Overachievers and Underachievers' Strategies in Learning the Language Skills

[1]Farnoush Ahangaran*, [2]Aram Pouyan

[1]Department of TEFL, Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Urmia, Iran
[2]Department of TEFL, Urmia Branch, Islamic Azad University, Urmia, Iran

*Mr.ahangaran@gmail.com

Abstract – The current study investigated the preferences of Overachievers and Underachievers' strategies in learning the language skills. To this aim, three types of language learning strategies-metacognitive, cognitive, and socioaffective- were applied to make a 28-item Likert-type questionnaire, respectively for the four language skills, of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, for 100 university English students (50 overachievers and 50 underachievers) to select their strategies in learning each language skill. The results indicated that both groups were aware of the learning strategies, but overachievers used more strategies for learning one language skill; also, their strategies were more coherent. Hence, overachievers' strategies were more effective and could be applied to underachievers in order to help them succeed more in learning the foreign language skills.

Keywords – Strategies; learning strategies; cognitive; metacognitive; socioaffective

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

As we know, strategies are detailed plans for achieving success in any situations. "Strategies are those specific *attacks* that we make on a given problem. They are the moment-by-moment techniques that we employ to solve *problems* posed by second language input and output (Brown 2000)". O'Malley and Chamot (1990) explain that learning strategy is the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information. For language teachers, learning strategies have been a source of great appeal. It helps teachers improve their teaching and make it effective by identifying the learners' choices of using strategies and correlating their teaching techniques with them in order to have a successful teaching. Consequently, the use of learning strategies among the learners in different situations, either successful or not, is of immediate interest to language teachers. Teachers can benefit from an understanding of what makes learners successful and unsuccessful, and establish in the classroom an environment for the realization of successful strategies; because expecting immediate success in the classroom with students of different notions to be used in the classrooms is rather impossible. As Ellis (1997) argues, the study of learning strategies is of potential value to language teachers. If those strategies that are crucial for

learning can be identified, it may prove possible to train students to use them.

1.2. Statement of the problem

In most of the English classes, little attention is paid to the conscious efforts learners make in mastering a foreign language. Many of students do not know, neglect or pay not enough attention to how to deal with the task of learning a foreign language even after years of study; only a few students who have used a set of strategies, have been able to succeed and hence, learn the language. The central theme of this research, a comparison of overachievers and underachievers in their use of learning strategies in EFL situations, is the concept that refers to this neglected area in our language classes. The educational goal of this research is concerned with helping students to learn how to learn the ways of effective learning of English as a foreign language and to achieve autonomy in their education. This has been done by studying the learning strategies of overachiever students in comparison with underachiever students' strategies. The present study is designed to compare and identify the preferences of overachievers and underachievers in their use of learning strategies in EFL situations. The researchers believe that what makes a learner achieve more and the other less in a learning situation is largely related to the choice and the use of some strategies. Therefore, to be able to come up with a satisfactory explication as to the main postulation of the

research, the following research questions were formulated:

Q1: What are the similarities and differences between overachievers and underachievers in terms of using learning strategies?

Q2: which learning strategies are perceived to be more conducive of success from the viewpoint of overachievers?

1.3. Significance of the study

Although some research studies have been carried out by different scholars and researchers in the field of learning strategies and language skills to pinpoint the use of strategies in learning a language skill or sub-skill, like reading, grammar or vocabulary (Agaie, 2005; Hong-Nam & Leavel, 2006; Ikeda & Takeuchi, 2006), as far as the researchers know, almost no study has been carried out to have a comparison of overachievers and underachievers in their use of learning strategies in Iranian EFL situations. The lack of research studies in this field as well as the importance of strategies used by overachievers in order to help underachievers requires close scrutiny in this field. Doing so, therefore, motivates drawing on various sources of information, trying to have a fresh look on basic notions and previous studies as well as contributing new data.

2. Literature review

2.1. Why learning strategies are important?

Oxford (1990) argues that, learning strategies are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning; Strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. She further explains that appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence. The use of language learning strategies has a long history although its names and types are developed quite recently. A good example can be the storytellers who used their memory to remember the every part of their stories. Now, the theory, elements, and implications of language learning strategies are widely concerned among the theorists, teachers, and even learners.

