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**EFL TEACHERS' SELF-REPORTED PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES
IN LEARNING STRATEGIES INSTRUCTION**

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EFL TEACHERS' SELF-REPORTED PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN LEARNING STRATEGIES INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

This research examines EFL teachers' beliefs, practices, and challenges in the teaching of language-learning strategies and the promotion of learner autonomy. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through a questionnaire combining Likert-scale items based on Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (1989) and open-ended questions answered by in-service teachers. Additionally, this article is grounded in studies on language learning strategies and learner autonomy (Oxford, 1990, 2003), strategy instruction (Brown, 2007; Griffiths, 2013, 2014) and teachers' beliefs and practices (Borg, 2003). The findings show that teachers value strategy instruction and frequently use both explicit and implicit teaching approaches, indicating a greater preference for teaching metacognitive and affective strategies. However, it also reveals a gap between teachers' intentions and what they feel able to implement in practice, due to contextual constraints such as time, curricular demands, and learner engagement. The results also indicate that students tend to rely more on cognitive and memory strategies, which indicates a misalignment with teachers' practices. Overall, the study underscores the complexity of teaching learning strategies in EFL contexts.

Keywords: Learning Strategies; Teachers' practices; Teachers' beliefs; Strategy-Based Instruction.

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa investiga as crenças, práticas e os desafios de professores de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL) no ensino de estratégias de aprendizagem de línguas e na promoção da autonomia do aluno. Utilizando uma abordagem de método misto, os dados foram coletados por meio de um questionário que combinou itens em escala Likert baseados no Strategy Inventory for Language Learning de Oxford (1989) e perguntas abertas, respondidos por professores em exercício. Além disso, este artigo baseia-se em estudos sobre estratégias de aprendizagem de línguas e autonomia do aluno (Oxford, 1990, 2003), ensino de estratégias (Brown, 2007; Griffiths, 2013, 2014) e crenças e práticas dos professores (Borg, 2003). Os resultados mostram que os professores valorizam o ensino de estratégias e utilizam com frequência abordagens tanto explícitas quanto implícitas de ensino, indicando uma preferência maior no ensino de estratégias metacognitivas e afetivas. No entanto, observa-se uma lacuna entre as intenções dos professores e o que eles percebem ser possível implementar na prática, em função de limitações contextuais como tempo, demandas curriculares e engajamento dos alunos. Os resultados também indicam que os alunos tendem a recorrer mais a estratégias cognitivas e de memória, indicando uma disparidade com as práticas dos professores. De modo geral, o estudo evidencia a complexidade do ensino de estratégias de aprendizagem em contextos de EFL.

Palavras-chave: Estratégias de Aprendizagem; Práticas dos professores; Crenças dos professores; Instrução Baseada em Estratégias.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the role of language learning strategies has been widely recognized as a crucial element in the development of language proficiency and learner autonomy. Research has demonstrated that students who can select, monitor, and evaluate their own learning processes tend to perform better and become more independent language users (Samaie, Khany, Habib, 2015; Benson, 2003; Oxford, 2003). Consequently, there has been a

growing emphasis on teachers' need to promote strategic learning in the classroom, particularly in contexts where students have limited exposure to the target language outside instructional settings.

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, such as in Brazil, promoting the use of learning strategies is particularly relevant. EFL learners often rely heavily on their teachers to develop not only linguistic competence but also the tools to manage their own learning process effectively. While much of the academic literature explores learners' perceptions and reported use of learning strategies (Chang, 2010; Chang, Liu, Lee, 2007; Yang, 1999; Azar & Saeidi, 2013; Paula, 2022), few studies focus on teachers' practices and how contextual factors influence their ability to implement strategy-based instruction (SBI) (Griffiths, 2007).

Understanding teachers' practices is essential because what teachers believe about teaching and learning directly influences their classroom behavior (Puspitasari, Susilohadi; Wahyuni, 2017). At the same time, their actions are also influenced by institutional constraints, teaching experience, and their access to professional development (Basturkmen, 2012). As a result, a significant gap may exist between what teachers believe should be done and what they feel able to do in practice.

