

From Curriculum Policy to Classroom Practice: Examining the Implementation of Language Learning Strategy Instruction in EFL Secondary Education

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Abstract: Despite the established role of language learning strategies (LLS) in facilitating learning and fostering learner autonomy, research shows that many university students in an English as a foreign language context exhibit a limited LLS repertoire and demonstrate limited strategic competence. This study investigates LLS instruction to students transitioning from secondary to higher education in Morocco. The qualitative case study examines the curriculum guidelines with regard to LLS instruction, the extent to which the textbook materials align with the guidelines, and LLS instruction implementation in classroom practice. Data was collected through document analysis and observation of lessons taught to a class of final-year high school students. Findings reveal that, with some limitations, the curriculum provides the rationale for LLS instruction and articulates a comprehensive theory-informed vision recommending explicit and embedded LLS teaching, metacognitive awareness, and strategy transfer to foster learner autonomy. The textbook partially realizes the curriculum vision through explicit *Study Skills* sections and embedded strategic teaching. Classroom teaching of LLS failed to effectively enact the curriculum guidelines and to leverage the affordances of the textbook. LLS was sidelined in classroom practice due to time constraints and to the baccalaureate examination preparation pressure. The findings highlight the importance of the systematic alignment of curriculum policy, textbook materials, and classroom practice in promoting learner autonomy and LLS competence. The findings also indicate that the LLS deficiency among EFL university students may result from LLS instruction inadequacy at the secondary education level. Incorporating strategic competence assessment in secondary education examinations and emphasizing LLS in educational materials and in teacher pre-service and professional development programs would contribute to better preparing high school students for university study, where autonomous and strategic learning skills are essential for academic success.

Keywords: *Language Learning Strategies; Learner Autonomy; Learner Training; Learning to Learn; EFL Learners; Curriculum Policy; Learning Strategy Instruction.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The transformation of the roles of teachers and learners has been a natural outcome of the shift in language pedagogy from teacher-centered to learner-centered. In approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Learning (TBL), where teachers have been repositioned as facilitators and learners as active participants (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), the learners' ability to take charge of their own learning remains decisive in the success of this transformation. Learner autonomy is especially important in an English as a foreign language context due to the limited exposure to and use of the language the classroom instruction provides compared to naturalistic acquisition environments

(Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Equipping EFL learners with effective language learning strategies (LLS)—approaches and techniques facilitating comprehension, retention, and use of new language (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990)—is a crucial means in helping them achieve their learning objectives.

The importance of LLS instruction in fostering learner autonomy and lifelong learning has been well-documented. However, the effectiveness of this instruction depends on sound implementation at both the curriculum and classroom practice levels. Research has shown inconsistencies in this regard across varied educational contexts (Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Griffiths, 2013). In the context of Morocco, learner autonomy and learning strategy instruction are among the

components of the curriculum, yet research examining whether and how these curriculum recommendations translate into classroom practice is scarce.

The present study attempts to bridge this gap by investigating the LLS instruction implementation in secondary education in Morocco, with a focus on final-year high school classes. Equipping high school final-year students with effective LLS is particularly important, as they are preparing to integrate tertiary education, where autonomous and effective learning skills are essential for academic success. The study examines the extent to which the curriculum promotes LLS instruction and textbook materials and classroom instruction align with the curriculum directives in this English as a foreign language (EFL) context. Aiming to contribute to our understanding of the interplay of language education policy, pedagogical material, and instructional practice concerning learning strategies instruction, this study is guided by three questions:

- To what extent does the secondary English language teaching curriculum policy in Morocco foster instruction of language learning strategies?
- To what extent do textbook materials align with the English language teaching curriculum directives with regard to language learning strategies?
- How do teachers implement learning strategy instruction in the EFL classroom in Morocco?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this review of the literature related to language learning strategies, I examine the conceptualization of LLS and the different definitions proposed by scholarship, present taxonomies of LLS, make the case for LLS explicit instruction, discuss LLS implementation, and overview LLS research in EFL and secondary education contexts.