2.2. What are common features of language learning strategies?

Locke and Latham (1994) believe that all language-learning strategies are related to the features of control, goal-directedness, autonomy and self-efficacy. Goals are the engine that fires language-learning action and provides the direction for the action; examples of goals are to use English fluently and accurately in business, to order meals, to ask directions, etc. In another situation, Bandura (1997) argues that learning strategies help learners become more autonomous. Autonomy requires conscious control of one's own learning processes. Learning strategies also enhance self-efficacy, individuals' perception that they can successfully complete a task or series of tasks. Table 1, summarizes the features of language learning strategies discussed by Oxford (opcit.):

Table 1. Features of language learning strategies

Language Learning Strategies	
1	contribute to the main goal, communicative competence.
2	allow learners to become more self-directed.
3	expand the role of teachers.
4	they are problem-oriented.
5	are specific actions taken by the learners.
6	involve many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive.
7	support learning both directly and indirectly.
8	are not always observable.
9	are often conscious.
10	can be taught.
11	are flexible.
12	are influenced by a variety of factors.

2.3. Empirical studies related to the study

During the recent years, the study of learning strategies has been developed in a variety of disciplines including metacognitive, cognitive and socioaffective. In time, researchers have taken one category or its sub-categories and studied their effects on learning skills, say, listening, speaking, reading and writing and sub-skills such as grammar and vocabulary.

O'Malley and Chamot (opcit.), contrasted strategies used by beginning and intermediate students. The purpose of their study was to go beyond lists of strategies determined by researchers to discover the strategies L2 learners actually use. The main part of their research investigated what strategies would emerge out of discussions with L2 learners. They interviewed 22 teachers and 70 high-school ESL students, mostly Spanish-speaking, in groups of 3—5 about their L2 activities both inside and outside the classroom; the students were grouped by the educational system into beginners and intermediates. This data-gathering produced an amplified list of 26 strategies, with 79 per cent agreement amongst the four raters on the strategies used. They felt it necessary to add a third group of social

mediation-strategies. As well as listing the strategies that the students reported, O'Malley et al. (1985a) looked at how often they occurred in the interviews. The study showed the high level of the students' metalinguistic awareness in a second language. Overall, cognitive strategies were more frequent than metacognitive strategies (69.9 per cent) compared with (30 per cent). Intermediate students had a slightly higher proportion of metacognitive strategies (34.9 per cent) compared to beginners (27.4 per cent), even if their absolute totals were smaller. Comparing the two levels, beginners scored over intermediates in the amount of strategies reported; 409 compared with 229.

Zohreh Ghaffarzadeh (2000), was concerned with helping students to learn how to learn English as a foreign language in order to achieve autonomy in their education. This was intended to be done by studying the learning strategies of effective English students in comparison with less effective students' ones. Accordingly, two types of research questions were developed: i) whether success in foreign language can be attributed to some specific learning strategies developed by students, and ii) whether there is difference in the extent of the strategies used by effective and less effective students. The students were evaluated in order to identify less effective and effective students. In this way, the mean score was calculated. Those who were above the mean were labeled effective and those who were below the mean were labeled less effective. Bogardus scale was used to devise the questionnaire and analyze the data. The calculation indicated that more students in the high group than the low group use the strategies. Also, the extent of strategies used by effective students was more than the extent of the strategies used by less effective ones. Then, it could be resulted that some of the success of effective students could be attributed to their learning strategies.

Reza Agaie (opcit.), examined the effect of language learning strategies on L2 learners' oral English proficiency. 40 students studying English at New Interchange introduction level at an institute in Orumieh were selected. They were divided in two groups: experimental and control. Both groups were taught by the researcher himself. Throughout the research data gathering instruments were employed: a post test of written form and a post test of oral form. The results of the statistical procedure proved that language learning strategies have a significant role on the improvement of the learners' oral language proficiency.

