

**Abstract**

Language learning is critically an important phenomenon in today's world. Everyone has to learn at least one foreign language to catch up with the changing conditions but there still exist some problems derived from several affective or cognitive factors in learning English as a foreign language in Turkey. For this reason, the study aims to investigate the relation between university students' attitudes towards foreign language and use of foreign language learning strategies. The freshmen and seniors enrolled in English and German language teaching departments of two universities located in western Turkey are selected as participants of the study. The sample consists of 204 university students. As data gathering instruments, the "Language Attitude Scale" (LAS), developed by Saracaloğlu (1992), and the "Language Learning Strategies" (SILL) developed by Oxford (1990), whose validity and reliability studies were conducted by Cesur and Fer (2007), were used. The results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences among university students' attitudes towards foreign language and their gender, the university they attend, and having a foreign country experience, except for the class level and department of study variables. Also, there are some statistically significant correlations between some language learning strategies and the department (major). Additionally, it was found that university students use cognitive strategies at a high level and social strategies at a low level of frequency. Statistically significant and positive correlations between all language learning strategy dimensions and attitudes towards language learning were also identified.

**Keywords:** Attitudes towards language learning, language learning strategy, university students

**Özet**

Günümüz dünyasında dil öğrenimi kritik bir öneme sahiptir. Herkes ana dili dışında en az bir yabancı dili öğrenmek zorundadır; fakat Türkiye'de ikinci bir dil olarak İngilizce öğrenimine duyuşsal veya bilişsel alandan kaynaklanan pek çok problem bulunmaktadır. Bu sebeple çalışmada üniversite öğrencilerinin yabancı dile ilişkin tutumları ile yabancı dil öğrenme stratejileri arasındaki ilişki araştırılmıştır.

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Türkiye'nin batısında bulunan iki üniversitede İngilizce ve Almanca bölümlerinde öğrenim görmekte olan birinci ve dördüncü sınıf öğrencileri araştırmanın örneklemini oluşturmaktadır. Örnekleme 204 öğrenci katılmıştır. Veri toplama araçları olarak Saracaloğlu (1992) tarafından geliştirilen Yabancı dile Yönelik Tutum Ölçeği (LAS) ile Oxford (1990) tarafından geliştirilen ve Türkçe geçerlik ve güvenirlik çalışmaları Cesur ve Fer (2007) tarafından yapılan Dil Öğrenme Stratejileri Envanteri (SILL) kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlar, üniversite öğrencilerinin yabancı dile yönelik tutumları ile sınıf düzeyi ve bölüm değişkenleri dışında kalan cinsiyet, buldukları üniversite ve yurtdışı deneyimi olma değişkenleri ile anlamlı ilişkiler bulunmadığını göstermektedir. Ayrıca bazı öğrenme stratejileri ile bölüm değişkeni arasında anlamlı farklılıklar görülmüştür. Ek olarak üniversite öğrencilerinin bilişsel stratejileri en fazla, sosyal stratejileri en az düzeyde kullandıkları bulunmuştur. İstatistiksel olarak dil öğrenme stratejilerinin tüm boyutları ile yabancı dile yönelik tutum arasında anlamlı ve pozitif ilişkiler tespit edilmiştir.

Keywords: Yabancı dile yönelik tutum, dil öğrenme stratejisi, üniversite öğrencileri

### **Introduction**

In today's global world, the importance of learning a second language is an indisputable fact. Knowing and performing a foreign language is seen as a symbol of power, so especially developing countries as Turkey encourages its people to learn at least one foreign language with language policies to catch up with social, economic and technological changes. According to Turkey's Foreign Language Education and Training Commission Report published in 1991, the importance of learning English as a second language was neatly emphasized with these words: *"The changing world conditions have brought countries together, making it necessary for people to communicate with each other across national borders. Foreign language is very important for this and it will be even more important in the future. No country has the right to remain behind the developments because the dimensions of modernity will be measured by the power to reach universality in the very near future."* As it was stated above these changes and developments around the world shape the human profile and cause changes in education system as well as in many areas. Nowadays families are conscious about the importance of learning a foreign language and they have a lot of support for their children's language learning process by special courses, private colleges, foreign country visits and so on. But it is clearly seen that there is still something problematic with language teaching education in the system. Rubin (1975:41) draws attention to this problem with the following question: *"It is common knowledge that some people are more successful than others at learning a second language, so if people can learn their first language easily and well (although some have more verbal skills than others), why does this innate ability seem to decline for some when second language learning is the task here?"* Hence, the most strongly highlighted question here is to whom, at which pace and how to teach English as a foreign language effectively? This question is not easy to answer because; different from learning the mother tongue, learning a second language is a complex process. Therefore, language experts, linguists and researchers have long been conducting studies how well a person can learn a second language effectively (Demirel, 1998; Paker, 2002; Gökdemir, 2005; Saracaloğlu and Varol, 2007; Cohen & Griffiths, 2015; Amerstorfer, 2016; Oxford, 2017).