Different definitions of LLS are proposed in the literature. Rubin (1975) provided an early conceptualization of LLS as “the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge” (p. 43). Rubin emphasized strategies as operations and routines that facilitate obtaining, storing, retrieving, and using information. In refining this definition, O’Malley & Chamot (1990) characterize LLS as “the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information” (p. 1). The concept is further expanded to “specific actions taken by the learner to make the learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990, p. 8).

Arguing that these definitions were overly static and highlighting the learner’s agency and intentionality, Griffiths (2013) proposes the definition “activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning” (p. 49). This definition accords with more recent conceptualizations emphasizing the dynamic and situation-bound nature of LLS, including Oxford’s (2017) revised framework incorporating a complex, dynamic systems perspective. In this framework, LLS are seen as emerging

from interactions between learner characteristics, task demands, and contextual factors. Despite this evolution in conceptualization, learner autonomy—the learner capacity to take charge of their own learning—remains a central concept in LLS. Benson (2011) presents different dimensions of autonomy. Technical autonomy refers to strategies and skills, psychological autonomy to attitudes and motivation, and political-critical autonomy to awareness of power relations in education. A multidimensional view is particularly important as it informs taxonomizing LLS.

Among the classifications of LLS are O’Malley & Chamot’s (1990): metacognitive strategies (planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning); cognitive strategies (direct manipulation of learning materials, note-taking, summarizing, deducing, elaborating, and inferencing); and social-affective strategies (interacting with others and managing emotions). Oxford (1990) classifies LLS into direct (memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies that directly involve the target language) and indirect (metacognitive, affective, and social strategies that support learning but do not directly involve language use). This direct-indirect taxonomy was criticized on the basis that strategies serve multiple functions simultaneously (Tseng et al., 2006; Woodrow, 2005). Griffiths (2013) proposes a simplified tripartite framework: cognitive strategies (mental processing), metacognitive strategies (managing learning), and social strategies (interacting with others). Nunan (2015) proposes a more comprehensive classification including (1) cognitive strategies (classifying, predicting, inferencing), (2) interpersonal strategies (cooperating, role-playing), (3) linguistic strategies (practicing, using context, summarizing), (4) affective strategies (personalizing, self-evaluating, reflecting), and (5) creative strategies (brainstorming). Regardless of how LLS are taxonomized, what is important is teachers’ awareness of the range of available strategies and their ability to foster the development of a rich and varied learner strategy repertoire.

Research has demonstrated that the development of a varied repertoire and an effective use of LLS are achievable through instruction. In a seminal work, Rubin (1975) studied the profile of good language learners and concluded that they use different language learning behaviors that can be adopted by other learners. It is, therefore, possible to alter the language learning behavior of foreign language learners by means of instruction through training in the use of strategies that promote and facilitate language learning (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989). O’Malley et al. (1985) found that ESL learners who received explicit metacognitive and cognitive strategy training outperformed control groups on speaking tasks, and Oxford et al. (1992) reported that strategy training improved reading comprehension and vocabulary learning. In a synthesis of 61 studies, Plonsky (2011) found that the studies confirm the effectiveness of LLS instruction, and Ardasheva and Tretter (2013) reported similar findings for lower-proficiency learners. With the converging findings regarding the benefits of explicit LLS instruction, Grenfell and Haris (2017) stress that “the question is no longer whether to teach strategies, but how to teach them effectively” (p. 204).

O'Malley & Chamot's (1990) recommendation to embed LLS instruction in regular language classes, rather than teaching LLS in dedicated lessons, has been shown by scholarship to have strong effect on learners' attainment (Plonsky, 2011; Ardasheva & Tretter, 2013). The argument for integrating LLS instruction in language classes is that this approach better demonstrates LLS practical applications and facilitates transfer to new tasks. The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; O'Malley, 1994) is a model within the embedded instruction approach. This framework consists of the five phases: preparation (teacher identifies students' current strategies), presentation (teacher explains and models new strategy), practice (students try the strategies with teacher's support), evaluation (students assess strategy effectiveness), and expansion (students transfer the strategies to a new context).

