



Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)' Approach in Burkina Faso through the IVSC Project

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Abstract

Learning strategies are steps taken by learners to enhance their learning. This article explores the learning strategies employed by participants in the Intercultural Virtual Societal Challenge (IVSC) in Burkina Faso. The IVSC project, part of the European ERASMUS KA2 TRIP, builds on the "Virtual Environmental Challenge" initiative (Evain, Moore, Hawkrige, 2023) and utilizes a combined Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) and Internationalization at Home (I@H) approach to promote collaborative learning and cross-cultural interactions. The aim is to analyze the learning strategies that empower learners to take control of their own learning, develop language skills, and increase confidence and motivation in the target language. Designed to foster independent and autonomous learning, the IVSC project encourages students to take responsibility for their language acquisition through CBL and I@H. The study shows that students utilize all six of Rebecca Oxford's (Oxford, 1989) strategies as outlined in the SILL taxonomy: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The findings suggest that the more strategies a learner employs, the greater their confidence, motivation, self-efficacy, and overall success in advancing along the proficiency continuum.

Keywords: Learning strategies, Intercultural Virtual Societal Challenge (IVSC), Virtual Environmental Challenge

Introduction

Learning strategies are steps taken by learners to enhance their learning. This article explores the learning strategies employed by participants in the Intercultural Virtual Societal Challenge (IVSC) in Burkina Faso. The IVSC, part of the "Virtual Environmental Challenge" initiative (Evain, Moore, Hawkrige, 2023), uses a Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) approach and Internationalization at Home (I@H) to promote collaborative learning and cross-cultural interactions. The aim is to analyze the learning strategies that empower learners to take control of their own learning, developing language skills, and increasing confidence and motivation in the target language. Designed to foster independent and autonomous learning, the IVSC project encourages students to take responsibility for their language acquisition through CBL and I@H. The study found that students utilized all six of Rebecca Oxford's strategies as outlined in the SILL taxonomy: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The findings suggest that the more strategies a learner employs, the greater their confidence, motivation, self-efficacy, and overall success in advancing along the proficiency continuum

This article is articulated as follows: Literature review, methodology, results and analysis, recommandan

1. Literature Review

This literature review includes four parts: Intercultural Virtual Societal Challenge (IVSC), Cross-Cultural Education and Its Importance, The Process of Reflective Feedback Conversations, and Language Learning Strategies and Possible Classification.

1.1 Intercultural Virtual Societal Challenge (IVSC)



The Intercultural Virtual Societal Challenge (IVSC) represents a novel educational approach designed to foster cross-cultural interactions and collaborative learning. As part of the ERASMUS KA2 TRIP project, a European initiative promoting internationalization in higher education, the IVSC builds on the "Virtual Environmental Challenge" (Evain et al., 2023) and employs Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) and Internationalization at Home (I@H) methodologies. It provides students at all levels with opportunities to explore critical societal challenges while enhancing their digital skills.

Core Structure and Methodology

The IVSC operates through the formation of student teams coordinated by an IVSC coordinator and country-specific coordinators. These coordinators facilitate the creation of mixed groups, conduct online training sessions, and provide coaching via "teamchairs." The teams work towards creating a video project, addressing real-world societal issues through practical application of their knowledge.

The IVSC E-MODULE focuses on the broad theme of inclusion, allowing students to engage in problem-solving while enhancing their intercultural and digital skills. The program aims to develop transversal skills such as critical thinking, intercultural understanding, research, digital literacy, and empathy. The pedagogical structure encourages meaningful interactions and the sharing of ideas, fostering a Community of Practice (CoP) as described by [1].

The IVSC project is organized into four distinct phases:

- Getting started and weekly guidance: Each team designs an eco-campus logo reflecting their commitment to environmental sustainability. and spend at least 5 weeks working on their project, and receiving weekly guidance from their teamchair
- Slide Presentation: Teams deliver a 20-minute presentation showcasing their understanding of the project's objectives and their strategies for implementing Open Educational Resources (OERs).
- Pecha-Kucha Trailer: Teams create a concise and visually engaging presentation summarizing their key ideas.
- TED Talk Presentation: Teams deliver compelling speeches in the style of a TED Talk, highlighting the impact of their OER initiatives.

These phases enable students to demonstrate creativity, expertise, and dedication to fostering a culture of knowledge sharing and open education.

