
A Study on Chinese Learning Strategies of International School Students in China

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Abstract: In this study, the empirical quantitative questionnaire method was adopted to study the use of Chinese learning strategies of 76 students from Kunming International School, Yunnan, China. This survey adopts the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) designed by Oxford (1990), which is a 5-point Likert Scale from "1 totally disagree" to "5 totally agree", and the frequency of use of learning strategies was determined based on the 7 factors' scores. SPSS descriptive analysis shows that the use frequency of overall strategies is ranked from high to low: compensation strategies, social strategies, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, memory strategies and emotion sense of strategies. Correlation analysis suggests that there is a significant and positive correlation between age and Chinese learning strategies. Suggestions are offered for teachers to cultivate and form students' learning strategies, i.e., adjusting and controlling of the learning process, giving full play to students' cognitive ability, imparting effective methods of memory, regulating learning emotions, attaching importance to the stage of learning and development, and paying attention to the impact of individual differences. To sum up, teachers should emphasize the development stage of Chinese learning and the full play of the students' cognitive ability. On this basis, students can be helped to cultivate and improve their ability to use Chinese learning strategies.

Keywords: Chinese International Education, Learning Strategies, International School

1. Background

Learning strategies generally refer to the methods and behaviors used by learners in the learning process, which reflects the learning rules of learners and cognitive style. In the process of learning a second language or a foreign language, learners will consciously apply certain learning strategies to make efforts to learn as expected; at the same time, learners' cognitive level and individual differences also influence the use of learning strategies. The study of learning strategies abroad mainly focuses on the definition, classification and the main factors influencing learning strategies aspects. This research is based on the classification system of learning strategies proposed by Oxford [1], and Oxford [1] divides learning strategies into direct strategies and indirect strategies. Direct strategies consist of memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies, and indirect strategies include metacognitive strategies,

emotional strategies and social strategies. Oxford [1] emphasizes that direct strategies and indirect strategies are interrelated and functional in language learning strategies. On the basis of the classification system, Oxford [1] also designed and compiled a set of diagnostic table (SILL) of language learning strategies. After several revisions, the scale has become a widely used standardized scale for measuring language learning strategies.

The research results related to learning strategies of Chinese international education in China began to emerge in the late 1990s. Yang [2] investigated with a questionnaire the relationship between the commonly used learning strategies and learning effects of advanced Chinese learners, which is the first study related in China. Then some other Chinese scholars made empirical studies on Chinese learning strategies from different angles. Most previous researches

focused on the use of learning strategies, and the subjects were mainly selected from college students (both Chinese and foreigners) studying in China [3-13]. This paper sampled primary and middle school students from Kunming International School so as to explore their use of Chinese learning strategies. Hopefully, this survey will expand the scope of subject groups and bring some new enlightenment to Chinese international education.

2. Methodology

2.1. Samples

The participants in this survey were 76 students in the three grades of primary, middle and high school of Kunming International School. They studied Chinese as an elective course, and the study years were different. The subjects were all aged from 10 to 18 years old. The distribution of demographic information of the samples is shown in table 1.

Table 1. Year level, sex and nationality.

	Year Level			Gender		Nationality	
	Primary School	Middle School	High School	Male	Female	European and American	Asian
N	15	41	20	28	48	55	21
Percentage	19.7	54	26.3	36.8	63.2	72.4	27.6
Total N	76			76		76	

2.2. Instrument

This study adopts the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning(SILL) designed by Oxford [1], which is a 5-point Likert Scale from "totally disagree" to "totally agree", and the frequency of use of learning strategies was determined based on each item's score. The SPSS reliability analysis indicates that the overall reliability of the questionnaire is 0.9407.

2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

78 questionnaires were distributed to the students from Kunming International School, and they were asked to fill the survey according to the actual situation under the supervision of teachers, of which 76 were valid. SPSS1 1.5 was carried out as follows:

- (1) Reliability analysis of the questionnaire to evaluate the

reliability of the questionnaire;

- (2) Descriptive statistics to measure the overall use of Chinese learning strategies;
- (3) Correlation analysis to examine the correlation between individual factors and learning strategies.
- (4) One-Way Anova to analyze differences between demographic information and the use of Chinese learning strategies.

3. Results

3.1. The Use of Chinese Learning Strategies

According to the collected data, descriptive analysis of the six types of learning strategies were presented in table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the overall use of Chinese learning strategies.

