University Students' Test-taking Strategies and Their Language Proficiency

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Abstract

Test-taking strategies are of two kinds: general and specific. General strategies are applicable to any test while specific ones can be employed by test-takers in special kinds of tests. Specific cognitive test-taking strategies, in turn, are divided into various types: structure, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Based on their level of language proficiency, test-takers may show various degrees of tendency in making use of these strategies. The present study is an attempt to investigate whether there is any significant relationship between the subjects' proficiency level and their tendency in using various types of strategies while taking a test of language proficiency.

Keywords: test-taking strategies, language proficiency, test-wiseness, multiple-choice tests, test performance, test score

1. Introduction

In order to answer the items in a given test properly, and consequently receive a higher score, test-takers usually follow certain procedures. Besides having enough command over the content of what is being tested, first, they should be able to read and understand all the instructions, directions, and questions along with the choices, in the case of multiple-choice items. These strategies are mental operations that testees consciously

select to use. Diamond and Evans (1972), Sarnacki (1979), Kubistant (1981), Taylor and White (1982), Rittar and Idol-Maestas (1986), Rogers and Bateson (1991) have provided evidence regarding the positive relationship between test performance and knowing test-taking strategies in the literature of language testing, in taking tests.

Test-wiseness was introduced as a construct at least five decades ago. Thorndike (1951), discussing sources of variation entering into observed test scores, identifies test-wiseness as a persistent, general attribute of the examinee that would contribute in part to individual differences. Millman, Bishop, and Ebel (1965: 707) define test-wiseness as "a subject's capacity to utilise test characteristics and formats of the test-taking situations to receive a higher score." Furthermore, Sarnacki (1979) and Benson (1988) have shown that test-wiseness is a cognitive ability or set of skills a test taker can use to improve a test score no matter what the content area of a test is (Amer 1993: 71).

By proposing a model of test-taking behaviour of skilled test-takers, Rogers and Bateson (1991: 333) suggest that the cognition of skilled test takers consists of: 1) a cognitive monitor that controls which abilities and skills are going to be engaged to answer the item under consideration; 2) knowledge, abilities, and skills relevant to the content or trait being measured; 3) knowledge of test-wiseness principles; and 4) the

response (selection and record of choice). Besides, they say that in order to take a multiple-choice test, there are certain steps usually followed:

> First, the test taker reads the stem of a multiple-choice test and then attempts to recognise, using knowledge about the perceived content being tested, what he or she believes to be the correct answer from among the options listed. If the answer is not found, an unskilled test taker will either simply guess from among the options presented or omit the question entirely. In contrast, a skilled test taker, by way of his or her cognitive monitor for testing and partial knowledge about the content being measured (including that contained in the item's option), will next apply the set of test-wiseness principles he or she possesses, working cyclically through the elements of the set for a test-wiseness element-item cue match. When a match is made, the cycle is terminated, and a test-wise (as opposed to a pure knowledge) response is recorded. (Ibid: 333-334)

The ability of learners to use language strategies has been referred to as their *strategic competence* which is a component of communicative language use (Canale and Swain 1980). Bachman (1990) provides a broader theoretical model for viewing strategic competence. Bachman and Palmer (1996) adopt the model of language ability proposed by Bachman (1990), who defines language ability as involving two components: *language competence* and *strategic competence*.

Bachman and Palmer (1996: 67) call the former *language knowledge* and the latter *metacognitive strategies*. They say that "It is the combination of language knowledge and metacognitive strategies that provide language users with the ability, or capacity, to create and interpret discourse, either in responding to tasks on language tests or in non-test language use" (67). With regard to strategic competence, they believe that it is "a set of metacognitive components, or strategies, which can be thought of as higher order executive processes that provide a cognitive management function in language use, as well as in other cognitive activities" (70).

Strategic competence puts emphasis on 'compensatory' strategies, that is, strategies used to compensate for or remedy a lack in some language areas. It can be said that a fair number of test-taking strategies are, in fact, compensatory. Testees often omit some materials simply because they do not know it. They may also produce different materials from what they would like with the hope that it will be acceptable in the given context. In a writing task, Testees may use lexical avoidance, simplification, or approximation when they do not remember the exact word or do not know it at all. As it is true with any mental activity, testees may make differential use of the strategies they have at their disposal.

1. 1. Test-taking Strategies

A survey of the various test preparation books and internet sites which have dealt with 'test-taking strategies' can give one the idea

that test-taking strategies are mainly of two types: general and specific. As to general strategies, some general guidelines such as preparing for the test, reading the directions, the use of time during a test, error avoidance strategies etc. are presented. With respect to specific strategies, certain skills are given for taking various kinds of tests such as multiple-choice, matching, fill-in-the-blanks, essay, short answer, true-false, and problem solving.