Ikeda and Takeuchi (opcit.), studied the differences in the process of learning reading strategies by EFL learners whose English proficiency level differ. For this purpose, portfolios made by ten Japanese female collage students learning English (five in the higher proficiency group and the other five in the lower) were analyzed. The results showed that the students in the higher proficiency group tended to report on the use of more than one strategy in detail in every entry for the portfolio submitted. The students in the lower proficiency group, on the other hand, were inclined to report on the use of a single strategy with little detail in each entry. In addition, the understanding of the purpose and the merit of each strategy use was differtent. The students in the higher proficiency group tended to write descriptions, which imply that they had well understood the purpose and the merit of using the strategy paying attention to discourse markers.

Hong-Nam and Leavell (opcit.), investigated the language learning strategy use of 55 ESL students with differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds enrolled in a college Intensive English Program (IEP). The IEP is a language learning institute for pre-admissions university ESL students. The study examined the relationship between language learning strategy use and second language proficiency, focusing on differences in strategy use across gender and nationality. The study found a curvilinear relationship between strategy use and English proficiency, revealing that students in the intermediate level reported more use of learning strategies than beginning and advanced levels. More strategic language learners advanced along the proficiency continuum faster than less strategic ones. The study found that the students preferred to use metacognitive strategies most, whereas they showed the least use of affective and memory strategies. Females tended to use affective and social strategies more frequently than males.

3. Method

3.1. Design and Procedure

In order to seek answers to the research questions posed in the study, a two-phased research design was developed that included both quantitative and qualitative elements. The quantitative part of the study, with the help of surveys, sought to determine different types of learning strategies of the participants in learning the language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Whereas, the qualitative part, consisting of semi-structured interview sessions, provides more insights into the use of strategies and even other possible language learning strategies, the participants may experience.

In doing so, the students of two frequent years, the first four terms, of Tabriz Islamic Azad University were selected. They were studying English literature, English translation, and English teaching. They were divided into two groups called overachievers (16 and higher) and underachievers (14 and lower) by their average scores in general English courses in each of the four terms. For each group, same questionnaire was given and they were to answer the questions individually. Afterwards, fifteen students from each group (overachievers and underachievers) were chosen randomly to have an interview. The questions for interview were selected to elicit some personal strategies that the learners might use for learning the skills if there were any strategies at all.

By having a close look at the data collected, the results were interpreted and discussed in order to come to some understanding of differences between overachievers and underachievers in their use of learning strategies; and also to find out about some reasons regarding why overachievers were successful.

3.2. Participants

A total of 100 Iranian male and female EFL students at Tabriz Islamic Azad University in English literature, English translation and English teaching took part in this study. They were divided into two different groups of 50 in each who were called overachievers (learners with the average term scores of 16 and high) and underachievers (learners with the average term scores of 14 and low). Since the focus was on the four language skills, the sex variable, age variable and ability level of the students were not controlled. The participants were of different age groups ranging from 18 to 25 years old.

3.3. Instruments

The first instrument used in this study was a 28-item Likert-type questionnaire, respectively for the four language skills, of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Each participant was given a four part questionnaire to answer. This instrument, which assesses the use of language learning strategies (cognitive, metacognitive and socioaffective) is presented by (O'Malley et al. opcit.). These scales were as follows:
1)   Always or almost true of me,
2)   Sometimes or generally true of me,
3)   Seldom or generally not true of me,
4)   Never or almost never true of me, and
5)   No idea

The second instrument used in this study was interview. 30 participants (15 overachievers and 15 underachievers) were selected from the participants randomly to be interviewed. They were asked questions about what strategies they used to improve their language skills in order to identify personal or any other strategies which might not be included in the questionnaire.

3.4. Data analysis

For interpreting the collected data from the questionnaire and the interview, exploratory research and survey research which were related to the question of design in descriptive research were used. After obtaining the data from the questionnaire, the data were analyzed and the mean and frequencies of different types of learning strategies were determined. Then, their percentages were calculated. For the interview part, the learning strategies which the participants used mostly for each skill were extracted and listed in order. The data analysis of the interviews followed the steps of qualitative

content analysis, seeking common patterns in the responses. Interview data were analyzed and interpreted following the grounded theory data analysis techniques and procedures, which is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to arrive at an inductively grounded theory. For this purpose, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and the comments of the subjects were written down. Then, the language learning strategies proposed by the subjects were sorted out from their comments and classified in order to find any specific or personal strategies along with the ones proposed in the questionnaire.