Organization and Roles

The IVSC involves four main groups of participants:

- Students: Engage in team collaboration, follow written instructions, participate in the IVSC bank of resources, attend meetings, and produce presentation content.
- Teamchairs: Support and guide student teams, facilitate understanding of resources, and help with project preparation.
- Mentors: Organize the competition, facilitate participant interactions, promote useful digital tools, and create educational resources.
- Country Coordinators: Typically teacher-researchers, they communicate with teams, attend debates, judge competitions, and reward students with ECTS credits.

The IVSC Digital Dashboard

A central tool for the IVSC is the Digital Dashboard, which supports both participants and managers in maintaining control over the project. The dashboard comprises five tabs:

- General Organization: Provides project structure and timetabling information for all participants.
- Weekly Tracking: Offers ongoing updates and feedback between teamchairs and student teams.
- Teams: Facilitates easy communication and ensures team registration.
- Teamchair Page: Manages teamchair contact information and collaborative tools.
- Resources: A collaborative space for sharing and enriching project-related resources.

Adaptability and Future Plans

The IVSC is highly adaptable, allowing for different language editions and international scalability. It can be implemented both within and outside classroom hours. The interdisciplinary nature of the project makes it easy to integrate into various syllabi. Future plans include adding new languages and topics, such as gender, race, and discrimination, to expand the project's reach and impact.

The IVSC aims to bridge cultural gaps, promote collaboration, and provide students with valuable intercultural engagement opportunities. By focusing on real-world challenges and fostering a collaborative learning environment, the IVSC enhances students' skills and contributes meaningfully to their educational journey.



1.2 Cross-Cultural Education and Its Importance

In an increasingly globalized world, the importance of cross-cultural education cannot be overstated. The interconnectedness of societies and the blending of diverse cultures highlight the need for educational initiatives that foster understanding, tolerance, and empathy among individuals from varied cultural backgrounds.

Research demonstrates that exposure to cross-cultural education develops global citizenship skills, enabling individuals to navigate an interconnected world with cultural competence [2]. This aligns with the broader goals of cross-cultural education, aiming to bridge divides and cultivate a sense of shared humanity.

The IVSC emerges as a promising catalyst in this context. Grounded in the ERASMUS KA2 TRIP project, the IVSC places a deliberate emphasis on cross-cultural interactions as a cornerstone of its pedagogical approach. By fostering collaborative learning experiences among students from diverse backgrounds, the IVSC not only complements but also amplifies the objectives of cross-cultural education.

Studies have shown that exposure to diverse perspectives and collaborative problem-solving enhances cognitive flexibility and intercultural competence [3]. The IVSC's commitment to Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) and Internationalization at Home (I@H) positions it as an innovative platform for students to critically engage with key societal challenges while cultivating essential cross-cultural skills for effective global citizenship.

As we consider the potential transfer of the IVSC to Burkina Faso, its alignment with the broader goals of cross-cultural education underscores its relevance in addressing the demands of a globalized world. This alignment not only enhances the educational experience but also contributes to the broader societal goal of nurturing individuals capable of navigating and positively influencing an interconnected and culturally diverse global landscape.

1.3 The Process of Reflective Feedback Conversations

There are various approaches to establishing reflective feedback systems, whether through self-assessment or assessments and discussions within a community of experts or a Community of Practice (CoP). The common goal of these systems is to help learners independently improve their knowledge, skills, attitudes, or behaviors in line with their performance and educational program objectives. The feedback process should provide learners with opportunities to reflect on both their performance and their learning process [4]. Effective and constructive feedback must offer reliable and valid input that learners can act upon to enhance their performance. For example, "Reflective Feedback Conversations [5] provides a strategic approach to promoting learners' critical reflection, self-assessment, and fact-based improvement processes.

Reflective feedback is not solely a personal activity; it can also be extended to a group, particularly within a community that shares practices. A Community of Practice (CoP) is defined as an organized group of professionals who share interests in resolving issues, improving skills, and learning from each other's experiences. In our project, the RTT is a community of future teachers practicing teaching skills. Communities of Practice have been an effective means of leveraging businesses over the past decades [6]. It is now used in educational contexts to invite students to reflect collaboratively on their practices. The CoP model includes three stages: inviting self-assessment, providing actionable guidance, and describing relevant, observable behaviors along with constructive compliments and corrections.

