning experience questionnaires were administered to the 330-subject group. Correlations were computed between six groups of strategies and academic self-concept, anxiety and previous learning experience measures (Table 3).

➔ TABLE 3  
Correlations between strategies and academic self-concept, anxiety, and previous learning experience for the primary school sample (n = 330)

Strategies	Academic self-concept	Anxiety	Previous learning experience
Memory	.08	.03	.07
Cognitive	.41**	-.10	.34**
Compensation	-.17**	.24**	-.19**
Metacognitive	.29**	-.06	.23**
Affective	-.11*	.19**	-.09
Social	.25**	-.01	.20**

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01

Pearson's coefficient of correlation indicates that in the primary school sample there is a low but significant relationship between academic self-concept and use of the following strategies: cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social. As the coefficients indicate, compensation and affective strategies correlate negatively with academic self-concept. This means that users with higher academic self-concept less frequently need to use compensation strategies to help them overcome knowledge gaps to continue the communication. They also less frequently report the use of affective strategies, which are concerned with the learner's emotional requirements. The coefficients show significant positive correlation of academic self-concept with cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies. The better the learners thought of themselves as language learners, the more often they reported forming and revising internal mental models, regulating their learning and interacting with others. It is possible that primary school learners with higher academic self-concepts establish easier contacts and cooperation with others; that is why they use social strategies more often.

Anxiety correlated significantly with compensation and affective strategies. The more anxious the learners are the more they try to overcome gaps in knowledge of the language and to control feelings and attitudes related to language learning.

Previous learning experience shows positive correlations with cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies. There is a negative correlation between previous learning experience and compensation strategies. The learners with more positive previous learning experience more often report using cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies. Primary school students do not use compensation strategies often, perhaps because they do not have a developed vocabulary or reasoning abilities.

### Secondary school group

This group consisted of 309 subjects. Correlations were computed between six groups of strategies and academic self-concept, anxiety and previous learning experience measures (Table 4).

➔ TABLE 4  
Correlations between strategies and academic self-concept, anxiety, and previous learning experience for the secondary school sample (n=309)

Strategies	Academic self-concept	Anxiety	Previous learning experience
Memory	.07	.10	.17**
Cognitive	.33**	-.03	.36**
Compensation	-.28**	.29**	-.15**
Metacognitive	.23**	.03	.25**
Affective	.01	.14*	.02
Social	.11	.10	.09

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01

Pearson's coefficient of correlation indicates that in the secondary school sample there is a significant relationship between academic self-concept and the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The students with higher self-concept more frequently use practicing, receiving and sending messages, analysing and reasoning. They also more frequently use metacognitive strategies such as arranging, planning and evaluating their learning. The negative correlation between academic self-concept and compensation strategies indicates that the better the learners think of themselves as language learners, the less frequently they need to overcome limitation in speaking.

As in the primary school sample, learners with more fear from language learning more frequently use compensation and affective strategies. The more anxious the learners are, the more they try to overcome deficiencies in English and to manage emotions.

Previous learning experience shows positive correlations with memory, cognitive and metacognitive strategies, but negative correlation with compensation strategies.

### University sample

The same instruments were administered to the 194-subject group of university students. Correlations were computed between six groups of strategies and academic self-concept, anxiety and previous learning experience measures (Table 5).

➔ TABLE 5  
Correlations between strategies and academic self-concept, anxiety, and previous learning experience for the university sample (n=194)

Strategies	Academic self-concept	Anxiety	Previous learning experience
Memory	.02	-.09	.13
Cognitive	.35**	-.27**	.35**
Compensation	-.38**	.30**	-.28**
Metacognitive	.17*	-.16*	.22**
Affective	-.06	.09	-.04
Social	.11	-.02	.15*

\*p<.05; \*\*p<.01

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Pearson's coefficient of correlation indicates that in the university sample there is a significant positive relationship between academic self-concept and the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The better the learners think of themselves as language learners, the more often do they use cognitive strategies (e.g. repeating, recombining, translating) and metacognitive strategies (e. g. organising learning, setting goals and objectives, seeking practice opportunities). The coefficients indicate that compensation strategies negatively correlate with academic self-concept, meaning that students with higher academic self-concepts less frequently need to use mime or gestures, avoid communication or use synonyms.