4. Results and Discussion

Students use different strategies to learn language skills. Among the strategies, there are some that the successful students use frequently and these strategies which are used by the successful students are not common among less successful ones; therefore, some strategies used by the successful students can be the keys that the students apply to be successful. Moreover, these strategies make some students, overachievers and some others underachievers in the process of learning a language skill.

4.1. Quantitative findings

In this section, the quantitative findings related to the proposed research questions will be given and further discussed.

4.1.1. Learning strategies and listening skill

Listening is one of the most important skills. Being able to listen, understanding and recreating the meaning are the tasks that the students always try to achieve. To reach to an acceptable level of listening skill and to be able to recreate the meaning of what you listen, overachievers used eleven strategies more than other strategies. From these eleven strategies, three of them were metacognitive, six of them were cognitive, and two of them were socioaffective. On the other hand, underachievers used five strategies (one metacognitive and four cognitive) more than other strategies. Table 2, presents the mean and frequencies in percentage of the listening strategies commonly used by overachievers and underachievers.

Table 2. Common listening strategies used by overachievers and underachievers

		Strategy	Type of Strategy	M	A	S	SE	N	NI
Overachievers	1	self-management	metacognitive	4.3	54.0	28.0	14.0	2.0	2.0
	2	self-monitoring	metacognitive	4.3	62.0	22.0	8.0	4.0	4.0
	3	self-evaluation	metacognitive	3.4	26.0	38.0	8.0	10.0	18.0
	4	grouping	cognitive	3.6	30.0	26.0	26.0	14.0	4.0
	5	note-taking	cognitive	4.3	54.0	30.0	10.0	6.0	0.0
	6	imagery	cognitive	4.3	52.0	34.0	12.0	0.0	2.0
	7	inferencing	cognitive	4.5	60.0	30.0	8.0	2.0	0.0
	8	summarizing	cognitive	3.9	30.0	46.0	8.0	14.0	2.0
	9	rehearsal	cognitive	3.6	28.0	26.0	24.0	18.0	4.0
	10	question for clarification	socioaffective	3.9	30.0	38.0	24.0	6.0	2.0
	11	cooperation	socioaffective	3.7	22.0	38.0	30.0	6.0	4.0
Under	1	selective attention	metacognitive	4.5	60.0	32.0	6.0	0.0	2.0

				M	A	S	SE	N	NI
	2	repetition	cognitive	3.5	20.0	36.0	24.0	18.0	2.0
	3	translation	cognitive	4.4	56.0	30.0	10.0	4.0	0.0
	4	auditory representation	cognitive	4.2	38.0	50.0	10.0	2.0	0.0
	5	key word	cognitive	4.0	26.0	54.0	18.0	0.0	2.0

M = Mean / A = Always / S = Sometimes / SE = Seldom / N = Never / NI = No Idea

4.1.2. Learning strategies and speaking skill

A good listener is usually a good speaker, so, listening and speaking are the two connected skills. Since speaking ability is tangible and measurable it is noticed even more than the listening ability; therefore, there were twelwe learning strategies that the overachievers used more than other strategies for learning speaking skill. Whenever overachievers were to work on listening, they used these twelwe learning strategies. From these, seven of them were metacognitive, four of them were cognitive, and only one of them was socioaffective. Underachievers, on the other hand, used three cognitive strategies more than other strategies. Table 3, presents the mean and frequencies in percentage of the speaking strategies commonly used by overachievers and underachievers.