Given this background, the present study aims to investigate how EFL teachers perceive and report their own practices in the instruction of learning strategies, while also examining the challenges they face in doing so. By addressing these issues, the research aims to bridge the gap between theoretical discussions of SBI and the realities of classroom practice. To this end, the following questions arise: 1. "How do EFL teachers perceive and conduct the instruction of learning strategies in their classrooms?" 2. "What challenges do EFL teachers report when attempting to integrate learning strategies into their teaching practices?"

Overall, this research intends to provide insights into common practices, perceived barriers, and potential areas for teacher support. The findings may offer valuable insights for English language schools, teacher education programs, curriculum development, and institutional policies, particularly on how EFL classrooms can be structured to foster the effective use of strategies.

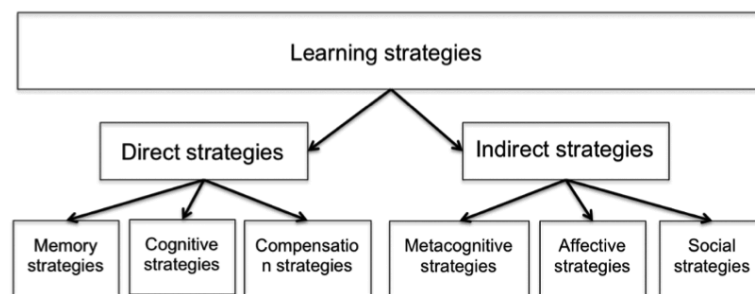
2. LEARNING STRATEGIES IN EFL CONTEXTS

Learning a foreign language involves not only the acquisition of linguistic structures but also the development of cognitive, affective, and social skills that support this process.

Within this context, learning strategies arise as a valuable resource, as they enable learners to draw specific actions on how to process, retain, and apply linguistic knowledge more effectively, consciously, and in a self-directed way (Oxford, 1990).

In this regard, Oxford (1990) proposes one of the most well-known taxonomies of language learning strategies, drawing a distinction between direct and indirect strategies:

Figure 1 — Language Learning Strategies



Source: Oxford (1990).

Direct strategies involve the mental processes related to the manipulation of language. The author claimed that memory strategies help learners store and retrieve information through techniques such as grouping, imagery, and physical association. Cognitive strategies involve the manipulation of language material through summarizing, repetition, note-taking, and analyzing. Compensation strategies enable learners to overcome gaps in knowledge by using context clues, guessing meaning, or paraphrasing to continue communication.

Indirect strategies, on the other hand, support learning by regulating the process. Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own learning process, which is essential to developing learner autonomy. Additionally, affective strategies help learners manage emotions, motivation, and anxiety by employing techniques such as self-regulation. Lastly, social strategies promote interaction with others, encouraging learners to ask for clarification and correction, cooperate in tasks, and seek feedback.

These classifications help explain how learners approach various aspects of language learning beyond vocabulary and grammar, encompassing self-regulation, emotional control, and interaction with others.

According to Chamot (2005), the explicit teaching of learning strategies can support both language proficiency and learner autonomy. Her and O'Malley's (1994, 2009) instructional model, the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA), foregrounds the importance of systematic and guided instruction, allowing learners to select and apply strategies consciously and appropriately. This approach has been successful in

many studies (Chamot, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2009).

Griffiths (2008) reported that the use of learning strategies is also influenced by individual learner differences, such as age, motivation, cognitive style, and proficiency level. These findings reinforce the idea that teachers should not only present strategies but also help learners discover which strategies are most effective for their personal learning profiles.

In EFL contexts, where exposure to the target language is often limited to the classroom, strategy instruction becomes even more significant. Therefore, understanding what learning strategies are, how they function, and how they can be taught is fundamental for teachers who aim to promote more effective and meaningful English language learning experiences.