Another five-stage model was developed by Grenfell & Harris (1999) encompassing (1) awareness-raising (discussing current approaches), (2) modeling (teacher demonstrates strategies), (3) general practice (trying strategies with familiar content), (4) action planning (students set goals for strategy use), and (5) focused practice (applying strategies to new content). Yet another LLS instruction model was devised by Oxford (2017)—the Strategic Self-Regulation (S2R) Model. The model proposes a dynamic and flexible approach responsive to the learners' emerging needs and follows a progression designed to move students from teacher dependency to autonomous strategy transfer. The order of phases in this framework is the pre-diagnostic phase, pre-teaching strategies, the intervention/explicit instruction stage, practice and contextual transfer, and post-diagnostic and knowledge construction. With the rich repertoire of LLS and varied approaches to their instruction, a body of research has focused on investigating LLS use in EFL contexts.

Tseng et al. (2006) investigated LLS use by Taiwanese EFL learners and concluded that self-regularity capacity—both metacognitive and motivational dimensions—was a better predictor of language learning achievement than specific strategy use. Similar research was conducted by Gao (2006) in the context of China. Gao reported that university students mainly used cognitive strategies with limited metacognitive monitoring. Park (2011) found that Korean high school students did not use LLS systematically even though they were aware of many strategies. In the same vein, Dabarera et al. (2014) reported that Omani secondary education students' reading comprehension improved following strategy instruction but noted the need for sustained implementation of LLS instruction to yield positive effects. Likewise, a positive effect of metacognitive strategy teaching on Iranian EFL language proficiency and autonomy was the outcome of a study by Nosratinia and Zaker (2017). On the other hand, both Alhaysony (2017) in the context of Saudi Arabia and Bouziane (2015) in Morocco reported a limited use of metacognitive strategies among university students, a deficiency Barnard and Phan (2015) attributed, in the context of Vietnam, to the lack of explicit strategy instruction in secondary school.

While early conceptualizations of LLS as techniques for acquiring language have evolved to recognize their context-dependent nature affected by learner characteristics, tasks, and environments, LLS taxonomies have developed to encompass metacognitive, cognitive, and social-affective strategies. Nonetheless, consensus among scholars remains regarding the centrality of learner autonomy and strategy repertoire development in effective language learning. Instructional models have been devised to provide structured frameworks for fostering learner autonomy and strategy repertoire development through instruction. However, research has demonstrated a deficiency in effective LLS use by students in different EFL contexts, which calls into question LLS instruction implementation.

In light of the importance of language learning strategies and LLS instruction to EFL learners and the body of literature discussed in this section, the present study examines LLS teaching to students transitioning into higher education in Morocco. This investigation examines this instruction at the level of the curriculum guidelines, the textbook materials, and classroom practice.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative case study of the implementation and practices of LLS instruction in secondary education in Morocco. The data was collected by means of analysis of the curriculum guidelines and textbook contents, and through classroom observation.

➤ Participants

This study focused on a second-year baccalaureate class (the final year in secondary education in Morocco), as these students were preparing to transition into higher education. The 37 participants—24 female and 13 male students—were 17 to 19 years of age, all Moroccan Arabic (Darija) native speakers, with 6 students speaking Tamazight as an additional language. The teacher reported the English proficiency level of the students to have been in the A2 to B1 range. The teacher was a mid-forties Moroccan male, holder of a bachelor's degree in English studies and a state-issued professional teaching certificate, with 22 years of teaching experience. Authorization to observe the class had been obtained, and the names of the teacher and students were not used to ensure confidentiality.

➤ Data Collection

Data collection occurred over a period of two months, using the two instruments, document analysis and observation, for data triangulation. Data collection occurred over three phases: (1) analysis of the curriculum policy, (2) analysis of the textbook in use, and (3) classroom observation.