First of all, it can be said that language learners are affected by various internal (such as age, gender, motivation, cognition, personality, beliefs, attitudes etc.) and external factors (such as curriculum, culture, status, learning tools, classroom etc.) while they are learning a new language. Among these, attitudes towards foreign language are taken into consideration in our study as one of internal factors for learning a foreign language effectively. The relevant research has concluded that student's attitude is an integral part of learning and it should, therefore, become an essential component of the language learning pedagogy (İnal et al., 2003). Language attitude can be described as the positive or negative beliefs/feelings about a language. Feeling anxious, afraid of, or happy about a subject while performing a language shapes learners' attitudes. In other words, motivated, demotivated, and unmotivated students have different perceptions of their

class, teacher and curriculum (Verma, 2005); and such variation in learner motivation determines the extent of active involvement in foreign language learning. Conversely, unmotivated students are insufficiently involved, and therefore unable to develop their potential L2 skills (Oxford & Shearin, 1996:121).

The second variable taken into consideration in our study is learning strategies that EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners use. They are defined as the “*specifications, behaviors, steps, or techniques such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task used by students to enhance their own learning*” (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992:63 cited in Oxford, 2003:2). The studies by Rubin (1975) and Naiman et al. (1975) mention that successful language learners consciously use certain types of learning strategies to become better learners (cited in Oxford, 1999). For more than three decades, various strategy taxonomies have been identified by different researchers such as Naiman et al. (1987), Dansereau (1985), O’Maley et al. (1985), Rubin and Wenden (1987), Oxford (1990) & Stern, 1992, cited in Vlckova, et al., 2013: 96). As one of these researchers, Oxford (1990) brought a new perspective to language learning strategies by categorizing them into 6 groups: memory, cognitive & compensation as direct; metacognitive, affective, and social strategies as indirect strategies. The first three strategies are called direct strategies because they directly involve processing, or using the language that is being learned. The latter three are called indirect strategies because they do not involve the language itself: instead, they allow the learner to manage himself/herself with regard to the organizing, monitoring, evaluating, maintaining motivation, lowering anxiety, and learning with others (Oxford, 1999:114). Oxford (1996) summarizes various crosscultural studies by some researchers with different levels of students in her edited book explaining various affective factors related with language learning strategy use such as motivation, self-efficacy, anxiety and so on. In our study, Oxford’s taxonomy and its instrument is preferred because it is widely used in many countries with different samples with reported high reliability and validity.

Many researchers have studied use of language learning strategies. For instance, Sadighi, Zarafshan and Shiraz (2006) conducted a study about the effects of attitude and motivation on the use of language learning strategies by Iranian EFL University Students. Mohammadi et al. (2013) studied the relationship between foreign language anxiety and language learning strategies among university students. Also, Wu (2010) investigated the relation between language learner’s anxiety and learning strategy in language classrooms. On the other hand, many studies were conducted about attitudes towards language with different perspectives for a long time (Bartley, 1969; Raymond and Roberts, 1983; Baştürkmen, 1990; Saracaloğlu, 1992; Saracaloğlu and Varol, 2007; Alaviana and Salmasi, 2012; Al-Qahtani Mona Faisal, 2013; Jabbari and Golkar, 2014). In short, there is a great number of studies on students’ attitudes towards foreign language or use of language learning strategies separately; however, there are no studies directly related to the relationship between students’attitudes and foreign language learning strategies except Al-Qahtani Mona Faisal’s (2013) study. For this purpose, this study aims to investigate the relation between language attitude and language learning strategy use of university students to make a valuable contribution to the literature.

### **Aim**

The major purpose of the study is to reveal relationship between attitudes towards foreign language and language learning strategy use. To reach this aim the following questions are asked:

1. How often do university students use language learning strategies?

2. Do university students' strategy use differ according to gender, university they attend, class level, enrolled department, having a foreign country experience?
3. Do university students' attitude towards foreign language differ according to gender, university they attend, class level, enrolled department, and status of having a foreign country experience?
4. Is there a statistically significant relation between university students' strategy use and their attitudes towards foreign languages?