3. EFL TEACHERS' ROLE IN PROMOTING LEARNING STRATEGIES

The implementation of learning strategies in the EFL classroom depends largely, but not only, on the teacher's awareness, attitudes, and motivation toward language teaching. Brown (2007, p. 259) observes that “when students are taught how to look at themselves and how to capitalize on their talents and experiences, they learn lessons that carry them well beyond any language classroom. That’s what SBI is all about”. Thus, SBI involves teaching students how to learn, not just what to learn. According to this view:

The teacher’s role expands from being mainly concerned with imparting knowledge to including the facilitation of learning by raising awareness of strategy options and providing encouragement and opportunities for practice so that students might be assisted towards the goal of managing their own learning (Griffiths, 2013, p. 144-145).

Language teachers can incorporate SBI in different ways. Chamot (2005) distinguishes between explicit strategy instruction, in which strategies are taught, modeled, and practiced directly, and embedded instruction, where strategies are integrated naturally into classroom activities without explicit labeling. Bearing this in mind, Griffiths (2014, p. 42) emphasizes that “effective strategy instruction, then, should aim to raise learner awareness of strategy options and provide opportunities to practise by means of both explicit and implicit instruction.”

Consequently, both approaches require that teachers themselves have a solid

understanding of the matter. Cohen (1998) reinforces this idea, noting that teachers familiar with SBI are better equipped to help students select appropriate strategies for various language tasks. This can include, for example, encouraging learners to plan before writing, monitor their comprehension while reading, or use cognitive tools such as summarizing, paraphrasing, or using visual aids.

By equipping students with a notion of what successful learners do to achieve success and encouraging them to develop their individual pathways to language proficiency, teachers can help them develop strategic competence and act as self-driven, independent learners. Once this awareness is established, the subsequent stage involves the application of diverse strategies tailored to the learner's styles and learning preferences (Brown, 2007).

Apart from CALLA, as cited before, many other models for teaching learning strategies have been developed (Cohen & Weaver, 2005; Harris & Grenfell, 2004; Lee & Oxford, 2008; Naughton, 2006), and most models highlight the need to provide learners with multiple opportunities to practice strategies until they can apply them autonomously. Moreover, they suggest that learners should evaluate the effectiveness of each strategy, choose strategies for a task, and actively transfer them to new language tasks (Gunning & Oxford, 2013).

Besides that, EFL teachers often need to adapt strategy instruction to match students' age, proficiency level, previous knowledge, learning styles, motivation, and socio-cultural background. According to Oxford (2017, p. 309), SBI involves "discovering and honoring diverse strategies from various cultures, rather than just teaching strategies that are acceptable from one cultural viewpoint".

Contexts, then, should be considered when designing strategy instruction. Recognizing learners' cultural and personal beliefs is essential, yet these should remain open to transformation rather than fixed constraints. Context can also provide valuable cues to improve learners' interest and engagement. Incorporating available technologies and employing materials that are creative, culturally sensitive, visually stimulating, tactile, auditorily, or kinesthetic can further enhance motivation and support the learning process (Oxford, 2017).

In sum, efficient SBI depends on teachers' interest and motivation (Chamot & Küpper, 1989), their flexibility in employing different instructional approaches, and their concern for their learners' specific needs (Lee, 2007).

4. TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Teachers' beliefs play a fundamental role in building their classroom practices and instructional decisions, including how and whether they promote learning strategies. As noted by Borg (2003), teacher cognition (i.e. what teachers know, believe, and think) is central to understanding what happens in the classroom. In the context of learning strategy instruction, teachers' beliefs can either facilitate or hinder its implementation.

Beliefs are not always aligned with practice. Phipps and Borg (2009) emphasize that although teachers may express support for certain pedagogical principles, such as teaching strategies, these beliefs can be hindered by contextual factors, including prescribed curricula, time constraints, or even uncertainty about how to put theory into practice. They also tend to be deeply rooted and can influence how teachers perceive their roles and select or avoid certain instructional approaches.

When it comes to promoting learning strategies, research has shown that teachers' beliefs about their usefulness, teachability, and appropriateness for learners strongly influence how frequently they incorporate them into lessons (Griffiths, 2013; Cohen, 1998). For instance, a teacher who believes that young learners are not ready to reflect on their learning process may avoid metacognitive strategy instruction, even if they recognize its long-term benefits.