Learning Strategies	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation
Memory Strategies	1.00	4.00	2.5643	.64093
Cognitive Strategies	1.07	4.00	2.6335	.61493
Compensation Strategies	1.00	5.00	3.1776	.666574
Meta-cognitive Strategies	1.00	4.00	2.7251	.82302
Emotional Strategies	1.00	5.00	2.4079	.82749
Social Strategies	1.00	5.00	2.9715	.95351

It can be seen from table 2 that the mean value of the use of the six Chinese learning strategies is between 2.4--3. 2, which suggests the subjects' use of six Chinese learning strategies is average. Compensation strategies and social strategies were most used, followed by metacognitive strategies and cognitive strategies. Memory strategies and emotional strategies were least used.

3.2. The Correlation Between Gender, Nationality and Age and Chinese Learning Strategies

Pearson correlation coefficient was utilized to analyze the relationship between gender, nationality and age and Chinese learning strategies, and the result is shown in Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 3. The correlation between gender and Chinese learning strategies.

		Memory strategies	Cognitive strategies	Compensation strategies	Meta-cognitive strategies	Emotional strategies	Social strategies
Gender	Correlation coefficients	.087	.004	.102	-.057	.163	.164
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.457	.971	.380	.627	.159	.156

••Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

• Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 4. The correlation between nationality and Chinese learning strategies.

		Memory strategies	Cognitive strategies	Compensation strategies	Meta-cognitive strategies	Emotional strategies	Social strategies
Nationality	Correlation coefficients	-.003	.216	.145	.048	-.157	.107
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.997	.061	.210	.682	.174	.359

••Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

• Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As shown in table 3 and table 4, there is no significant correlation between gender and nationality and the use of these six learning strategies, i. e., gender and nationality, as

relatively fixed variables in individual factors, did not cause changes in the use of learning strategies, and they were not naturally and necessarily correlated.

Table 5. The correlation between age and Chinese learning strategies.

		Memory strategies	Cognitive strategies	Compensation strategies	Meta-cognitive strategies	Emotional strategies	Social strategies
Age	Correlation coefficients	.289 *	.323 **	.176	.276 *	.032	.359 **
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	.004	.127	.016	.781	.001

••Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

• Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

The data in table 5 indicates that there is a significant and positive correlation between age and the four learning strategies, but the correlation coefficient is weak, that is, memory strategies ($r = 0.289$, $p < 0.05$), cognitive strategies ($r=0.323$, $p < 0.01$), metacognitive strategies ($r=0.276$, $p < 0.05$), social strategies ($r= 0.359$, $p < 0.01$), and there was no significant correlation between age and compensation strategies and emotional strategies.

3.3. One-Way Anova Analysis of Gender, Nationality, Age and Chinese Learning Strategies

We investigated the differences in the use of Chinese learning strategies in terms of gender, nationality and age by using One-Way Anova, as shown in Table 6. The analysis in Table 6 reveals that the significant value of gender in various learning strategies is greater than 0.05, explaining that there were no statistically significant differences between the boys and the girls in the use of Chinese learning strategies.

Table 6. One-Way Anova of gender and Chinese learning strategies.

Learning Strategies	Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig.
Memory strategies	.232	.232	.560	.457
Cognitive strategies	.000	.000	.001	.971
Compensation strategies	.346	.346	.778	.380
Meta-cognitive strategies	.163	.163	.238	.627
Emotional strategies	1.369	1.369	2.027	.159
Social strategies	1.838	1.838	2.050	.156

Table 7. One-Way Anova of Nationality and Chinese learning strategies.

Learning Strategies	Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig.
Memory strategies	.000	.000	.001	.977
Cognitive strategies	.1.322	1.322	.3619	.061
Compensation strategies	.703	.703	1.600	.210
Meta-cognitive strategies	.116	.116	.169	.682
Emotional strategies	1.273	1.273	1.882	.174
Social strategies	.775	.775	.851	.359

It can be observed from table 7 that the significant value of nationality in various learning strategies is greater than 0.05, meaning no statistically significant differences were found. Asian students frequently use understanding, practice, assistance and cooperation in Chinese learning while European and American students tend to manage and regulate their learning emotions. European and American students and Asian students use similar strategies in memorizing, reviewing and coordinating of learning activities.

Table 8. One-Way Anova of age and Chinese learning strategies.