**Method**

The study is designed as relational survey method. Relational survey methods are defined as research models aimed at determining the degree of presence of the differences between two or more variables (Karasar, 1991: 81).

**Participants**

During 2014–2015 academic year the first and the fourth-year undergraduate students enrolled in English and German language teaching departments of two universities in Turkey were selected as participants of the study. To meet easy accessibility, geographical proximity and availability criteria in choosing the participants, convenience sampling was used. The sample of the study consisted of 204 university students in total. Table 1 demonstrates the demographic characteristics of the sample.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the sample

<b>Variables</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	52	25,5
Female	152	74,5
<b>University</b>		
Dokuz Eylül	104	51
Muğla	100	49
<b>Enrolled Department</b>		
German language teaching	95	46,6
English language teaching	109	53,4
<b>Having a foreign country Experience</b>		
Yes	52	25,5
No	152	74,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>100</b>

**Procedure**

The participants were informed about the study in the beginning of the data collection process. The inventories used in this study were administered by the researcher during their class hours –in three different class hours during three weeks. The participants were expected to respond to the questions in the inventories in 50 minutes each week. In addition, students were informed that they could get the results of the research after it was completed.

**Instruments**

Two data gathering instruments were used in the study. One of them was “Language Attitude Scale” (LAS) developed by Saracaloğlu (1992). LAS is a 5-point Likert-type scale with 60 questions ranged as 1- I never agree, 2-I do not agree, 3-I have no opinion, 4-I agree, 5-I strongly agree. The positive items are scored as “5 to 1”, while negative items

are scored conversely as “1 to 5”. The higher scores mean higher attitudes towards foreign language.

The other instrument was “Strategy Inventory for Language Learning” (SILL) - developed by Oxford (1990), whose validity and reliability studies were done by Cesur and Fer (2007). It had 50 questions with six dimensions. The SILL is comprised of Likert-scaled items (scale 1-5, ranging from “never or almost never” to “always or almost always”), with each item expressing a learning strategy. Items in the SILL are grouped into six categories of strategies: memory-related, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The first three categories are called “direct”, the latter three are collectively labelled as “indirect” strategies (Oxford, 1999:114).

In the study, the reliability of the scales was computed with Cronbach alpha coefficient, and found as .81 for LAS, and .94 for SILL. It can be said that these two scales have high reliability and are suitable to be used in our sample.

### **Analysis of the data**

In the data analysis process, according to the aims of the study, firstly, the relations between some demographic variables (gender, class, enrolled department, university and having a foreign country experience) and language attitudes, and also language strategy use of the students were analyzed. Before the analysis, to understand whether the data is normally distributed or not, the Kolmogrov Smirnov test was done. According to the test results, the data were not normally distributed ( $p=.000$ ), so the Mann Whitney-U test was used to find the differences between the variables (class level, gender, university, having a foreign country experience), and the students’ attitudes towards foreign language, as well as language learning strategy use. Secondly, whether there were any relationships between learners’s foreign language attitude and language strategy use or not was investigated by using the Spearman correlation analysis.

### **Findings**

#### **Findings for the 1<sup>st</sup> sub problem:**

First of all, to test the assumption of normal distribution of the data, Kolmogrov Smirnov test was done.

**Table 2.** Kolmogrov Smirnov test results for Normality

Variable	Kolmogrov- Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistics	df	Sig.	Statistics	df	Sig.
University	,346	204	,000	,636	204	,000
Gender	,465	204	,000	,542	204	,000
Class	,343	204	,000	,636	204	,000
Department	,358	204	,000	,635	204	,000
Having a foreign country experience	,465	204	,000	,542	204	,000
SUM LAS	,097	204	,000	,965	204	,000

As can be seen in the table, because the data were not normally distributed, to compare the values of two variables, Mann Withney U test was done instead of t-test.