1. 1. 1. General Test-taking Strategies

1. Plan your arrival so that you have plenty of time. Be sure to check your test taking material prior to leaving for the exam. (Showing up for an exam late or without a pencil is a sure way to focus unfavourable attention on yourself.)

2. *Read all directions.* Underline key words in the directions that give indication as to how your answers are to be recorded and how they should be worded.

3. Listen for any oral directions, if any.

4. Survey the entire test to get a feel for its order and contents. (If there are several pages, make sure that it was collated correctly and that all questions are in order.)

5. Budget your time. Survey the test to determine the type and number of questions to be answered. Determine where you will start on the test. Check yourself at 15 or 20 minute intervals to determine if you are progressing at an acceptable rate.

6. Note the point values for the various sections and allocate your time appropriately.

7. Be aware that you may have problems remembering from time to time. If you find yourself blocking, move on to the next question. Do not panic.

8. Ask for help in interpreting test questions which you do not understand.

9. Be aware of any negative statements you are telling yourself about the test. Such statements as "I'm failing, I didn't study for this, and the test is too hard for me" are sure ways of increasing anxiety.

10. Do not be concerned with what the other students are doing. (Another sure way of increasing anxiety is to tell yourself you are the only one having trouble.)

11. As a general rule answer the easy questions first. Don't waste time labouring over troublesome questions at the start.

12. If you are not certain of an answer, guess but do so methodically.

13. You may want to change an answer you think is wrong but remember that studies indicate that if you were fairly certain when you marked a response you were correct, leave it as it is.

14. Once you have completed the exam, make sure you have answered all questions. (If you are provided with a

separate answer sheet, be sure the numbers correspond properly.)

15. Try to break any anxiety or other type of mental rut by doing something unusual such as asking the instructor a question, sharpening your pencil, eat some candy, etc.

1. 1. 2. Strategies for Answering Different Exam Questions

Apart from general strategies which are mostly applicable to any test type, there are a number of strategies which can specifically be employed in doing certain types of tests. These are the strategies applicable to 'multiple-choice tests', 'matching items', 'fill-in-the-blanks items', 'essay questions', short answer items' true-false tests', problem-solving questions'.

The type of test-taking strategies used depends on the context. In multiple-choice tests, some strategy types are used to eliminate the options which are thought to be wrong through a surface matching of identical information in the passage and in one or more of the response choices. Some other strategy types are utilised as shortcuts to arrive at answers by not reading the text as instructed but simply looking immediately for the answers to the given reading comprehension questions. Still other strategy types are employed to answer vocabulary test items by analysing the structure, prefixes, stems, and suffixes, of the words being tested. In all these cases "the respondent may be using test-wiseness to circumvent the need to tap their actual language knowledge or lack of it" (Cohen 1998: 92). As most of

the test items usually employed in assessing language ability of test-takers are in multiple-choice format, below a list of strategies commonly used in this type of tests will be given.

1. 1. 2. 1. Multiple Choice Tests

1. Remember that you are looking for the best answer, not only a correct one, and not one which must be true all of the time, in all cases, and without exception.

2. Pay attention to qualifying words (e.g., always, never). Because few things in life are absolute without exceptions, avoid selecting answers that include words such as always, never, all, every, and none. Answers containing these key words are rarely correct.

3. Do not look for patterns.

4. Read through the questions with the answer.

5. Estimate the alternatives.

6. Look for clues (e.g., grammar, tenses).

7. Guess if you don't know the answer.

8. Work backwards — read the answers, then the question.

9. Choose the best alternative (more than one answer may be correct).

10. Eliminate some choices you know are incorrect.

11. Consider the cover-up strategy whereby you read the question and try to answer it before looking at the alternative answers

12. Translate double-negative statements into positive ones.

1. 1. 2. 2. Strategies for Taking Test Items on Language Skills

Very little is written in the literature about the exact specific strategies to be used in taking tests on specific language skills such as reading comprehension, vocabulary or grammar. However, most of the strategies mentioned above can be utilised in taking these tests. The following strategies are specifically about taking reading comprehension tests:

1. Completely read each passage and accompanying questions.

2. Read every possible answer--the best one could be last one.

3. Reread, when necessary, the parts of a passage needed for selecting the correct answer (scanning).

4. Eliminate answer choices that are clearly wrong.

5. Use your knowledge of common prefixes, suffixes, and word roots to make intelligent guesses about the words you do not know. (This strategy can be used in answering vocabulary test items as well.)