• Document Analysis

The *English Language Guidelines for Secondary Schools: Common Core, First Year, and Second Year Baccalaureate* (Ministry of National Education, 2007) is the official document that provides the curriculum guideline for teaching the English language in secondary education in

Morocco. A chapter within this document is dedicated to learner autonomy and learner training, outlining the pedagogical principles and objectives to be achieved by students with regard to language learning strategies. This document was analyzed for references to LLS, instructional approaches to LLS, and sought LLS instruction outcomes.

Ticket 2 English Student's Book was the textbook used for second-year Baccalaureate classes. This topic-based textbook includes ten units. Each unit revolves around a theme and contains seven parts. The parts provide practice, activities, tasks, and exercises in listening, reading, speaking, writing, grammar, vocabulary, study skills, and culture. Additionally, two extra activities are provided after every other unit: *Work on your Project* and *Check your Progress*. The textbook was analyzed for any inclusion of explicit, implicit, embedded, or separate LLS instruction, types of strategies addressed, and opportunities for strategy practice and transfer.

• Classroom Observation

Each of the classroom observations lasted 60 minutes, and a total of 20 classes were observed. During classroom observation, the researcher sat at the back and took field notes without interfering with the lessons. The observation protocol employed was adapted from Chamot and O'Malley's (1994) CALLA observation scheme and Macaro's (2001) strategy instruction framework. The focus during classroom observation was on the following:

- ✓ Evidence of explicit LLS instruction
- ✓ Evidence of embedded/implicit LLS instruction
- ✓ Separate and integrated LLS teaching
- ✓ Types of LLS addressed
- ✓ Explanation of strategy purposes and benefits by the teacher
- ✓ Opportunities for strategy practice and transfer by the students
- ✓ Student response to strategy instruction

➤ Data Analysis

A three-phase coding scheme was followed to analyze the curriculum guidelines and textbook contents. In phase 1, different parts of the documents were coded. This initial coding was based on the research questions and emerging themes during data collection. This protocol included codes such as *metacognitive strategy*, *explicit strategy*, *learner autonomy rationale*, *guidance for implementation*, *opportunity for strategy practice*, and *strategy recursiveness*. Phase 2 consisted of pattern identification. The coded parts of the documents were reviewed to identify patterns within and across documents. The patterns the researcher sought to identify included LLS receiving emphasis in either the curriculum or the textbook, the frequency of strategy-related content across the textbook units, alignment of recommended LLS instructional approaches in the curriculum and implementation in the textbook, modeling of LLS, and LLS transfer to different contexts. In phase three, the identified patterns were interpreted in light of the research questions and the literature on LLS. With regard to observation data, field notes taken during classroom observation were analyzed and

grouped. Notes regarding LLS explaining and modeling by the teacher and practice, for example, were grouped under *strategy instruction approaches*. Within-lesson and across-lessons comparisons were carried out to identify consistencies or variations in LLS instruction.

IV. FINDINGS

This study investigated LLS instruction in secondary education in Morocco through a multi-layered examination of how curriculum specifications translate into classroom practice. The findings are organized according to the research questions to address the extent to which the curriculum guidelines emphasize LLS instruction, if and how these guidelines are translated into teaching materials in the textbook in use, and if and how LLS instruction is enacted in classroom practice.

Analysis of the *English Language Guidelines for Secondary Schools: Common Core, First Year, and Second Year Baccalaureate* revealed that the curriculum incorporates LLS as an integral component of effective language teaching and that there is significant emphasis on learner autonomy. Consider the statement in the policy document that “learner training for lifelong learning is omnipresent throughout the 5 Cs above. All the curricula and syllabi need to target enabling learners to learn how to learn and be able to carry on learning by themselves, even when they graduate” (pp. 5-6). Learner autonomy is defined in the curriculum directives as “independence, self-direction, development, and involvement” (p. 45), and LLS instruction is defined as “intervention to help learners make regular use of various language learning strategies in order to learn the language effectively, operate competently in real-life situations, and solve real-life tasks” (p. 46). Moreover, an overview of different LLS—based on Oxford's (1990) framework—and detailed LLS instruction implementation guidelines are provided (pp. 46-47). The suggested theory-informed cyclical and recursive instructional framework (pp. 47-48) includes the nine components:

- Evaluate the existing repertoire of strategies learners are aware of and make use of. The teacher starts from the familiar zone to move to the new or unfamiliar later.
- Invite learners to perform a task or a series of tasks, and then highlight the benefits of using any of the strategies specified (centering one's learning, inferencing, rehearsing, encouraging oneself, etc).
- Build on a follow-up discussion to introduce an alternative strategy to use in a meaningful context and with a realistic task. Provide reasons for its use, and indicate how learners might benefit from its use.
- Present one or a few alternatives at a time, because overwhelming learners with multiple strategies might be inhibiting and might run against the goal of teaching.
- Set goals and time limits for the recognition and practice of these strategies, and consider individual style differences.
- Model these strategies and guide learners throughout the various paths of learning, observation, experimentation, and evaluation.

- Find ways of convincing learners to transfer the learned strategies to other learning contexts or other subject matters (e.g., French, Arabic, history and geography, etc.).
- Recycle these strategies in practice and encourage learners to use them in connection with the other known or familiar ones.
- Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the new strategies, either in isolation or in connection with other already known ones, provide constructive feedback, and create opportunities to start the process again so as to reinforce strengths and compensate for weaknesses.

The guidelines provide specific learning strategies second-year baccalaureate students are expected to master upon completion of the syllabus (mainly cognitive and metacognitive and related to reading and listening). The

curriculum document, furthermore, encourages teachers to train students in self-assessment, to explore textbooks for opportunities for LLS, and supplement them with additional material.

Analysis of *Ticket 2 English Student's Book* revealed LLS instruction incorporation through separate explicit teaching (*Study Skills* sections) and embedded teaching within the language development sections. A message to the student on page two of this course book states that study skills activities (*Learn how to learn and develop your study skills*) are included with the aim of helping students improve their study skills in order to become independent learners, especially because they will sit for the baccalaureate exam and get prepared for higher education. The study skills activities in the learner training sections of the textbook, separate explicit LLS teaching, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Study Skills Sections in Ticket 2 English Student's Book.

Units	Learner Training Sections	Focus
1. The gift of youth	Manage your time Study how to manage your time	Time management and organization Monitoring learning
2. Humor	Study vocabulary effectively	Tips and techniques to boost your vocabulary
3. Formal, Informal and Non-formal Education	Learn about reading model "SQ4R"	Improve your reading skills SQ4R model: survey, question, read, recite, review and reflect
4. Sustainable Development	Improve your Internet skills	Navigating the Internet
5. Women and Power	Learn how to think critically	Characteristics of critical thinkers
6. Cultural Values	Keep records of your study	Ways to record and take notes about your study
7. Citizenship	Study groups	Advantages How to form a study group Discussion
8. International Organizations	Improve memory techniques	Use acronyms Use chaining Use concept mapping
9. Advances in Science and Technology	Take notes effectively	Different formats and organization of notes
10. Brain Drain	Get prepared to succeed in exams and tests	Tips for succeeding in an exam

Except for the study skills section under Unit 7, focusing on affective strategies (collaborative learning), the focus throughout the textbook is mainly on cognitive and metacognitive strategies. In addition, the pattern in the learning strategies sections consists of presenting the strategy and asking the students to try it. Moreover, the strategies are presented once and not revisited across units, with the exception of note-taking appearing in Unit 6 and Unit 9. Furthermore, there is a lack of modeling the strategy process and guidance on transfer to different contexts. For instance, in the critical thinking section under Unit 5, characteristics of critical thinkers are presented—asking questions, examining evidence, and avoiding hasty conclusions—and then identifying valid arguments, recognizing assumptions, and analyzing cause-and-effect relationships are provided as activities. Still, this section fails to provide sustained practice and guidance on the transfer of critical thinking to other contexts.