The first sub problem of the study was stated as “How often do university students use language strategies?.” Answer to this question was shown in Table 3. with descriptive statistics, frequency, mean and standard deviations of the variables

**Table 3.** Levels of Language Learning Strategy Use

Strategy	N	Minumum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Deviation
Memory	204	21,00	42,00	34,16	4,57
Cognitive	204	35,00	64,00	53,52	5,51
Compensation	204	11,00	30,00	21,65	3,18
Metacognitive	204	9,00	45,00	30,69	7,27
Affective	204	12,00	28,00	20,54	2,15
Social	204	6,00	30,00	18,67	4,36

As it is seen in Table 3, it can be said that university students used all language learning strategies at ( $\bar{x}=24,67$ ) medium level. The most frequently used strategies were “cognitive strategies” ( $\bar{x}=54$ ), “memory strategies” ( $\bar{x}=34,16$ ), and “metacognitive strategies” ( $\bar{x}=31$ ) whereas the least used strategies were “compensation strategies” ( $\bar{x}=22$ ), “affective strategies” ( $\bar{x}=21$ ), and “social strategies” ( $\bar{x}=19$ ). The results indicate that university students used cognitive strategies at a high level and social strategies at a low level of frequency.

**Findings for the 2<sup>nd</sup> sub problem:**

The second sub problem of the study was stated as “Do university students’ strategy use differ according to gender, university they attend, class level, department, or having a foreign country experience? In order to answer this sub problem, Mann-Whitney U test was computed and the result are shown in Table 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

**Table 4.** Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Gender

SILL	Group/Gender	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Memory	Female	152	104,58	15896,	3635,500	,388
	Male	52	96,41	5013,50		
Cognitive	Female	152	104,05	15815,50	3716,500	,521
	Male	52	97,97	5094,50		
Compensation	Female	152	104,73	15918,50	3613,500	,354
	Male	52	95,99	4991,50		
Metacognitive	Female	152	104,47	15879,00	3653,000	,415
	Male	52	96,75	5031,00		
Affective	Female	152	101,28	15394,50	3766,500	,609
	Male	52	106,07	5515,50		
Social	Female	152	102,59	15593,50	3938,500	,971
	Male	52	102,24	5316,50		
Strategy in total	Female	152	103,04	15661,50	3870,500	,824
	Male	52	100,93	5248,50		

\*p<.05

As seen in Table 4, there was no statistically significant difference between gender and foreign language strategy that university students use. Additionally it was revealed that females used nearly all strategies more actively than males.

**Table 5.** Mann-Whitney U Test Results for University

SILL	Group/University	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Memory	Dokuz Eylül	104	105,61	10983,50	4894,000	,467
	Muğla	100	99,27	9926,50		
Cognitive	Dokuz Eylül	104	105,44	10966,00	5122,000	,853
	Muğla	100	99,44	9944,00		
Compensation	Dokuz Eylül	104	105,69	10992,00	4868,000	,428
	Muğla	100	99,18	9918,00		
Metacognitive	Dokuz Eylül	104	104,02	10818,00	5042,00	,707
	Muğla	100	100,92	10092,00		
Affective	Dokuz Eylül	104	99,93	10393,00	4933,000	,512
	Muğla	100	105,17	10517,00		
Social	Dokuz Eylül	104	102,90	10702,00	5158	,920
	Muğla	100	102,08	10208,00		
Strategy in total	Dokuz Eylül	104	105,61	10983,50	4876,500	,443
	Muğla	100	99,27	9926,50		

\* $p < .0$ 

As displayed in Table 5, there was no significant statistical difference between university that students attended and language learning strategies they used. In other words, the university variable did not affect students' language learning strategy choice.

**Table 6.** Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Class Level

SILL	Group/Class	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Memory	1 <sup>st</sup> class	103	110,78	11410,50	4348,500	,420
	4 <sup>th</sup> class	101	94,05	9499,50		
Cognitive	1 <sup>st</sup> class	103	107,65	11088,00	4671,000	,207
	4 <sup>th</sup> class	101	97,25	9822,00		
Compensation	1 <sup>st</sup> class	103	108,21	11145,50	4613,500	,161
	4 <sup>th</sup> class	101	96,68	9764,50		
Metacognitive	1 <sup>st</sup> class	103	103,54	10665,00	5094,000	,799
	4 <sup>th</sup> class	101	101,44	10245,00		
Affective	1 <sup>st</sup> class	103	100,24	10324,50	4968,500	,575
	4 <sup>th</sup> class	101	104,81	10585,50		
Social	1 <sup>st</sup> class	103	109,77	11306,50	4452,500	,075
	4 <sup>th</sup> class	101	95,08	9603,50		
Strategy in total	1 <sup>st</sup> class	103	103,64	10674,50	5084,500	,781
	4 <sup>th</sup> class	101	101,34	10235,50		

\* $p < .05$ 

Table 6 shows that there is no significant difference between university students' language learning strategy use and class level. Looking at the mean rank of the grades, it is clear that for all the strategies except the affective, the first grade students used all the strategies more often, in other words, 1<sup>st</sup>-year students' strategy choice level was higher than the 4<sup>th</sup>-year students, but it had no significant impact on university students' strategy choice.