6. Spend some time on skimming the passage before you read through it.

7. Remember that in most of the cases the main idea of a passage can be taken out from the beginning sentences of the passage.

8. Pay close attention to the fact that some of the choices are mere restatements of the original sentences of the passage, and some are inferences.

1. 2. Studies on Test-taking Strategies

Literature on general education has not witnessed so many studies on test-taking strategies. Millman, Bishop, and Ebel's (1965) article is known as a classic study in the field. In language testing, Nevo (1989) dealt with test-taking strategies on a multiple-choice test of reading comprehension. Some of the other studies which can be referred to are Gibb (1964), Diamond and Evans (1972), Slakter, Koehler and Hampton (1970), Allan (1992), Purpura (1997 and 1998), Amer (1993), Rogers and Bateson (1991), and Storey (1997).

It can be inferred from the relevant studies on test-taking strategies that these strategies, most of which have been derived from the testees' reports of what they know and use to answer tests, can be described as a threat to the construct validity of a test. The purpose of these studies, however, has been to describe this threat by measuring the testees' knowledge and use of these strategies. Although it seems impossible to completely neutralise the use of these strategies, there have been some attempts to bring them under control by investigating the effect of knowing and applying them on the testees' test performance.

Gibb's (1964) test of test-wiseness measures the use of secondary cues found in test items. Secondary cues in test items

can be used to answer the test question itself without content-specific knowledge. Although Gibb (1964) pointed out that he was well aware that secondary cues are not the only elements that comprise test-wiseness, he justified narrowing his focus to cue-using strategies by stating that (a) secondary cues could be examined effectively through at least one type of commonly administered test (multiple-choice), and (b) secondary cueing was at least one element of test-wiseness that could be controlled for and eliminated as a source of variance by a test constructor in case test-wiseness is a variable worthy of consideration by testers.

In their seminal article, Millman, Bishop, and Ebel (1965) elaborated the concept of test-wiseness and articulated their explanation with a proposed taxonomy of test-taking skills. They defined test-wiseness as "a students' capacity to utilise the characteristics and formats of the test and/or the test taking situation to receive a high score (Millman, Bishop, and Ebel 1965: 707). They further asserted that test-wiseness is logically independent of the examinees' knowledge of the subject matter for which the items are supposedly measures (707).

Morse (1998: 399) says that a refinement offered by Millman, Bishop, and Ebel was that of separating test-taking skills into two broad domains: skills that are logically independent of the test purpose or test constructor (Class 1) and skills that are dependent on the test purpose or test constructor

(Class 2). Components independent of test constructor or test purpose included strategies for (a) using test time wisely, (b) avoiding careless errors, (c) making a best guess, and (d) choosing an answer using deductive reasoning. Components dependent of test constructor or test purpose included strategies for (a) interpreting the test constructor's intent and (b) using cues contained within the test itself. Therefore, skills that assist testees in avoiding the loss of points from variables other than knowledge include time-using strategies, error avoidance strategies, and knowing the intent of the tester. Techniques related to gaining points from variables other than knowledge include guessing, deductive reasoning, and cue-using strategies.

In order to examine the validity of the inventory, Allan (1991) collected relevant evidence from a small-scale investigation conducted with Cantonese speaking tertiary level ESL students. He noticed the familiarity of the students with some of the strategies in the inventory. He asked the students to describe the strategies they would recommend for taking a test of reading. The test-wiseness principles advocated and listed according to frequency of mention are as follows: guessing; elimination of alternatives; managing time so that equal time is given to each item; leaving difficult questions to the last; looking for a pattern of answers; answering as the author intended. All of these strategies are either implied or directly

stated in Millamn, Bishop and Ebel (1965). This suggests that the test-wiseness concept is valid in the EFL/ESL field.

Allan (1992) analysed the reports of the development of three measures of test-wiseness (Diamond and Evans, 1972; Ferrell, 1977; and Slakter, Koehler and Hampton, 1970) to determine previous researchers' responses to the following questions:

- Which test-wiseness strategies should be included in a scale?

- How many items per test and per subscale should be included?

- What methods will ensure that only test-wiseness cues are available to testees?