Table 3. Common speaking strategies used by overachievers and underachievers

		Strategy	Type of Strategy	M	A	S	SE	N	NI
Overachievers	1	advance organizers	metacognitive	4.3	52.0	32.0	14.0	2.0	0.0
	2	directed attention	metacognitive	3.9	24.0	48.0	24.0	0.0	4.0
	3	selective attention	metacognitive	4.6	68.0	24.0	6.0	2.0	0.0
	4	self-management	metacognitive	4.2	54.0	20.0	20.0	4.0	2.0
	5	advance prepration	metacognitive	3.8	28.0	42.0	16.0	14.0	0.0
	6	self monitoring	metacognitive	4.6	76.0	16.0	6.0	0.0	2.0
	7	self-reinforcement	metacognitive	4.7	80.0	14.0	4.0	2.0	0.0
	8	deduction	cognitive	4.2	48.0	32.0	14.0	2.0	4.0
	9	elaboration	cognitive	4.1	40.0	40.0	14.0	4.0	2.0
	10	transfer	cognitive	4.5	58.0	34.0	6.0	2.0	0.0
	11	summarizing	cognitive	3.8	36.0	34.0	14.0	8.0	8.0
	12	cooperation	socioaffective	4.0	34.0	40.0	16.0	8.0	2.0
Under-achievers	1	repetition	cognitive	3.5	14.0	36.0	34.0	16.0	0.0
	2	translation	cognitive	4.0	40.0	36.0	14.0	6.0	4.0
	3	contextualization	cognitive	4.1	34.0	50.0	10.0	2.0	4.0

M = Mean / A = Always / S = Sometimes / SE = Seldom / N = Never / NI = No Idea

4.1.3. Learning strategies and reading skill

Another skill which is very important is reading. Reading is a skill that helps maintaining and improving other language skills such as vocabulary, grammar, etc. For developing this skill, students use different strategies. Overachiever participants for learning the reading skill used a number of strategies, but there were nine strategies that were very common and important among them. From these nine strategies, two of them were metacognitive, five of them were cognitive, and two of them were socioaffective. On the other hand, underachievers used four strategies (one metacognitive and three cognitive) more than other strategies. Table 4, presents the mean and frequencies in percentage of the reading strategies commonly used by overachievers and underachievers.

Table 4. Common reading strategies used by overachievers and underachievers

		Strategy	Type of Strategy	M	A	S	SE	N	NI
Overachievers	1	self-management	metacognitive	4.4	60.0	26.0	6.0	6.0	2.0
	2	self-monitoring	metacognitive	4.4	62.0	24.0	8.0	4.0	2.0
	3	deduction	cognitive	4.0	32.0	40.0	22.0	6.0	0.0
	4	imagery	cognitive	4.3	58.0	24.0	12.0	4.0	2.0
	5	contextualization	cognitive	4.2	58.0	24.0	6.0	2.0	10.0
	6	inferencing	cognitive	4.6	72.0	18.0	6.0	2.0	2.0
	7	summarizing	cognitive	4.1	38.0	38.0	18.0	6.0	0.0
	8	question for clarification	socioaffective	4.2	48.0	34.0	14.0	2.0	2.0

		Strategy	Type of Strategy	M	A	S	SE	N	NI
	9	cooperation	socioaffective	4.1	36.0	44.0	12.0	6.0	2.0
Under-achievers	1	delayed production	metacognitive	3.9	36.0	34.0	18.0	12.0	0.0
	2	repetition	cognitive	3.8	24.0	48.0	16.0	10.0	2.0
	3	grouping	cognitive	4.0	34.0	46.0	12.0	6.0	2.0
	4	key word	cognitive	4.0	36.0	40.0	18.0	4.0	2.0

M = Mean / A = Always / S = Sometimes / SE = Seldom / N = Never / NI = No Idea

4.1.4. Learning strategies and writing skill

Another skill which is also important in the process of learning a language is writing. Being able to write, what to write and how to write are related to this language skill. Among the strategies that the participants used to learn writing skill, there were eight strategies that were common among overachievers. The use of these eight strategies was more than other strategies. Underachievers, on the other hand, used six strategies (two metacognitive and four cognitive) more than other strategies. Table 5, presents the mean and frequencies in percentage of the writing strategies commonly used by overachievers and underachievers.