**Table 7.** Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Major Department

SILL	Group/Department	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	P
Memory	German	95	91,98	8738,50	4178,500	,017*
	English	109	111,67	12171,50		
Cognitive	German	95	99,04	9409,00	4849,000	,434
	English	109	105,51	11501,00		
Compensation	German	95	93,11	8845,00	4285,000	,033*
	English	109	110,69	12065,00		
Metacognitive	German	95	81,88	7778,50	3218,500	,000*
	English	109	120,47	13131,50		
Affective	German	95	96,64	9180,50	4620,500	,180
	English	109	107,61	11729,50		
Social	German	95	84,39	8017,50	3457,500	,000*
	English	109	118,28	12892,50		
Strategy in total	German language	95	79,52	7554,00	2994,000	,000*
	English language	109	122,53	13356,00		

Table 7 shows that except for the affective and cognitive strategies, students' strategy choices differed significantly according to their department. When the mean ranks were compared, no differences were observed, and it was seen that German language teaching department students used cognitive strategies which enable them to manipulate the language material in direct ways such as reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing and synthesizing (Oxford, 2003) the most, and metacognitive strategies which help them plan and control their own learning process the least. In sharp contrast to the German language teaching students, the ELT department students used metacognitive strategies the most, cognitive strategies the least. When we looked at the student' strategy use in total, it was observed that students in the ELT department used all the language learning strategies more than those in the German language teaching department. So, departments seemed as an important factor in determining the choice and significance of strategies in our study ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table 8.** Mann-Whitney U Test Results of Having a Foreign Country Experience

SILL	Having a foreign country experience	N	Mean Rank	U	p
Memory	Yes	52	90,90	3349,000	,100
	No	152	106,47		
Cognitive	Yes	52	101,01	3874,500	,833
	No	152	103,01		
Compensation	Yes	52	100,84	3865,500	,813
	No	152	103,07		
Metacognitive	Yes	52	97,99	3717,500	,523
	No	152	104,04		
Affective	Yes	52	98,26	3731,500	,543
	No	152	103,95		
Social	Yes	52	93,40	3479,000	,197
	No	152	105,61		
Strategy use in total	Yes	52	96,72	3651,500	,413
	No	152	104,48		



As can be observed, having a foreign country experience did not have an impact students' strategy choice ( $p > .005$ ). Also, it was somewhat surprising to see that the students that had not been to a foreign country used all the strategies more often than the students who had been abroad before.

**Findings for the 3<sup>th</sup> sub problem:**

The third sub problem was stated as "Do university students' attitudes towards foreign language differ according to gender, university they attend, class level, department, and having a foreign country experience?" In order to answer the sub problem, a Mann Whitney-U test was conducted and its results are shown below.

**Table 9.** Mann Whitney-U test results of Students' attitudes towards foreign language according to different variables

	Grup	N	Mean Rank	Mean Sum of ranks	U	P
<b>Gender</b>	Female	152	104,96	15954,50	3577,500	,308
	Male	52	95,30	4955,50		
<b>University</b>	Dokuz Eylül	104	104,83	10902,00	4958,000	,566
	Muğla	100	100,08	10008,00		
<b>Class</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> class	103	112,27	11564,00	4195,000	,017*
	4 <sup>th</sup> class	101	9293,	9346,00		
<b>Department</b>	German	95	92,04	8744,00	4184,000	,018*
	English	109	111,61	12166,00		
<b>Having a foreign country experience</b>	Yes	52	92,92	4832,00	3454,000	,175
	No	152	105,78	16078,00		
	Dokuz Eylül	104	104,83	10902,00		

As can be seen in Table 9, there were no significant differences between university students' attitudes towards foreign language and their gender, university they attend, and having a foreign country experience. In other words, these variables seemed to have no statistically-significant effect on students' attitudes towards learning a foreign language.

Unlike the other variables, class level and department had significant effects on university students' attitudes ( $p < .05$ ). It could be said that compared to freshmen at universities, the seniors had a little bit lower mean scores. This meant that students in their first year at university had more positive attitudes towards foreign language than the fourth year students. Another significant difference was found between students' attitudes towards foreign language and department ( $p = .017$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The mean ranks indicate that the ones who attended the English language teaching department had a more positive attitude than those in the German language teaching department. This result could be attributed to the different structure of these two languages.