Feedback, rather than being a one-way transmission, is a dialogue and collaborative construction. It includes constructive descriptions of specific, relevant, and observable behaviors. Framing feedback as a non-threatening 'conversation' communicates to learners that they are responsible for self-assessment input within the context of an improvement plan.

1.4 Language Learning Strategies and Possible Classification

The IVSC project provides an opportunity to implement a reflective feedback approach that includes an examination of language learning strategies (LLS). LLS are defined as the steps learners take to enhance their learning, affecting the development of the language system they construct [7] describe LLS as "the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or



retain new information" (p. 1). Research shows that these strategies not only support language learning but also improve learner-directed learning, promoting autonomy and proficiency.

Numerous studies have classified LLS to understand which strategies are effective for language learning [8] categorized strategies used by ESL learners into three groups: metacognitive (planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning), cognitive (direct engagement with the learning task), and socio-affective (social interaction and affective control) [9] expanded on this classification, dividing strategies into direct (memory, cognitive, compensation) and indirect (metacognitive, affective, social) strategies. These classifications help identify the specific actions successful learners use to advance their language skills.

Effective use of LLS has been linked to improved language performance, autonomy, and motivation. Researchers like [10] emphasize that strategic use of these techniques enhances learners' language proficiency and self-regulation. Understanding and applying these strategies are crucial for learners to become effective and autonomous language users.

This literature review underscores the significance of understanding and implementing language learning strategies within the IVSC framework to foster effective and autonomous language learning. It thus leads us to raise the following two research questions: Among the six LLS categories, which ones are used by students in the IVSC project? How effective are these strategies in enhancing language learning?

2. Methodology

To address our research questions—specifically, which of the six LLS categories are used by students in the IVSC project and how effective these strategies are in enhancing language learning—we gathered feedback from IVSC participants.

At the end of the semester, we assessed this new approach to learning strategies using a questionnaire. Instead of administering an initial questionnaire to track the evolution of practices, we opted to ask fewer questions to identify overall trends and maintain a dialogue with the students. Therefore, our questionnaire not only tested the learners' memory by asking them to recall strategies they had learned but also analyzed their practices by inquiring about new methods they implemented for learning English and their subjective evaluation of their strategy work.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of six open-ended questions without prompts, designed to elicit unprompted responses. The second part categorized strategies into six categories based on [11] "Learning Strategy Use Inventory", which is divided into listening, vocabulary, speaking, reading, writing, and translation sections to measure strategy use.

Part I

- If I can't find the right word, this is what I do:
- These are the changes I made to my learning strategies this semester:

Part II

Students were asked to identify and give examples of the following strategies they used:

- Direct Strategies
- Memory Strategies: Enable the transfer of information to long-term memory and recalling it for communication.
- Cognitive Strategies: Used for creating mental models, revising, receiving, and generating messages in the target language; these mental strategies help students make inferences from what they have learned.
- Compensation Strategies: Help students overcome communication difficulties by using body language and making logical guesses.
- Indirect Strategies
- Metacognitive Strategies: Allow students to plan, organize, and evaluate their own learning process.
- Affective Strategies: Help learners control their feelings, motivation, and attitudes related to learning.
- Social Strategies: Aid in communication with others.

3. Results and Discussion

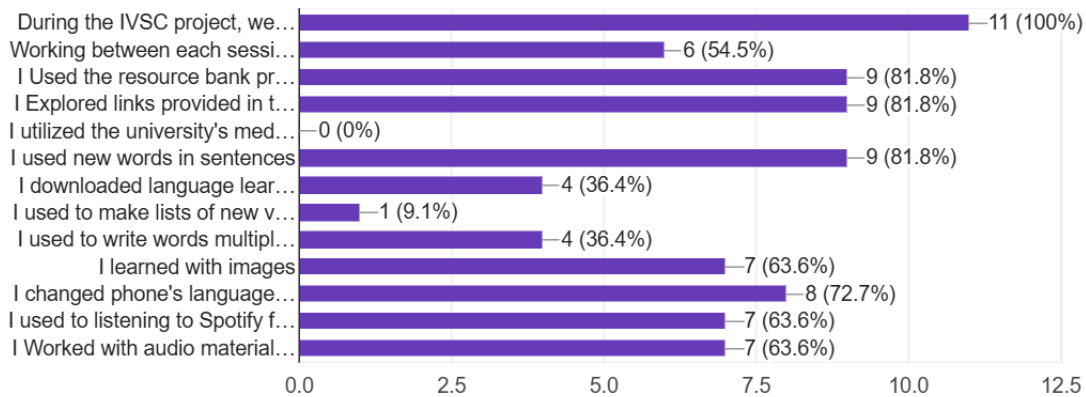
We collected feedback from the participants to explore which of the six languages learning strategy (LLS) categories were used by students in the IVSC project and assess the effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing language learning.