Table 5. Common writing strategies used by overachievers and underachievers

		Strategy	Type of Strategy	M	A	S	SE	N	NI
Overachievers	1	advance organizers	metacognitive	4.3	60.0	22.0	12.0	0.0	6.0
	2	directed attention	metacognitive	4.4	60.0	26.0	8.0	4.0	2.0
	3	self-management	metacognitive	4.1	46.0	28.0	20.0	4.0	2.0
	4	self-monitoring	metacognitive	4.7	84.0	4.0	12.0	0.0	0.0
	5	note-taking	cognitive	4.3	54.0	26.0	14.0	4.0	2.0
	6	deduction	cognitive	4.5	62.0	22.0	16.0	0.0	0.0
	7	elaboration	cognitive	4.6	74.0	14.0	8.0	2.0	2.0
	8	cooperation	socioaffective	4.0	40.0	30.0	20.0	6.0	4.0
Underachievers	1	selective attention	metacognitive	4.2	48.0	30.0	20.0	0.0	2.0
	2	self-reinforcement	metacognitive	4.4	60.0	20.0	18.0	0.0	2.0
	3	repetition	cognitive	3.7	16.0	46.0	32.0	6.0	0.0
	4	translation	cognitive	4.2	54.0	20.0	24.0	0.0	4.0
	5	grouping	cognitive	3.8	30.0	32.0	28.0	6.0	4.0
	6	key word	cognitive	4.1	44.0	36.0	14.0	2.0	4.0

M = Mean / A = Always / S = Sometimes / SE = Seldom / N = Never / NI = No Idea

4.2. Qualitative findings

In this section, the qualitative findings related to the proposed research questions will be given and further discussed. Thirty participants (15 overachievers and 15 underachievers) were selected randomly to answer some questions about what strategies they used to improve their language skills. They talked about the ways they dealt with listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the following tables, the learning strategies which the participants used mostly for each skill is listed in order. These listed learning strategies were frequently and orderly used by the participants who were interviewed.

In table 6, the interviewees talked about their prefered listening strategies in dealing with listening activities:

Table 6. Overachievers and underachievers' common listenning strategies obtained from the interview

	Overachievers		Underachievers
1	media	1	simplification
2	simplification	2	media
3	grouping	3	delayed production
4	selective attention	4	selective attention
5	cooperation	5	translation
6	summarizing	6	using tape scripts while listening
7	rehearsal		

Table 7, presents the interviewees' speaking strategies in order of their use when doing a speaking task.

Table 7. Overachievers and underachievers' common speaking strategies obtained from the interview

	Overachievers		Underachievers
1	self-talking	1	rehearsal

2	role-play	2	asking for clarification
3	cooperation	3	delayed production
4	rehearsal	4	translation
5	key-word	5	key-word
6	internet	6	internet
7	asking for clarification		
8	self-reinforcement		

In table 8, the frequently and orderly used reading strategies by the interviewees are presented.

Table 8. Overachievers and underachievers' common reading strategies obtained from the interview

	Overachievers		Underachievers
1	simplification	1	simplification
2	resourcing	2	resourcing
3	selective attention	3	transfer
4	rehearsal	4	rehearsal
5	guessing	5	advance-organizers
6	recombination	6	direct attention

Table 9, common writing strategies used by the interviewees are given in order.

Table 9. Overachievers and underachievers' common writing strategies obtained from the interview

	Overachievers		Underachievers
1	cooperation	1	advance preparation
2	deduction	2	resourcing
3	rehearsal	3	grouping
4	imagery	4	imagery
5	advance-organizers	5	translation
6	selective attention	6	rehearsal
7	resourcing	7	recombination
8	advance preparation		

5. Discussion

"Learning strategies are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning. Gaining a new language necessarily involves developing four modalities (four language skills) in varying degrees and combinations. Skills are gained incrementally during the language development process (Oxford, opcit.)".

In this research, we explored the use of language learning strategies among overachievers and underachievers. For doing so, three language learning strategies (metacognitive, cognitive, and socioaffective) were selected as the first variable, and another variable was the four language skills. Then, these strategies were applied to the four language skills and the result was a questionnaire of 28 strategies respectively to the language skills. After the participants selected the strategies from the questionnaire separately for the four language skills, the mean and the frequency, in percentage, for each strategy were computed. The results taken by the questionnaire identified three types of strategies used by the participants: i) Strategies mostly common among overachievers, ii) Strategies mostly common among underachievers and, iii) Strategies common among both overachievers and underachievers. The strategies used mostly by the overachievers were also noticed to some extent by the other group and vice versa. What is important is seeking a response to these questions that one might wonder; do the strategies special for each group contribute to success in learning the language skills? Are the strategies special for overachievers, the ones that make them successful? The odds are that, what makes one group, overachievers, successful and more effective in learning the language skills is using those strategies that are applied only by the overachievers and underachievers neglect using them. The main objectives of this study were to investigate the relation between:
1) Learning strategies and language skills
2) Overachievers and language learning strategies
3) Underachievers and language learning strategies
4) Learning strategies and degree of success
5) Comparing overachievers and underachievers' use of learning strategies with the language skills