LLS instruction is also embedded in the listening and reading activities of the textbook. Table 2 reports the learning skills to be developed in the listening and reading activities of different units of the textbook. The students are instructed to apply specific cognitive LLS within language skills development activities. However, some implicit LLS instruction shortcomings are noticeable throughout the textbook. There is a lack of opportunities for metacognitive reflection by the students (evaluation of strategy effectiveness and consideration of strategy transfer to different listening and reading situations) and an absence of scaffolding in building LLS competence (progressively more challenging application and opportunities for autonomous selection of strategies by the students).

Table 2 Embedded Learning Strategies in Listening and Reading Activities.

Listening Strategies	Reading Strategies
Listen and transfer information	Read and check predictions
Listen and guess	Read and take notes
Listen for details	Read and distinguish fact from opinion
Understand and interpret spoken texts	Read and infer
Listen and identify spoken input	Read for writer's attitude
Listen for gist	Read and sequence
Listen and take notes	Read and scan
Listen and check predictions	Read and locate reference
Listen and summarize	Read and recall information
Listen for specific information	Read and skim
Listen and compare	Read and identify the main idea
Listen for key words	Read and survey
	Read and transfer information
	Read and predict
	Read for word meaning

LLS instruction in classroom practice occurred explicitly during study skills lessons and implicitly during vocabulary, listening, and reading lessons. However, the observed LLS did not align with the curriculum recommendations. Let us consider the *Think critically* section of unit 5 as an example of explicit and direct learner training. This section was introduced by discussing the characteristics of critical thinkers listed on page 78. The teacher then instructed the students to work on task 1, where they had to decide if the statements provided were valid and logical. Most of the statements represent a rush to judgment. The students provided answers, and the teacher confirmed the flawed reasoning the students pointed out. The LLS implicit instruction regularly occurred during vocabulary, listening, and reading lessons. For instance, the teacher often implicitly encouraged the students to employ the strategy of using the context to infer the meaning of a word. The teacher also usually instructed the students to take notes and to copy diagrams (concept maps) into their notebooks.

Other instances of embedded learning strategy instruction included the teacher instructing the students to read a text a first time to deduce the main idea, a second time to look for specific information, and a third time to find out what the author's intention was. Similarly, when teaching listening, the teacher encouraged the students to listen for gist and then listen selectively for specific information and listen for the implied message. On the whole, the observed LLS classroom instruction was characterized by a lack of strategy modeling, a lack of metacognitive reflection on the effectiveness of the strategies employed, and an absence of discussion of the rationale, the benefit, and the transfer to other contexts. The time allocated to LLS instruction was limited, as more time was dedicated to exam-related content. A recurring theme during the lessons observed was the teacher frequently referring to the baccalaureate exam, emphasizing content on which the students would be tested.

Some of the phrases the teacher frequently used were "This is important for your exam," "You will see this type of question on the baccalaureate," or "We need to finish this unit quickly because you need more practice with exam

questions." Moreover, during a conversation, the teacher explained, "The Study Skills sections take time, and the students need to practice the exam format. The students and the parents want to see good grades, and the administration wants us to prepare the students for the exam. If we spend too much time on study skills, we won't finish the program." Substantial class time was devoted to exercises mirroring examination formats: multiple-choice grammar questions, guided paragraph writing following specific formats, and reading comprehension questions with predetermined answers. In contrast, open-ended activities requiring strategic thinking or problem-solving were rare. The dominant instructional pattern was teacher explanation followed by student practice of structured exercises, with limited opportunities for students to make strategic decisions, experiment with different approaches, or reflect on their learning processes.

V. DISCUSSION

The present study examined high school final-year curriculum guidelines, textbook material, and classroom practice to investigate the implementation of language learning strategy instruction in secondary education in Morocco. The findings are discussed in relation to the research questions posed at the outset of this study.