General Trends and Resource Utilization:

Overall, students did not prominently showcase new strategies for the IVSC project. For example, none mentioned the use of mind maps or other innovative techniques suggested by their team teachers. About 50% of the responses were expected, such as "working between each session with the team teacher." Notably, 81.8% of the students mentioned using the resource bank and expressed interest in exploring the links provided. We introduced the university's media library twice during the courses, and some students suggested practical strategies like creating sentences using learned concepts or keeping a journal.

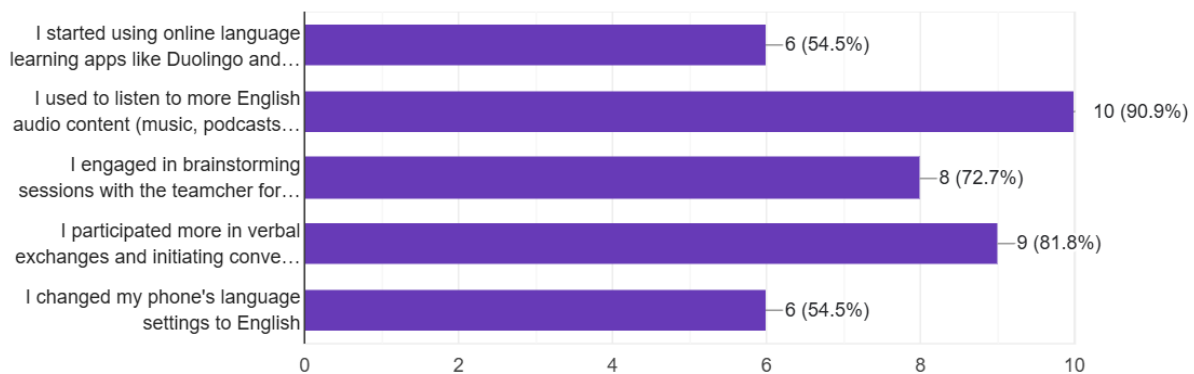
Fig.1. Frequency of Language Learning Strategy Used by IVSC Project Participant



Lexical Learning Strategies

The students' responses regarding lexical learning strategies were diverse and abundant. They included using words in sentences, downloading language learning apps like Duolingo, making lists, writing words multiple times, learning with images, changing the phone's language settings, and listening to Spotify. The most frequent response was working with audio materials from the resource bank.

Fig. 2. Frequency of Self-Directed English Learning Activities Among IVSC Project Students

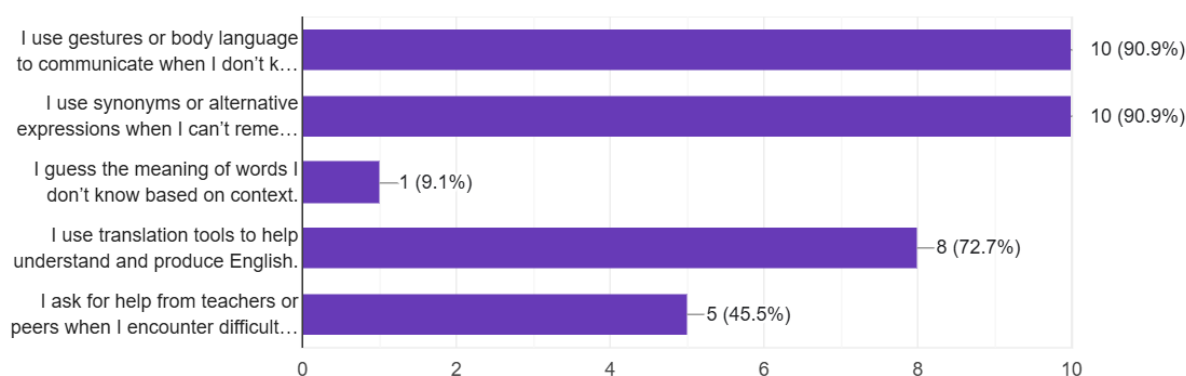


Compensation Strategies

For compensation strategies, 90.9% of the students emphasized using gestures. About 90.9% suggested using synonyms or alternative expressions, and 45.5% mentioned asking for help. However, a significant portion (72.7%) still proposed using translators, which, while practical, is less effective for long-term language learning [10].