**Findings for the 4<sup>th</sup> sub problem:**

The fourth and the last subproblem was stated as "Is there a statistically significant relation between university students' strategy use and their attitudes towards foreign language?" For this subproblem, Spearman correlation analysis was conducted and the results are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Correlation between LAS and SILL

	SUM SILL	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Meta-cognitive	Affective	Social
<b>SUM LAS</b>	r=,330	r=,757	r=,777	r=,760	r=,327	r=,492	r=,227
	p=,000	p=,000	p=,000	p=,000	p=,000	p=,000	p=,001
	N=204	N=204	N=204	N=204	N=204	N=204	N=204

Correlation is significant at 0.001 level.

As can be seen in Table 10, there is a positive but low correlation between language attitude scores and language strategy use total scores ( $p=.00$ ,  $r=,330$ ). This result explains that students' attitudes towards foreign language had positive effects on strategy use or vice versa. It was also determined that students' attitudes towards foreign language had a highly positive correlation especially with the direct strategies (cognitive, memory, and compensation) while it had a low but positive correlation with the indirect strategies (affective, metacognitive and social).

## Results and Discussion

### Frequency of Language Learning Strategy Use by University Students

The results of the study showed that university students used cognitive strategies at a high level and social strategies at a low level of frequency. Language itself is an element of social behavior and a predominant one for communication between people. Social strategies can help learners to achieve more effective language learning and achieve better understanding of different cultures (<http://elss.elc.cityu.edu.hk>). On the other hand, cognitive strategies generally enable the learner to manipulate the language material in direct ways, e.g., through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, reorganizing information to develop stronger schemas (knowledge structures), practicing in naturalistic settings, and practicing structures and sounds formally (Oxford, 2003:12). Thus, they have responsibility for their learning and they know the basic principles of learning a new language. As indirect strategies, affective and social strategies help learners to lower their anxieties and cooperating with others, in other words, they help to maintain positive self or to work with others. A cognitive view of language learning suggests that, in addition to being able to employ strategies to actively engage in the process of learning, strategies are themselves learnable and teachable (Griffiths, & Oxford, 2014). Although students use the metacognitive strategies frequently, they seldom use the indirect strategies. Stated thus, this current study indicates that use of affective and social strategies is rare in our education system. Therefore, prospective language teachers' awareness must be ensured and more exercises should be done to increase the use of these strategies during their education.

When compared to other studies, we may see some differences in the results of the current study. Demirel's (2012) study found that university students used compensation, social, metacognitive strategies, memory, cognitive and affective strategies most. In a study in Taiwan, conducted by Ching-Yi, Shu-Chen & Yi-Nian (2007), the most frequently-used strategy was compensation strategies followed by memory strategies, metacognitive strategies, social strategies, cognitive strategies and affective strategies. Generally, there were not big differences between the frequencies of different strategies that Taiwanese college EFL learners reported in their study. The results of our study are parallel to those of others who reported similar issues regarding the least used strategies.

Additionally, in Faisal's (2013) study held in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, it was indicated that university students used cognitive strategies more frequently than others. Also, Sadighi and Zarafshan (2006) conducted a similar study on Iranian EFL university students regarding strategy use. The results show that participants use the metacognitive, social, affective and compensation strategies most; memory and cognitive strategies least. From this perspective, it may be said that the differences result from education policy of different countries. The results give a hint about how our systems work. It can be inferred from the results that university students majoring in language teaching departments give more importance to thinking and cognitive processes rather than to feeling and emotions. In other words, they are thinking-oriented, not emotion- or feeling-focused, as opposed to the Iranian sample.

It was observed that language learning strategies that university students use while learning English did not show any statistical changes according to gender, university that they attend, having a foreign country experience, and class level; but show some variation according to department (except for the affective and cognitive strategies).