Anxiety has a significant negative correlation with cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The more anxious the learners are, the less they tend to form internal mental models, to receive and produce messages in a target language and to regulate and evaluate their learning. There is a significant positive correlation between anxiety and compensation strategies. The learners who report feeling embarrassed, insecure, less knowledgeable, nervous and fearful of ridicule more often use gestures, make up new words or switch back to their mother tongue.

Previous learning experience shows positive correlations with cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies. There is a negative correlation between previous learning experience and compensation strategies.

*Memory strategies.* Storage and retrieval of new information are two key functions of memory strategies. These strategies are used more frequently by primary school respondents. The use of these strategies is not correlated with any personality factors, except with previous learning experience in secondary school learners. This means that the secondary school learners who reported positive previous learning experience use memory strategies more frequently.

*Cognitive strategies.* Language learners use cognitive strategies for associating new information with existing information in long-term memory and for forming and revising internal mental models. These strategies are more frequently used by primary school respondents. The use of cognitive strategies is positively related with academic self-concept and previous learning experience.

*Compensational strategies.* Strategies such as switching to the mother tongue, using mime or gestures and coining words help learners to overcome knowledge limitation in speaking. Generally, in our research, there are no differences in the use of these strategies among the three groups of English as foreign language learners. Academic self-concept and previous learning experience are negatively related with these strate-

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gies in all three levels. It is interesting that there is a positive relation between those strategies and language learning anxiety at all three levels. As Oxford (1990) says, for beginning and intermediate language learners, compensational strategies may be among the most important to compensate for limited knowledge in speaking. Compensation strategies are also useful for more expert language users, who occasionally do not know an expression, who fail to hear something clearly, or who are faced with a situation in which the meaning is only implicit or intentionally vague.

*Metacognitive strategies.* "Metacognitive" means beyond, beside, or with the cognitive. These strategies are actions which go beyond purely cognitive devices, and provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process. Primary school respondents more frequently use centering, arranging, planning, and evaluating than others. Use of these strategies is positively related with academic self-concept and previous learning experience in all three levels. For university students language learning anxiety is related to less use of metacognitive strategies. This is probably due to the possibility of anxiety blocking the mental process.

*Affective strategies.* The term "affective" refers to emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values (Oxford, 1990). Primary school respondents more frequently use affective strategies, such as, anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, and self-reward than others. In addition, in primary school, affective strategies negatively correlated with academic self-concept, and positively with language-learning anxiety in primary and secondary school samples. There is no significant correlation between previous learning experience and the use of affective strategies.

*Social strategies.* Language is a form of social behaviour; it is communication, and communication occurs between and among people (Oxford, 1990). It is interesting that, in our research, learners in secondary school significantly decrease the use of these strategies than learners in primary school and at university. This is probably determined by specific pubertal changes in psychosocial functioning that usually occur in secondary school. One of the most basic social interactions is asking questions and cooperating in general with peers. However, cooperative strategies might not be typical of all language learners. Previous research shows (Reid, 1995) that language learners do not typically report a natural preference for cooperative strategies.

In the present study the use of these strategies is positively correlated with academic self concept only in primary school, and with previous learning experience in primary school and at university.

## **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Our results show how strategies' choices are affected by two groups of variables: 1) numbers of years of language learning; and 2) personality factors such as academic self-concept, previous learning experience and language learning anxiety.

Our younger respondents, report the use of more strategies than their older colleagues who studied the English language for a longer time. However, the university students more frequently used language learning strategies for oral communication than secondary school students. It is possible that this effect is due to the fact that generally, primary school respondents, especially at the beginning of studying EFL are more encouraged to develop oral communication than other skills.

Previous research, related to the use of all language learning strategies (reading, writing, speaking and listening), stated that learners in different learning stages use different strategies, with more frequent strategy use by more advanced learners (Bialystok, 1981; Politzer, 1983; Chamot and O'Malley, 1987; Green and Oxford, 1996). In his research Anderson (1990) pointed out that learners who studied the language for at least four or five years used almost all strategies more often than did less experienced language learners.