Furthermore, self-reported data provide an important picture of teachers' beliefs and practices. While such data may not perfectly reflect real classroom behavior, they reveal teachers' intentions, preferences, and perceived challenges, all of which are highly relevant in shaping pedagogical decisions. Understanding teachers' beliefs and practices is essential to identifying what teachers know about learning strategies, how they feel when promoting them, and what they perceive as feasible within their specific teaching contexts.

5. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted qualitative and quantitative approaches to investigate EFL teachers' practices and perceived challenges in implementing learning strategy instruction. To reach this objective, a questionnaire along with a modified version of Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (1989) was administered online to teachers from different institutions.

The questionnaire comprised 59 items, organized into three sections. The first section (05 items) focused on collecting demographic data; the second section (51 items) focused on collecting data on teachers' beliefs and practices; the third section (02 items) aimed to gather

data regarding the instructional challenges. The second section used a five-point Likert scale. The scale was: 1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; and 5 = always.

The sample of participants comprised 22 English teachers working in private schools, public schools, and/or private language institutes in Pernambuco, Brazil. The sample presented an equal gender distribution (50% female and 50% male). Most participants (59.1%) were aged 25 or younger, while 40.9% were aged 26-35. Regarding educational background, 63.6% held a degree in English Language Teaching. A large proportion of the teachers (81.8%) worked in private institutes, and their teaching experience varied: 72.7% had 1-5 years, 13.6% had 6-10 years, and 13.6% had less than 1 year.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

6.1 Teachers' beliefs

In the first question, participants were asked whether they considered it important to teach their students to learn independently using learning strategies. All of them answered “yes”, indicating a strong collective belief that strategy instruction is important in effective English language teaching. The teachers' justifications reinforce this position and reveal several recurring themes that help explain the importance of using learning strategies autonomously.

Table 1. Teachers' beliefs about the importance of encouraging learner autonomy through SBI

Themes	Description	Example
Autonomy reduces reliance on the teacher (n=7)	Teachers believe learning strategies help students learn independently.	“With greater autonomy, students can continue studying independently of the teacher's facilitation, thus being able to engage with the content for longer and with greater quality.” - Respondent 6.
Learning outside the classroom setting (n=10)	Strategies allow students to engage with English outside class time.	“Learning outside the classroom is also very important for the student's learning process.” - Respondent 10.
Efficiency, self-regulation and agency. (n= 9)	Strategies help learners plan, monitor, and organize themselves.	“Independent learning encourages student leadership, the ability to make informed decisions, problem solving, and the development of critical

		thinking.” - Respondent 12.
Personalization (n=6)	Strategies provide tools for learners to discover approaches that match their individual needs and learning profiles.	“Students can find the option that best suits their demands and learning needs.” - Respondent 8.

Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

As shown in Table 1, participants view autonomy as a central goal of language learning, and consider learning strategies essential tools for developing that autonomy. These views align with key ideas in the literature. The emphasis on reducing dependence on the teacher reflects Griffiths (2013) notion that the teacher’s role changes from an authoritative provider of information to a facilitator and guide, while the importance attributed to learning outside the classroom setting reflects Little’s (2007, p. 2) view that “the knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom can be applied to situations that arise outside the classroom”. Teachers’ recognition of self-regulation and learner agency corresponds to Oxford’s (1990) and Chamot’s (2005) descriptions of strategic learning as involving planning, monitoring, and informed choice. Together, the results show a connection to principles in the research on autonomy and learning strategies. Consequently, these beliefs provide a lens for investigating how teachers actually work with learning strategies in their classrooms.

6.2 Teaching practices for language learning strategies

Before examining the specific categories of learning strategies present in the SILL, the initial set of items offers a general picture of how teachers approach strategy instruction in their daily practice. Figure 2 and Figure 3 show that although both implicit and explicit instruction are present in their practice, explicit instruction is more consistently reported. Likewise, most teachers (90.91%) confirmed planning activities specifically aimed at teaching strategies, demonstrating pedagogical intentionality rather than incidental exposure.