Research question 1 asked to what extent the secondary English language teaching curriculum policy in Morocco fosters instruction of language learning strategies. The findings indicate that the curriculum guidelines reflect substantial emphasis on LLS and learner autonomy. LLS and learner autonomy are positioned as fundamental pillars of English language teaching, as equipping learners with learning strategies and increasing their awareness of the role they play in the learning enterprise during the students' lifetimes. The guidelines provide a comprehensive framework for learner training implementation and suggest classroom procedures and tips in a dedicated full chapter (explicit, embedded, and separate LLS teaching). The curriculum recommends a nine-phase LLS instructional cycle informed by evidence-based models in the literature. In

addition, teachers are encouraged to examine the textbook for learner training opportunities and to supplement it with appropriate materials and activities according to the students' specificities. Still, the curriculum reflects limitations that may result in LLS instruction implementation challenges.

First, while the guidelines enumerate and explain the target strategies and how they ought to be taught, limited guidance is provided on how to address implementation challenges in the context of Morocco. This lack of guidance concerns LLS instruction within an examination-oriented context and how teachers might develop the pedagogical content and expertise in this area. The curriculum does not address how teachers can balance the demands of an examination-driven system and learner-centered pedagogy. Cheng (2005) refers to the *washback to the curriculum*, invoking the powerful influence of high-stakes examination on all aspects of educational systems, including policy formulation. On the other hand, Borg (2006) analyzed language teacher cognition and found that, more than teacher resistance, lack of knowledge, skills, and contextual support are the causes behind the gap between recommended practices and actual classroom implementation.

Second, the curriculum reflects a narrow conception of LLS competence, as it emphasizes cognitive and metacognitive strategies more than social and affective strategies. Scholarship has demonstrated the importance of social strategies for language development (Oxford, 2017; Vandergrift & MacIntyre, 2014) and affective strategies for motivation and managing anxiety. This strategy type neglect could limit the students' learning strategy repertoire, which resonates with the conclusions by both Bouziane (2015) and Barnard and Phan (2015) that the cognitive strategy-dominated university students' repertoire may stem from secondary education not adequately developing the full range of strategic competence.

Research question 2 aimed to examine to what extent textbook contents align with the English language teaching curriculum directives with regard to language learning strategies. The findings indicate that *Ticket 2 English Student's Book* incorporates the autonomous learning and learner autonomy vision set forth in the curriculum. The dual approach in this textbook entails employing both explicit separate Study Skills sections and embedded LLS instruction. Explicit LLS instruction in the textbook prioritizes cognitive strategies (note-taking, vocabulary techniques, and memory strategy) over metacognitive and affective strategies (planning, monitoring, evaluating learning, interacting with others, and cooperating). Moreover, the textbook does not provide explicit guidance for evaluating strategy effectiveness, comparing alternative approaches, and considering transfer to other contexts. Merely teaching students to execute specific strategies is what Macaro (2006) refers to as *strategy training*. Macaro, instead, advocates for *strategic learning* (developing metacognitive awareness that enables autonomous strategy selection and adaptation). Furthermore, only some strategies recur in embedded listening and reading activities, and most strategies included in the textbook are not recursively revisited across units.

While the textbook provides initial exposure to LLS, it does not reflect the distributed practice with increasing complexity that research has demonstrated is effective in developing expertise.

Research question 3 asked how teachers implement learning strategy instruction in the EFL classroom in Morocco. The findings reveal that although LLS instruction is incorporated in classroom practice, it diverges from the curriculum guidelines and does not fully exploit the affordances of the textbook. One limitation is the limited time allocated to the study skills sections. These sections appeared to be perceived to take time away from teaching the aspects of language on which the students would be tested during the baccalaureate exam. For example, the *Think Critically* section was covered quickly, and the teacher moved to examination-focused grammar instruction. This pragmatic reasoning in instructional decision reflects what Kennedy (1999) terms the *problem of enactment*—the disconnect between what the curriculum policy envisions and what teachers can realistically accomplish given competing demands, limited time, and accountability pressure.