As noted by Oxford and Nyikos (1989) years spent studying the foreign language had a very high, significant effect on two communicatively-oriented factors; functional practice strategies, such as, initiating foreign language conversation, seeking native speakers for conversation and, conversational input elicitation strategies, such as, asking for pronunciation correction, requesting slower speech. The authors mentioned that students who had been studying the language for a longer time used strategies far more often than did less experienced language learners. More precisely, students studying the language at least five years used functional practice strategies i.e. all strategies which require language practice in natural settings outside of the classroom more often than did students with less study. Learners studying the language at least four years used conversational input elicitation strategies more often than did learners with less longevity. Looking at these results, the differences appear to demonstrate older group superiority in strategy use. Results revealed in the present study partially support the above-mentioned trend. Namely, it is possible that students attending secondary school study English less due to the number and verity of subjects that they have. At the university level a rise in the use of strategies is once again reported, probably because of the students' recognition of the importance of the English language in their future professions.

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Regarding personality factors, our result shows that learners with higher academic self-concept more often use cognitive and metacognitive strategies at all three levels. At the same time, they reported less use of compensation strategies which serve to overcome deficiencies in knowledge of the language. Previous learning experience is related with frequent use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies at all three levels and less frequent use of compensational strategies. In their research Oxford and Nyikos (1989) concluded that increased self-esteem led to more effective use of appropriate strategies and vice versa.

Anxiety is defined as a state of uneasiness and apprehension or fear caused by the anticipation of something threatening (Oxford, 1996). Language anxiety has been said by many researchers to influence language learning. Whereas facilitating anxiety produces positive effects on learners' performance, too much anxiety may cause a poor performance (Scovel, 1991). Oxford (1993) mentioned that many kinds of language activities can generate performance anxiety, depending on the student. Speaking in front of others is often the most anxiety-provoking of all. Many teachers have observed students who exhibit extreme anxiety when they are required to use the new language in activities such as oral reports, role-plays, or speaking tests. Students prone to anxiety when speaking include introverts who do not enjoy interacting with others spontaneously or who dislike performing in front of others (Oxford, 1993). According to Aida (1994), research on foreign language anxiety is still underdeveloped and studies examining the relationship between anxiety and learner characteristics will help us increase our understanding of language learning from the learner's perspective and provide a wider range of insight.

In our research, all the learners who reported higher levels of anxiety use compensational strategies more often, in order to compensate for their limited knowledge. Additionally, it is interesting that primary and secondary school learners also use affective strategies to reduce their anxiety, to encourage and reward themselves.

With university students, whereas primary and secondary students, we found a significantly negative correlation between anxiety and cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The above mentioned supports the theory that higher levels of anxiety result in less use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. This is probably due to the well known effect of fear which can result in blocking out higher cognitive processes.

Results about the use of affective strategies revealed in our study support the findings of Gardner and MacIntyer (1991). They stated that the use of certain affective learning

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strategies reduces the level of language anxiety, thus freeing up cognitive resources to be applied to the use of cognitive strategies, and that affective variables are probably more powerful in influencing strategy use than intelligence and aptitude. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) suggested that learning strategies interact in a complicated way with characteristics of the language learner and situational variables, to influence proficiency in a second language.

According to our results we suppose that reducing anxiety, improving self-esteem and positive past experience may improve the use of language learning strategies, which in turn may increase the language achievement and proficiency. However, due to the fact that our research is of a correlation nature, these are only assumptions which should be examined in future research.

Teachers can exert a tremendous influence over the emotional atmosphere of the classroom to give students more responsibility, by providing increased amounts of naturalistic communication, and by teaching learners to use all strategies.

### **Limitations and implications of the study**

The first limitation of this study is that the measuring of strategies was done by using subjective criteria (self-estimations) of learners that do not necessarily correspond with reality. Previous research (Kostić-Bobanović, 2004) showed that when we compare self-estimated use of strategies with real use of strategies (identified by three independent estimators) results are different. In addition, it will be very interesting and useful to explore the real use of strategies at different levels of learning. Another limitation of the study is its emphasis on the frequency of use of strategy, rather than on successful use. This issue could be investigated.