As for gender difference in language learning strategy use, there are different results indicated in other studies. For example, Aslan (2009) found significant differences between male and female participants' choices of some language learning strategies. It was found that females used memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies more frequently than males. Božinović and Sindik (2011) carried out a study about gender differences in the use of learning strategies by adult foreign language learners. According to its results, significant gender differences were found in the use of learning strategies, where females more frequently use all types of learning strategies, apart from socioaffective strategies. In addition to these studies, Zeynali (2012) found a significant gender difference in use of social/ affective strategies on behalf of females. Additionally, Bernat & Lloyd (2007) explored the gender effect on EFL learners' beliefs about language learning in their study. The study's results indicate that for learning and communication strategy use, males and females held similar beliefs about language learning according to the survey instrument 'Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory. Khamkhien (2010) reported different results for gender variable on language learning strategy use of Vietnamese and Thai students. While Vietnamese male and female students' choice of language learning strategies did not differ statistically, in the Thai sample, gender differences were observed favoring the male students in use of cognitive strategy. Similar to our study in general, females on average use all strategies more frequently than males in other studies. But the results in our study did not show a statistical difference for gender variable. The differences may be derived from the study sample, nationality, culture, language level, age or other factors, beyond the gender itself. For this reason, it can be said that gender differences in language strategy use can not be generalized, so further research is needed to be done.

Also, it was observed that university variable did not have any effects on the language learning strategy type in our study. When the literature was reviewed, there weren't found any studies investigating the relation between university variable and language strategy use but there are some studies discussing about types of schools. Özmen and Gülleroğlu (2013) found that considering different high schools, graduates of vocational and technical high schools use all the LLS, except for memory-related strategy, more frequently than others. Graduates of general high schools use the memory-related strategies. According to Tunç (2003)'s study, there were statistically significant differences between students' strategy use with regard to the type of high school they graduated from. University students who had graduated from vocational or Anatolian vocational

high schools used Metacognitive Strategies most frequently, followed by Social Strategies, Compensation Strategies, Affective Strategies, Cognitive Strategies and Memory Strategies, respectively. Based on these results, it may be said that university students' choice of language strategy use can be affected by high school type; but not by the university they attend. So it could be inferred that both English and German language teaching departments' students used similar strategies due to the similar education they were given.

The third variable whose affect on the choice of university students' strategy was investigated was the class level. In our study, the class level has no effect on university students' language learning strategy use. There are studies investigating whether different class levels affect the strategy use of students or not. Zhou (2010) conducted a study in senior high school on 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students about their strategy choice. Zhou (2010) found differences among the students in three grades. The study revealed that students in all three grades were medium users of learning strategies, with Grade 1 students using strategies a bit more and Grade 3 students using strategies the least. Although it was not statistically significant, it was observed that freshmen used all the strategies more frequently than seniors except for affective strategies. Affective strategies are about managing emotions, so it is an important result giving us a clue about the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students' positive emotions, attitude, and low anxiety towards learning a second language. As for the differences among the three grades, students use learning strategies less frequently as they go into higher grades; so it can be said that the higher the students' grade, the less frequently they use learning strategies. Similar to our study results, this result was somewhat surprising because it is generally expected that as students become older, they will be more skilled with strategies. The reason for this may be derived from the examination for the KPSS (State Employee Selection Exam) that students face after their graduation. That is, they have to take a critically-important test to be appointed to a school they want to work in Turkey, so they need to practice solving test questions to succeed in the exam. Thus, this result can be explained with the design of the education system they have to face.

In addition to the other variables, having a foreign country experience is not a key variable affecting students' language language learning strategy choice in our sample. In general, it is expected that having a foreign country experience will change students' views about learning a foreign language in a positive way, and may enhance the use of language learning strategies.

As last variable, department (major) is found as a significant factor for university students' choice of strategy use. Except for the affective and cognitive strategies, ELT and German language teaching department students' strategy choices differed significantly. English language teaching department students used all the strategies more often than German language teaching department students. ELT students preferred using memory, compensation, metacognitive and social strategies more than German language teaching department students. Another interesting result was the difference in metacognitive strategy use of two departments. While ELT department students use metacognitive strategy the most, German language teaching students use this strategy the least. Metacognitive strategies are important for language language processes because they are used to oversee, regulate or self direct language learning, and they involve various processes as planning, setting goals and self management whereby students can plan and change them if they are not suitable (Hardan, 2013). It is not the case that some language learning strategies are better and the others are worse, but it's a fact that language learning strategy use facilitates learning process. According to Rubin (1975: 44)'s classification of good-bad language learners, *"the good language learner takes and creates opportunities of what he has learned, while the poorer learner passively does what*

*is assigned to him.* So, it can be said that these results showed ELT department students had better understanding about their choice of language learning strategies and they were more capable of changing them according to different situations than the German language teaching department students could. In the literature, there were no similar studies to this study, and this current result can be explained by many different factors about the structure of the languages such as characteristics, forms, semantics, and grammar.