He summarises his findings as follows:

> The significant elements common to the instruments developed in the studies referred to above appear to be as follows: 1) tests were designed to measure more than one test-wiseness strategy; 2) strategy subscales contained from four to 10 items; and 3) the tests were all objective, with a four-option multiple-choice format.
>
> (Allan, 1992: 104)

The purpose of Nevo's (1989) research was to study the processing of reading comprehension tests in the first language (L1) as compared to the target language (L2), and to ascertain the cognitive strategies used by the respondents when taking the test. Nevo (1989: 199) says that the findings of his research

"indicated that in both languages most of the correct responses were obtained by the use of contributory strategies." However, he asserts that in the foreign/second language there was greater use of test-taking strategies that did not lead to selection of the correct response than in the first language.

Rogers and Bateson (1991) attempted to verify a model of test-taking behaviour of high school seniors. They tested 36 test-wise and 41 test-naïve high school seniors using a 14-item test designed to assess the students' abilities to apply selected test-wiseness principles. The results suggest that "before students can apply a test-wiseness strategy to answer a multiple-choice item for which they do not know the answer and that, because of its flawed character, provides a test-wise cue, they must have some knowledge of the content being tested and that contained in the item's options." (Rogers and Bateson, 1991: 346-7). They further concluded that the students classified as test-wise were more academically talented, whereas the students classified as less test-wise or test-naïve were among the less capable academic students (347).

Using a structural equation modelling approach, Purpura (1998) investigated the effects of strategy use and second language test performance (SLTP) with high- and low-ability test takers. He believes that "Implicit in the research on strategy use is the notion that high- and low-ability language learners utilize strategies differently" (333). He gave strategy

questionnaires and a language test to 1382 test takers and established baseline models of strategy use and SLTP for each group. The results of his study showed that the metacognitive strategy use (MSU) and SLTP models produced almost identical factorial structures for each group, while the cognitive strategy use (CSU) models were somewhat different (344)

In her study 'Reflections on the test-taking strategies of 7th and 11th grade Hungarian students of English', Katalin (2002) reveals that good language learners use a range of strategies during the process of learning, among them test-taking strategies, and it would help testees to do well on exams if they received some training in test-taking skills. She further adds that it would be useful to identify those general skills that help learners in a test-taking situation, such as planning, identifying and grouping (6).

It might be inferred that less proficient students use test-taking strategies more frequently in order to cope with the possible difficulties of the test. A comparison of the scores of the subjects in the tests and their responses to the items in the 'test-taking strategies questionnaire' of the present study can better reveal this fact. The question the present study addresses is:

> What is the relationship between the level of proficiency of the subjects and their use of test-taking strategies?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

A hundred and ten Iranian undergraduate male and female students, doing English as their major course, who had already passed their general English courses in the two semesters of their first year at universities in Iran, were randomly selected. These students were studying for a BA degree in 'English Language and Literature' or in 'Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)'. In selecting the students who acted as the subjects in the present study, factors such as sex, age, ethnic affiliation, native language/dialect, and linguistic background were not taken into consideration. Based on the scores these subjects obtained and starting from the highest scores to the lowest ones, they were then divided into three approximately equal groups, namely 'Advanced', 'Intermediate', and 'Elementary'.

The students whose scores fell between approximately 0.5 SD below and 0.5 SD above the mean were taken as the 'intermediate' group. The scores from 0.5 to 0.75 SD below and above the mean were left intact in order to have clear air among the groups. The students who obtained scores from 0.75 SD above the mean onwards were taken as the 'advanced' group and those who obtained scores from 0.75 SD below the mean were taken as the 'elementary' group. Table 1 shows the grouping of the subjects. As this table shows, the number of

students taken as 'advanced', 'intermediate', or 'elementary' is approximately similar in the language test. There are 23 advanced students, 26 intermediate students, and 25 elementary students.

Table 1: the grouping of the students into advanced, intermediate, and elementary

LEVEL OF THE SUBJECTS	PROFICIENCY TEST	% OF THE TOTAL SCORE OBTAINED
Advanced Students	**23 Subjects** Scores from 58 to 51	From 96.6% to 85%
Intermediate Students	**26 Subjects** Scores from 47 to 31	From 78.3% to 51.7%
Elementary Students	**25 Subjects** Scores from 26 to 12	From 43.3% to 20%

Note: Maximum possible total score of a student in the test could be 60.

In order to see whether the differences among the three groups are significant and therefore whether the grouping procedure is valid, a one-way ANOVA was conducted for the total test scores of the students in each test. The results of the ANOVA confirmed the existence of significant differences among the three groups.