Fig. 3. Feedback on Compensation Strategies used by IVSC Project Participant



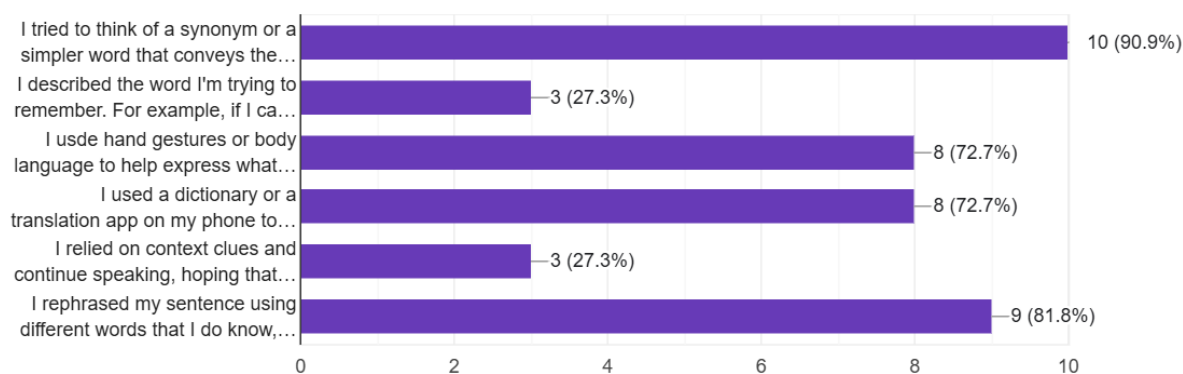
Strategies for Learning Outside of Class

When asked about improving their English outside of class, most students highlighted interactions within the group facilitated by the teacher. Additionally, 60% mentioned course work, and a few suggested conversation classes. Other responses included watching video materials and searching for additional content on YouTube to share with the group.

Changes in Learning Habits

Regarding changes in learning habits to learn English, 90.9% of the students reported modifying their habits to listen to more English, including music, podcasts, or other audio content while multitasking. This approach is supported by research indicating that immersive listening can improve language proficiency by enhancing vocabulary and comprehension skills [12]. About 72.7% highlighted innovations in written production, such as brainstorming sessions with the team teacher to create sentence fragments collaboratively, a method that aligns with collaborative learning practices to improve cognitive processing and language production [13]. Many students noted improvements in oral production, participating more willingly in verbal exchanges and initiating conversations, which reflects the benefits of active engagement in conversational practice to build confidence and fluency [14]. Additionally, three students suggested changing their phone's language to English for better reading comprehension, a strategy that is often recommended for increasing incidental learning and familiarity with the language in daily contexts [15].

Fig. 4. Changes in learning habits during the IVSC Project



Interest in Learning Strategies

Interest in learning strategies varied among students. While 47% expressed interest, 17% found the topic difficult, and 35% did not respond or did not understand the question. Research suggests that open-ended questions can sometimes be challenging for participants, as they require more cognitive effort and may lead to lower response rates, particularly among students unfamiliar with the subject [16]. We observed increased student engagement in proposing ideas. For instance, two students suggested apps for learning verbs and singing, reflecting the growing role of technology in autonomous language learning. Additionally, one student explained changing her phone's language interface, a common strategy for incidental learning through everyday device interactions.



Conclusions and Future Considerations

Working on learning strategies proved useful in changing students' habits and encouraging them to reflect. This approach actively engages students, making them more aware of their responsibility in their learning process, which is critical for fostering learner autonomy and self-regulation [17]. It also helps teachers better understand their class and renew their approach to teaching concepts using new techniques or authentic resources, which enhances contextual learning and supports cognitive engagement.

Incorporating student autonomy into language learning allows teachers to revisit learning strategies explicitly and introduce new methods from language didactics research. Additionally, adapting teaching practices to the cultural and cognitive particularities of learners fosters a more inclusive and effective learning environment, accommodating diverse needs and perspectives.

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