### **Language Learning Attitudes of University Students**

In our study, no statistically-significant differences were found between university students' attitudes towards foreign language and their gender, university they attend, and having a foreign country experience, except for the class level and department variables. The freshmen were found to have more positive attitudes than the seniors, and the students majoring in English department were found to have higher attitude scores than the German language teaching department students.

When the literature was searched, similar results were found between gender variable and learners' attitudes towards learning a foreign language. Demirel (2012) found no statistical significance between gender and strategy use of university students, although the mean scores of girls were higher than those of boys. Also, Alavinia and Salmasi (2012) reported no significant relation between gender and language learning attitudes. Additionally, Karaş (1997) and Yavuz (2004) found the same results as our study. This result may be derived from eagerness for learning a foreign language. Regardless of their gender, all the learners seem to have a positive attitude towards learning a foreign language, and in other words, they are aware of the importance of knowing a language. Regarding having a foreign country experience, no statistically significant difference was observed in our study. This result is also parallel to İnal et. al.'s (2005) study. It is conceivable that seeing a different country has no positive or negative effect on learners' attitudes for learning a foreign language. Generally speaking, going to a foreign country and seeing different cultures raises the interest of learning a language; but with our sample, it is not the case. This result may relate to "the impact of background differences on the attitudes and motivation of students involved in learning a foreign language" (Gardner & Lamberts, 1972, cited in İnal et. al. 2005).

Unlike the other variables, the class level and department variables had significant effects on students' attitudes towards language learning. Senior students have a little bit lower mean scores than the freshmen. This result can be explained by the fact that students are more eager to learn a language when they pass the university exam and start a new school, but in the following years, especially in their last year, students feel exhausted and tired of lessons along with the stress of finishing the school and finding a job.

### **Relationship Between Attitude and Strategy Use**

The answer to the last research question revealed that the learners' attitudes towards language learning and their language learning strategy scores were significantly and positively correlated. It means that

these two variables affect each other in a positive way and they are connected to each other. Learners having a positive attitude towards language learning were more likely to use language learning strategies frequently or vice versa. Additionally, a highly positive correlation between students' attitudes towards foreign language and direct strategies showed that language learning strategies were effective tools to shape learner attitudes in a positive way and help them to perform in target language well.

There are two studies similar to our study, although they assess motivation and attitude together. Sadighi and Zarafshan (2006) found that learners with positive attitudes used language learning strategies more frequently than those with negative attitudes. Jabbari and Golkar (2014) observed a positive and significant correlation between learners' attitude and language learning strategy use; that is, EFL learners with a positive attitude generally use the LLS more than learners with a negative attitude. Also, Cabansag (2013) found that there was a medium positive correlation between attitude and English language learning strategies among the respondents. Rastegar and Gohari (2016) investigated the relationship among EFL learners' speaking strategy use, attitude, and English language oral output in their studies. The results showed that there was a significant relationship between the different subscales of the use of communication strategies and the attitude of intermediate Iranian EFL learners. In addition to these results, as Oxford (1996:248) mentioned in her book, using language learning strategies and positive attitudes are essential and helpful tools for a better learning process, and they can affect each other significantly in a positive way, as found in the current study.

#### **Limitations**

This study does not give an overall picture of all the language teaching department students and universities in Turkey, because only the freshmen and seniors enrolled in the English and German language teaching departments of two universities located in the western part of Turkey are selected as the participants of the study. A larger scale study with more students from different universities could be conducted for deeper understanding and generalizability of the issue

#### **Suggestions for Practice**

As our results suggest, university students at language teaching departments use the social and affective strategies the least frequently. So, the learning environments, textbooks, and curriculum should be designed for students to facilitate the use of these strategies. Since a positive correlation was found between language learning strategies and attitude towards learning a foreign language, language learning strategies could be delivered as a lesson especially in language teaching departments.

#### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Having a positive attitude is critically important for learning a language. In our study it was observed that the 1<sup>st</sup>-year students had more positive attitudes than the 4<sup>th</sup>-year students. Because our sample consists of preservice language teachers, the reason of this case might be investigated in detail with qualitative research. In our study, the relationship between attitude and language strategy use was investigated, so, in further studies relationship between motivation, self efficacy, and anxiety could be explored. In the current research, some significant differences were found between ELT and German language students' use of foreign language strategies. To make further comparisons, additional studies can also be conducted with different language teaching departments.

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