Both overachievers and underachievers attempted to use strategies and sometimes the same ones; that is, for learning one language skill, a set of strategies were used by both groups. In addition, both overachievers and underachievers were aware of the most strategies that could be used for learning the language skills, that is, both groups knew the ways to approach one skill but how to approach them and which strategies were more effective was the problem for the underachievers.

As we read in the literature review, Ghaffarzadeh (opcit.), was concerned with helping students to reach autonomy in their education. Her calculation indicated that effective students used more strategies than the less effective ones. She concluded that some of the success of effective students could be attributed to their learning strategies which is similar to what we achieved in this research. One difference between overachievers and underachievers was the amount of strategies used in approaching one skill; as it was presented, the number of strategies used by the overachievers was more than underachievers. The more strategies one group used for approaching and learning one skill, the better and more effective they learned and comprehended that skill. This factor was available among overachievers who were more successful. Furthermore, the strategies used by the

overachievers were more *'coherent'* than the strategies applied by the underachievers.

In addition, in the literature review, O'Malley and Chamot (opcit.), contrasted strategies used by beginning and intermediate students to discover the strategies L2 learners actually use. Overall, cognitive strategies were more frequent than metacognitive strategies (69.9 per cent) compared with (30 per cent). This study is in line with the abovementioned one since the number of cognitive strategies used by the overachievers (N= 18) was rather more than metacognitive ones (N= 16) in dealing with the four language skills.

An other thing is that, among the strategies used by the overachievers and underachievers for learning language skills, there were some strategies which were commonly used by the overachievers. These strategies, although were applied to some extent by underachievers, were identified to be *the success strategies*. The use of these success strategies were more among the overachievers than the other group and were perceived to be more conducive of success from the view-point of overachievers. Agaie (opcit.) also in section 2.3, argued that language learning strategies have a significant role on the improvement of the learners' oral language proficiency.

6. Concluding remarks

This study could also raise awareness in teachers to identify the strategies used by the overachievers and try to apply them on the other group in order to increase their amount of achievement. Teachers can train their students to use the strategies utilized by the overachievers and try to integrate their teaching with the strategies used by them. Moreover, by focusing on the strategies used by the overachievers in different situations, we can help underachievers leave their strategies and focus more on some other strategies taken by the overachievers.

And finally, One responsibility of schools, language centers and universities is to prepare the conditions and situations suitable for the students to learn the related language skills. As for proper and effective doing of every thing a strategy or tactic is needed, for learning language skills some strategies are needed as well. Now it is the responsibility of these educational centers that through a planned and an organized schedule, select the effective and useful strategies that are conducive to the success of their students and train them in order to have a perfect learning situation. They can help their students in using the success strategies along with their learning process and not to spend much time on less effective strategies.

The data presented, and the results displayed in tables all reveal the fact that there is a difference between overachievers and underachievers in their use of learning strategies in learning the four language skills. By comparing overachievers and underachievers' learning strategies, we can pinpoint their strategy pereferences in learning the language skills and identify the effective strategies mostly used by the overachievers. By applying these success strategies and through making appropriate conditions, we can have the underachievers follow the other group if they wish to succeed.

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Vitae

Farnoush Ahangaran got his MA in TEFL/TESOL from Islamic Azad University of Tabriz, Iran, 2007, and his BA (in the same major) from the same university in 2001. He is currently involved as a fulltime university professor and staff member at Islamic Azad university of Urmia. His main areas of interests include Applied Linguistics, vocabulary learning strategies, word association techniques, discourse, and classroom teaching methodologies.

Aram Pouyan got her MA in TEFL/TESOL from Islamic Azad University of Tabriz, Iran, 2012, and her BA in English Literature from the same university in 2007. She is currently involved as an English teacher of well-known institutes and a part-time professor at the universities of Urmia. She is mainly interested in studies on applied linguistics, classroom teaching, and vocabulary acquisition and retention