Another limitation in the observed LLS instruction was the dominance of implicit embedded strategies over explicit strategies. The students were regularly instructed to employ listening and reading strategies, but explanation of the strategies and the purpose of their use and reflection on their effectiveness did not occur. The instruction was mainly teacher-directed, and the students did not have opportunities to develop the capacity to independently make decisions with respect to LLS selection and use. Yet another limitation of LLS classroom instruction was the absence of elements emphasized in the curriculum guidelines. These elements included assessing current students' strategy repertoire, discussion of strategy rationale and benefits, guidance for transfer to other contexts, differentiation based on learners' unique needs, and metacognitive reflection (discussing strategy purpose, comparing alternative strategies, and students' evaluation of strategy effectiveness). These limitations could stem from a lack of awareness of the importance of LLS, limitations in teacher knowledge, time constraints, or examination pressures.

VI. CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study was to investigate the implementation of LLS instruction in secondary education in Morocco. To this end, the curriculum guidelines concerning LLS instruction and the extent to which textbook materials and classroom practice align with these guidelines were examined. The findings indicate that a comprehensive theory-informed vision for LLS instruction and learner autonomy development is provided in the curriculum policy. The curriculum lays out a clear vision that aims to provide students with opportunities to learn how to learn. It also urges teachers to adopt learner training and help students develop a wide variety of learning strategies to use during their current and future studies and throughout their lives.

This vision is partially realized in the textbook materials through explicit separate strategy teaching—Study Skills sections—and embedded teaching within listening and reading tasks. The textbook upholds, to a limited extent, learning strategies instruction, with notable limitations with regard to depth, metacognitive discussion, recursiveness, and transferability. The textbook does not include a broad variety of learning strategies, does not present ample opportunities for the students to apply and transfer these strategies, and does not prioritize learner training.

The enactment of the curriculum recommendations and leveraging the textbook affordances were found to be deficient, as LLS instruction was sidelined due to time and examination constraints and possible gaps in teacher knowledge and training. While some learner training is part of classroom practice, it has proven inadequate. This disconnect appears to be caused mainly by the baccalaureate examination preparation constraints and time pressure, leading to a lack of emphasis on LLS, a lack of description of strategy aims, and the expectations from students in terms of how learning strategies are beneficial to them in and outside of the classroom and during their lives. This policy-practice misalignment has been documented across other EFL educational contexts. These findings may have important implications for both educational policy and classroom practice.

In an examination-oriented educational system where only linguistic knowledge is assessed, teachers face the challenge of applying the guidelines of a curriculum mandating promotion of learning strategy instruction and learner autonomy. Faced with the tension between the curriculum goals and time and accountability pressure, teachers may resort to prioritizing teaching what is tested. Incorporating means for assessing students' LLS competence in the curriculum could, therefore, address this imbalance. In addition, teacher pre-service training and in-service professional development programs should prepare instructors and continuously enhance their knowledge and skills in effective implementation of LLS instruction.

Still, regardless of the curriculum shortcomings and LLS teaching enactment constraints, teachers have the agency to creatively enhance strategy instruction and promote learner autonomy. Teachers can develop students' learning strategy metacognitive awareness by regularly explicitly naming strategies, explaining the purpose of their use, and modeling their application within language skill development lessons. Questions such as *Which strategy can we use? Why did we use this strategy? Did it help us understand better?* and *Where else can this strategy be used?* could develop students' strategic awareness and autonomous learning. Collaboration among teachers, peer observation, and sharing lesson plans may also contribute to effective LLS instruction. The consequence of not giving learner training the importance it deserves will be secondary schools shaping students to integrate higher education institutions who are expecting to be taught rather than being willing and prepared to actively learn themselves.

Although this research examined the official curriculum guidelines for teaching the English language and a ministry-authorized textbook used in the final year of secondary education in Morocco, it adopted a single-case study design to assess LLS instruction implementation in one classroom context. Research with similar aims, targeting different students and teachers affiliated with institutions in different areas and from different socio-economic profiles, would strengthen the conclusions drawn from this study. Additional research exploring students' perspectives on LLS instruction and tracking students' LLS competence development from high school into university would complement the present study and expand our knowledge regarding the effectiveness of learning strategy instruction and its contribution to students' academic success.

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