Learning Strategies	Sum of Squares	df	F	Sig.
Memory strategies	4.423	.553	1.404	.211
Cognitive strategies	.5.937	.742	2.217	.037
Compensation strategies	4.748	.593	1.396	.215
Meta-cognitive strategies	10.057	.754	2.067	.051
Emotional strategies	6.029	1.273	1.114	.365
Social strategies	13.268	1.658	2.023	.057

Table 8 indicates that students of different ages have no significant difference in the use of memory strategies, compensation strategies and emotional strategies. The significant values of metacognitive strategies and social strategies were .051 and .057 respectively, close to .05, explaining the significant differences to some degree. The value of cognitive strategies was .037, less than 0.05, showing that significant differences were reported in the use of cognitive strategies among students of different ages.

4. Discussion

4.1. Overall Situation of Learning Strategies

In terms of the use of learning strategies, the most used by the sample students are compensation strategies and social strategies. None of the students in the survey were proficient in Chinese, so in the process of learning, they would naturally choose some strategies to make up for the deficiency of Chinese knowledge and skills. In addition, the real learning and living in a language environment, in order to achieve communicative purposes, will also prompt them to use social strategies frequently. Instead, the students used less memory strategies and emotional strategies, and this research result is consistent with the survey conclusions made by Jiang [4], Lin and Lu [6] that foreign students used less memory strategies and emotional strategies. The less use of memory strategies may be related to the students' common memorization methods and they did not received the memorization training like their Chinese counterparts who study mainly by memorization. The sampled students were in the transitional stage of physical and mental development, and they might easily change their emotional learning, unable to regulate effectively the emotions generated during the Chinese learning. This is probably the reason why they rarely used emotional strategies.

4.2. The Correlation and Differences Between Gender, Nationality, Age and Learning Strategies

According to the survey, there was a significant positive correlation between age and memory strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and social strategies. This suggests that age impacts the use of memory methods, language understanding, coordination of learning activities and cooperative learning strategies. As the age increases, the use of memory strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and social strategies will also rise. Age has less to do with the auxiliary language expressions, and the management use of emotional strategies.

There were some differences in the use of learning strategies in regard to gender and nationality, but the differences were not significant. Compared with boys, girls are more likely to be proactive. Girls can use various learning strategies to improve the level of Chinese, effectively use memory skills and review in time, and express themselves in Chinese by auxiliary means, and they are also better at regulating their own learning emotions. Boys and girls are generally similar in this kind of understanding and practicing strategies in Chinese learning, but boys are more inclined to learn Chinese through coordinated learning activities and cognitive processing.

As for nationality differences, compared with students from European and American countries, Asian students pay more attention to the study of language itself. This finding disagrees with the conclusion reached by Jiang [4] that native European students tend to use social strategies, while native Asian students often use emotional strategies. Usually, Asian students are introverted, inclined to traditional learning methods, and often choose corresponding learning strategies according to their learning needs. The open culture and social atmosphere have created the extroverted learning character of European and American students. They pay more attention to their learning emotions and are good at expressing themselves.

Significant differences emerged in the use of cognitive strategies in terms of age. There is a tendency of synchronous development between age and cognitive level. As for younger students, the understanding of new knowledge is still at the superficial stage, and they do not have the ability to make full use of cognitive strategies to solve existing problems in learning. With the growth of age and the improvement of cognitive level, there are certain advantages in knowledge understanding, and the use frequency of cognitive strategies will be correspondingly higher. This finding confirms the statement of Brown et al. (1983) [14] that older children will use more flexible and miscellaneous learning strategies than younger children.

5. Cultivation and Formation of Learning Strategies

5.1. Adjusting and Controlling of the Learning Process

First, teachers should activate and maintain students' good attention, emotion and motivation during learning tasks and actual learning activities. The students will be given a state of focused attention, good mood, and positive motivation while

completing study tasks and carrying out study activities. The effectiveness of learning strategies has a positive result. Second, teachers should help students analyze learning situations and encourage them to ask questions and make their own study plans. Students, through the specific analysis of the study materials, learning time, learning environment and learning tasks, can make a study plan and choose learning methods related to learning contexts. Thirdly, teachers should help to maintain and correct students' learning behavior, develop the habit of self-evaluation of learning results. When implementing a learning plan, students should check whether the learning behavior is consistent with various learning factors. It is estimated that the learning effect of the adopted learning method can be achieved. After each specific learning activity, students need to be encouraged to carry out self-learning, and to evaluate it as feedback for this study and prepare themselves for a new learning behavior.

5.2. Giving Full Play to Students' Cognitive Ability

In elementary school, it is enough to keep them in a natural state of strategic use, without necessarily going beyond their cognitive development to teach them all the learning strategies one by one. Students from junior and senior high schools are in the late stage of strategic development period. Without teachers' assistance, students can consciously use appropriate learning strategies to improve learning, and are able to adjust the use of strategies according to specific task requirements. At this stage of development, teachers only need to help students in junior and senior high schools to supplement some common learning methods, such as reading skills, pronunciation methods, writing standards, etc.. Teachers should properly train students in learning strategies, providing them with more choices so that they can fully use their cognitive skills and achieve a greater success.