Figure 2 — Explicit Instruction

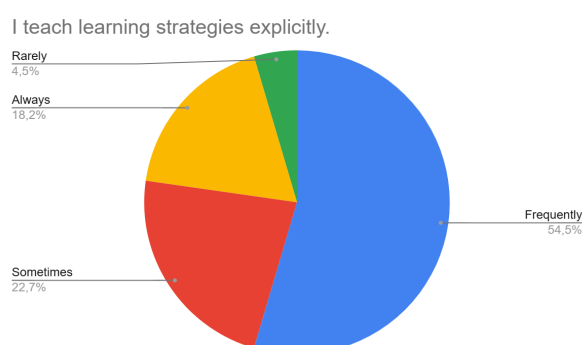
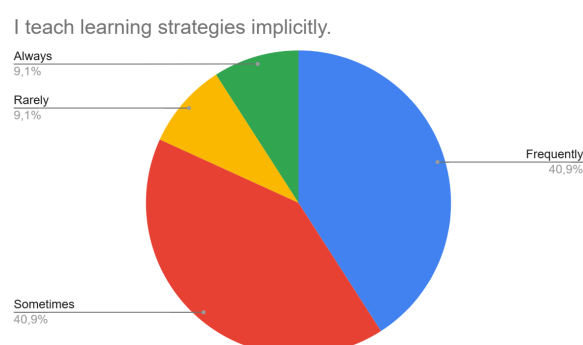


Figure 3 — Implicit Instruction

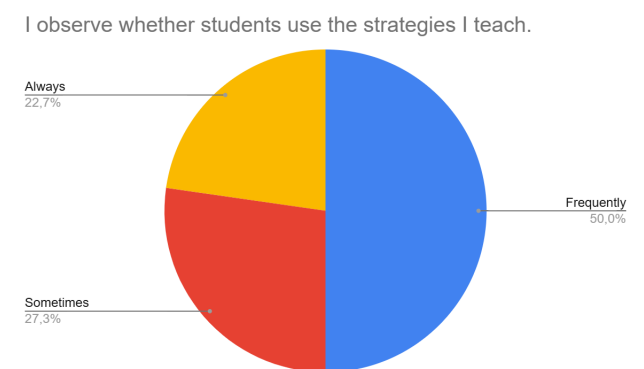


In addition, Figure 4 shows that most of the teachers explain the usefulness of strategies, and Figure 5 reveals that a large portion monitor students' use of learning strategies, which suggests that teachers intend to make strategy use visible, meaningful, and part of learners' ongoing development.

Figure 4 — Strategy Usefulness



Figure 5 — Teachers Monitoring



The mean scores presented in Table 2 provide a picture of the extent to which teachers integrate different types of learning strategies into their everyday practices. The results reveal that: metacognitive strategies are the most frequently encouraged ($M = 4.02$), followed by affective strategies ($M = 3.71$) and cognitive strategies ($M = 3.65$), with memory strategies ($M = 3.56$) and compensation strategies ($M = 3.26$) receiving comparatively lower emphasis.

Table 2. Mean frequency of self-reported teaching practices across strategy types, based on weighted Likert-scale responses (1 = Never, 5 = Always).

Strategy Category	Items (N)	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Metacognitive	8	1.00	5.00	4.02
Affective	6	1.00	5.00	3.71
Cognitive	14	1.00	5.00	3.65
Memory	9	1.00	5.00	3.56
Compensation	6	1.00	5.00	3.26

The prominence of metacognitive strategies is consistent with teachers' beliefs about autonomy. Many of the high-rated items, such as encouraging students to use English in diverse ways, reinforcing attention to spoken input, and seeking opportunities for communication, evidence that metacognitive strategies are essential because they "coordinate the learning process" (Oxford, 1990, p. 135). Similarly, affective support has long been

recognized as a prerequisite for strategic learning, as it reduces anxiety and prepares learners to take risks.