We may conclude that it will be very important for the teacher to know which strategies are effective on each level, in order to organize their teaching. This would include demonstrating when a given strategy might be useful, as well as how to evaluate its usefulness, and how to transfer it to other related tasks and situations. As Nyikos (1989) said, students are not always aware of the power of consciously using language learning strategies for making learning quicker, easier, more effective, and even more fun. That is why skilled teachers should help their learners develop an awareness of learning strategies and enable them to use a wider range of appropriate strategies.

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## Strategije učenja engleskoga kao stranog jezika na različitim obrazovnim stupnjevima

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Strategije učenja jesu procedure ili tehnike koje učenici mogu upotrijebiti za svladavanje vještina učenja. Dok su neke strategije učenja očite, većina je strategija prikrivena. To su mentalni procesi koji se ne mogu izravno promatrati. Proučavanje osobnosti važno je u dobivanju cjelovitijeg uvida u strategije učenja. Članak govori o vezi između nekih karakteristika osobnosti, kao što su strah od jezika, akademski pojam o sebi, prethodno postignuta iskustva pri učenju jezika, te strategija učenja jezika na različitim stupnjevima obrazovanja engleskog kao stranog jezika. U istraživanju je sudjelovalo 883 hrvatskih učenika: 330 učenika osnovnih škola, 309 učenika srednjih škola i 194 studenta. Svi su ispitanici učili engleski kao strani jezik. U istraživanju su upotrijebljena četiri instrumenta, i to za ispitivanje straha od učenja jezika, akademski pojam o sebi, prethodno postignuta iskustva u učenju jezika i upotreba strategija učenja jezika. Rezultati analize varijance pokazali su da se upotreba strategija značajno razlikuje između ispitivanih grupa. Postoji i znatna povezanost između osobnih karakteristika (straha od jezika, akademskoga pojma o sebi i prethodno postignutih iskustava u učenju jezika) i strategija učenja engleskoga kao stranoga jezika.

Ključne riječi: engleski kao strani jezik, strategije učenja, dobne skupine

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## Lernstrategien zum Erwerb des Englischen als Fremdsprache auf verschiedenen Altersstufen

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Lernstrategien bestehen in Verfahren oder Techniken, die Schülern das Lernen erleichtern sollen. Während einzelne Strategien bewusst unternommen und sichtbar werden, spielen sich andere als von außen unsichtbare mentale Vorgänge ab. Wichtig sind dabei Erkenntnisse aus der Persönlichkeitspsychologie, da sie einen tieferen Einblick in mögliche Lernstrategien ermöglichen. Die Verfasserinnen sprechen in ihrem Artikel über den Bezug zwischen bestimmten persönlichen Einstellungen wie Angst vor dem Sprachunterricht, Einstellung zu sich selbst als Lernsubjekt (akademischer Ich-Begriff), früheren Erfahrungen mit dem Sprachenlernen einerseits und Strategien zum Erwerb des Englischen als Fremdsprache (auf verschiedenen Lernstufen) andererseits. An der Untersuchung nahmen 883 kroatische Schüler teil: 330 Grundschüler,\* 309 Mittelschüler und Gymnasiasten sowie 194 Studenten. Sämtliche Untersuchungsteilnehmer lernten Englisch als Fremdsprache. Bei der Untersuchung kamen vier Untersuchungsinstrumente zum Einsatz. Ermittelt wurden: die Angst vor dem Fremdsprachenunterricht, die Einstellung zu sich selbst als Lernsubjekt (akademischer Ich-Begriff), frühere Erfahrungen mit dem Sprachenlernen und der Einsatz von Lernstrategien zum besseren Spracherwerb. Die Ergebnisse der Varianzanalyse zeigen, dass sich die Untersuchungsteilnehmergruppen hinsichtlich der von ihnen benutzten Lernstrategien wesentlich voneinander unterscheiden. Zu erkennen ist ein relevanter Zusammenhang zwischen bestimmten persönlichen Einstellungen (Angst vor dem Fremdsprachenunterricht, akademischer Ich-Begriff und frühere Erfahrungen mit dem Sprachenlernen) und dem Einsatz von Lernstrategien zum besseren Erwerb des Englischen als Fremdsprache.

Schlüsselwörter: Englisch als Fremdsprache, Lernstrategien, Altersgruppen

\* Das kroatische Schulsystem umfasst acht Grundschulklassen und vier Mittelschul- bzw. Gymnasiumsclassen (Anm. d. Übers.).