5.3 Imparting Effective Methods of Memory

Teachers should make a point of training students' memory ability and help them master some effective memory strategies. For example, try to explain new words by associating them with some principles of word formation and provide some evidence for students to understand and memorize the combination of sound, form and meaning, which can deepen students' memory. Using pictures, audiograms, and games will produce a good short-term memory effect, at the same time, the planned review, which should be emphasized, is not only the practical method to consolidate the knowledge memory, but also can help to transform life knowledge into growth memory. All kinds of methods can be used in combination to achieve unexpected memory effect.

5.4. Regulating Learning Emotions

While teaching Chinese, helping students learn to regulate and control learning emotions is also one of the teaching tasks of teachers. Teachers should, through observation, learn

about students' emotional problems in learning, and make targeted solutions to guide students to encourage themselves to take care of their learning emotions and make timely adjustments. Teachers should always ask them about their feelings and difficulties in learning Chinese and offer help to reduce their anxiety, and teach them the ways to relax and distract themselves, such as participating in extracurricular activities, listening to music, and engaging in activities of their own interest. These methods can effectively control or alleviate bad learning emotions so as to support Chinese language learning.

5.5. Attaching Importance to the Stage of Learning and Development

In the aspect of learning strategy training in primary school, teachers should attach importance to teaching appropriate learning methods and guide students to use them consciously and master relevant learning strategies to solve specific problems in learning, and to expanding students' thinking mode, and cultivating their planning and control of knowledge acquisition. The learning strategies of junior middle school students are in the development stage, and the knowledge experience and learning methods are gradually enriched and improved, and the awareness of autonomous learning is increased. In teaching, teachers should take seriously the setting of problem situations and encourage them to think actively, and simultaneously train their cognitive regulation. The later stage of learning strategic development is completed in the high school stage, and so teachers should fully trust their autonomous learning ability, help develop their habit of using learning strategies to solve problems independently. Teachers should also assist students in targeting different problems and conduct relevant guidance when necessary.

5.6. Paying Attention to the Impact of Individual Differences

First, teachers should adopt the principle of seeking common ground while reserving differences, and in the meantime, give full play to the role of individual factors in promoting learning strategies, and actively cultivate common effective learning strategies. Secondly, through the form of stratified teaching and classified guidance, the teaching that truly adapts to the difference of learning strategies can be realized. The learning strategies of boys and girls can be developed in a complementary way. In the allocation of learning tasks teachers should take into account the advantages of boys' learning plan, adjustment and control and make these advantages be given full play while teachers should pay attention to making girls play a positive role in the control of emotional factors. In this way students are encouraged to cooperate in learning, so that different strategies permeate each other through cooperative learning. As for the teaching content and methods the impact of country differences should be taken into account. Teachers should not only teach the basic knowledge of language, but also attach

importance to the emotional release of students. Teachers should complement rich language materials as much as possible in the teaching process, adopt various teaching methods to make the difference of learning strategies play a positive role in the common learning and teaching environment.

6. Conclusion

Most of the learning strategies that the international school students often use are driven by the need for learning and communication. Unfortunately, emotional strategies that play an important role in language learning are rarely used in this study. Age shows a significant positive correlation with memory strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and social strategies, and there are significant differences in the use of cognitive strategies related to age. Based on the quantitative information about learning methods obtained from the survey, Chinese teachers in international schools can get to know the Chinese learning situation of students and the influence of individual factors on Chinese learning.

Teachers should pay attention to cultivating students' use of emotional strategies, so that students can effectively control and regulate their learning emotions in Chinese learning, and try to avoid negative effects of bad emotions on Chinese learning. At the same time, teachers should also emphasize the development stage of learning and the full play of the students' cognitive ability. On this basis, students can be helped to cultivate and improve their ability to use learning strategies.

In this case, students' Chinese scores were not collected, and there was no effective analysis of the relationship between the use of learning strategies and their Chinese proficiency. Therefore, the data information needs to be perfected in further research. In addition, language learning is influenced by many other factors besides learning strategies, including such factors as learners' character, intelligence and their own learning ability. It is necessary to make a comprehensive analysis of other relevant variables and draw more objective and accurate conclusions by expanding the scope of investigation scientifically.

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Biography



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