The considerable presence of cognitive strategies in teachers' practices reflects their natural integration into communicative tasks, such as practicing, summarizing, or analyzing language. These strategies often emerge implicitly in instruction, which aligns with Griffiths's (2014) observation that effective strategy instruction may involve both explicit teaching and embedded opportunities for practice.

Memory strategies, by contrast, received less attention from teachers, despite their relevance for vocabulary retention. Finally, compensation strategies appear least frequently, consistent with the idea that they tend to emerge spontaneously when learners face linguistic gaps rather than through teacher intervention.

6.5 Students' strategy use: What do teachers have to say?

Based on teachers' monitoring and observation, the study reveals, through a thematic categorization, that cognitive strategies ($n = 13$) are the most commonly observed, followed by memory strategies ($n = 10$) and metacognitive strategies ($n = 6$), with compensation strategies ($n = 3$) and affective strategies ($n = 1$) mentioned less frequently. Figure 6 illustrates this tendency by noting that students engage in repetition, media exposure, and flashcards, demonstrating an integration between cognitive and memory strategies. Similarly, Figure 7 emphasizes students' use of word association with imagery, auditory, and/or contextual aspects, which reflects the relevance of memory strategies in classroom observations.

Figure 6 — Teachers' observation: cognitive and memory strategies

Sound repetition and language immersion through various media formats. Younger students practice a lot with flashcards in the classroom, but outside of it, I believe that active language study through practical activities is the most common.

Figure 7 — Teachers' observation: memory strategies

Associating words with images, sounds, or situations/repetition/adapting the use of words to the learner's existing vocabulary.

Although teachers report that metacognitive and affective strategies are central to their instruction, learners seem to rely more on practical, concrete, and easily implemented cognitive and memory strategies. This asymmetry reinforces findings in strategy research suggesting that learners tend to adopt strategies that are visible and familiar, unless metacognitive regulation has been explicitly taught and practiced over time (Griffiths, 2013).

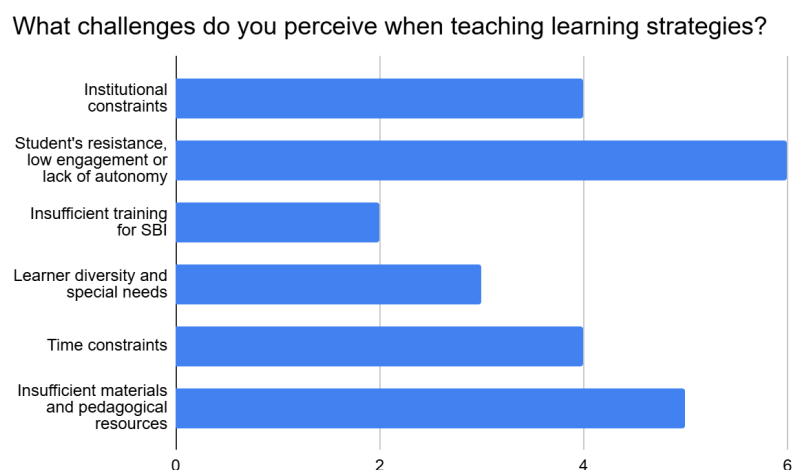
At the same time, the presence of metacognitive tendencies, such as predicting content or seeking extra exposure, indicates that some learners have begun to internalize reflective behaviors encouraged by teachers. In this sense, the results suggest a gradual yet irregular development of strategic autonomy, with cognitive and memory strategies serving as accessible starting points, and metacognitive behaviors emerging for more experienced or motivated learners.

6.4 Challenges in language learning strategies instruction

In this area, when asked about whether institutional conditions (curriculum, time, planning, and materials) allow for explicit or integrated strategy instruction, 63.6% of teachers responded “yes”, whereas 22.7% responded “no”, and 13.6% indicated “indifferent.” This distribution shows that although a majority feel supported by their institutional context, a substantial proportion still experiences structural constraints that affect the teaching of learning strategies.

Even those who answered “yes” described a series of obstacles that make strategy teaching partial or dependent on individual effort rather than institutional support. To better understand the nature of these difficulties, teachers were asked about the challenges they face in teaching learning strategies. The analysis of the 17 responses revealed six major categories:

Figure 8 — Reported Challenges



The most frequently mentioned challenge concerns students’ lack of autonomy, motivation, and resistance to new learning approaches. Teachers describe learners who rely heavily on classroom instruction, expect improvement to come solely from lessons, or show reluctance to experiment with strategies. Students may resist new teaching methods if those changes force them to redefine their understanding of learning and the expected roles of both

students and teachers (Keeney-Kennicutt, Gunersel & Simpson, 2008; Stover & Holland, 2018). If learners are used to task completion or textbook-based instruction, for instance, they may not immediately recognize the value of strategic behaviors.

Teachers also identified time constraints, curricular demands, and outdated or limited materials as substantial barriers. These constraints reduce opportunities for structured strategy instruction and limit the variety of activities that could support strategy use. As Chamot (2005) mentions, strategy instruction requires intentional planning, scaffolding, and repeated practice. When instructional time is limited or curriculum/content dominates lesson planning, strategic learning risks becoming secondary rather than integrated into daily routines. Similarly, Oxford (2017) emphasizes that strategy use is most effective when combined with resources and opportunities for meaningful language use. The absence of audiovisual tools or dynamic materials, reported by 5 teachers, means students have fewer contexts in which to apply or test strategies.

Four teachers noted limited teacher autonomy or institutional constraints, which restrict innovation and personalization. In these cases, even teachers who value strategies may be unable to incorporate them consistently when the institutional culture prioritizes standardization or textbook completion. Gu (2007) argues that institutional alignment is essential for strategic learning: “SBI will only be successful when schools and teachers involved are fully cooperative and know what SBI is, why it is helpful, and how it should be implemented.” For this reason, strategy instruction is not effective when treated merely as an optional teacher initiative rather than one of the primary goals.

Three teachers highlighted difficulty adapting strategies for classrooms with varied learning needs, and two reported feeling unprepared to teach strategies effectively. These findings suggest that strategy instruction demands specific professional knowledge and training, including how to differentiate strategies and help learners generalize them across contexts, which is not always emphasized in teacher education. In this sense, teachers need explicit training in identifying, modeling, and scaffolding the use of strategies, and learners with different profiles may require tailored approaches (Chamot, 2004, 2005).

Taken together, while teachers value strategy instruction and believe it is essential for developing autonomy, their ability to implement is conditioned by learners' willingness to embrace innovations and use strategies, institutional conditions, available resources, and their own pedagogical preparation. Rather than reflecting isolated problems, the challenges suggest that strategy instruction depends on a combination of factors to take place.

7. CONCLUSION

This study examined EFL teachers' beliefs, teaching practices, and perceived challenges in promoting language-learning strategies. The research was guided by the hypothesis that a significant gap may exist between what teachers believe should be done in strategy instruction and what they feel able to implement in practice.

In fact, the findings largely support this hypothesis. Teachers expressed strong beliefs in the importance of learning strategies and autonomy and reported intentional efforts to incorporate strategy instruction into their teaching. However, their responses also revealed that these efforts are frequently influenced by contextual constraints, such as limited instructional time, curricular demands, available materials, and learners' engagement. As a result, strategy instruction often reflects a balance between the teacher's intentions and what is feasible within specific teaching contexts.

Furthermore, this gap becomes clearer when comparing teachers' practices with their observations of students' strategy use. While teachers emphasize the reflective and affective aspects of learning, students tend to rely more on concrete, immediately applicable strategies. This misalignment suggests that learners' use of strategies is shaped by how visible the strategies are in classroom practices, learners' prior familiarity with them, and the extent to which practice opportunities are provided.

Overall, this study has limitations that should be acknowledged. The use of self-reported data may not fully capture classroom realities, and the sample size limits the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the absence of classroom observation and learner perspectives restricts deeper insight into how strategies are used and developed over time. Thus, future research could address these limitations by incorporating observational data, semi-structured interviews, or longitudinal designs to better understand the context of strategy-based instruction in EFL classrooms.

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