2. 2. Instrumentation
2. 2. 1. The Language Test
The test of general language proficiency employed in the present study was adopted from one of the versions of the 'Michigan Test'. For practical and administrative reasons, this test lacked a

listening comprehension section. The time the students had to do the test was 50 minutes. This test was used mainly because the format of the test was quite familiar to the students. This, in turn, would bring the possible negative effect of 'unfamiliarity with the test' under control. Moreover, I found the Michigan Test not so difficult for the Iranian students. Therefore, the students could, to a large extent, cope with the test. Being able to cope with the test has positive psychological effects on the testees to finish the test with less anxiety.

The 60 four-option multiple-choice test items of the general language proficiency test of the present study are grouped into three sections of a) grammar, 30 items, b) vocabulary, 15 items, and c) Reading Comprehension, 3 passages with 15 items.

2. 2. 2. The Questionnaire

There are 22 items in the questionnaire employed in the present study. In devising the questionnaire used in this study steps were taken and every effort was made to avoid pitfalls in questionnaire development. In order to do so the 'content' of the questionnaire was carefully designed; special attention was paid to the 'length' of the questionnaire; and 'questionnaire development processes' were also meticulously attended to.

As to the content of the questionnaire, an exhaustive review of the possible strategies which might be employed by testees was carried out. The test preparation materials and textbooks

such as 'Preparing for TOEFL and IELTS' manuals and 'How to Take Tests' materials were reviewed in order to develop a clear understanding of the techniques suggested for taking tests efficiently and improving test scores.

A five-point Likert Scale was employed in the present questionnaire. All the five options, *'Never'*, *'Rarely'*, *'Sometimes'*, *'Frequently'* and *'Always'* were repeated after each statement. This gave the impression of taking a series of 22 questions in a multiple-choice test format in which the five options to all questions were identical. The questionnaire starts with a direction concerning how to respond to the questions. The subjects were also instructed that, in reacting to the statements of the questionnaire, they were not required to evaluate the correctness or incorrectness of them. What they were required to do was just to choose among the options of each statement the one which exactly indicated the degree of using or not using the specific strategy introduced in that statement while answering the questions of a language test.

The strategies incorporated in the questionnaire can be put into four categories: a) items which bear on the strategies generally used in taking a test, b) items which are related to the specific strategies which are usually employed in taking Reading Comprehension tests, c) items which show what strategies subjects use in Grammar tests, and d) items concerned with taking Vocabulary tests. The following table

(Table 2) shows the number of the statements in the questionnaire, which deal with general and specific strategies. Furthermore, numerical values were assigned to the responses of the subjects to the questionnaire items. Therefore if a subject marked 'always' under a particular item of the questionnaire, he would get 5 in that item. For 'frequently', numerical value of 4, for 'sometimes', 3, for 'rarely', 2 and for 'never', 1 were assigned.

Table 2: The number of general and specific strategies and their relevant minimum and maximum scores in the questionnaire

Strategy Type	Statements in the questionnaire	Number of strategies	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
General	2- 10	9	9	45
Reading Comprehension	2-17	16	16	80
Grammar	2-10 and 18-19	11	11	55
Vocabulary	2-10 and 17 and 20-22	13	13	65

2. 3. Results

As stated earlier, using test-taking strategies may be a personal habit. Some students show a marked proclivity towards utilising these techniques, others use them less frequently. Whether the advanced, the intermediate, or the elementary students fall into the former category is the topic of the present research.

2. 4. Analyses

2. 4. 1. Advanced Students

A 2-tailed correlation was conducted among all the scores of the advanced students in the language test and the scores the subjects had obtained in the questionnaire in order to examine the relationship between the subjects' strategy use and their test performance. The results show that there is a significant correlation only between the advanced students' scores in the reading comprehension section of the test and their scores in the reading comprehension strategies. The correlation between reading comprehension scores of the proficiency test (RCSP) and TRCS, total scores of the subjects in the reading comprehension plus general strategies of the questionnaire, was –0.441 and between RCSP and ORCS, only scores of the subjects in the reading comprehension strategies of the questionnaire, was -0.494. Table 3 shows the details of the correlations among all the scores of the subjects in all sections of the proficiency test and the various sections of the questionnaire.

Table 3: Correlation among the scores in the language test and the various strategies – Advanced students

	TGS	TSS	TRCS	TVS	TQS	OSS	ORCS	OVS
TSP	-.215	-.103	-.221	-.220	-.071	.326	-.078	-.031
SSP	.129	.267	.273	.063	.298	.403	.284	-.131
RCSP	-.181	-.214	-.441*	-.277	-.403	-.098	-.494*	-.229

VSP	-.304	-.309	-.330	-.179	-.201	-.019	-.141	.243

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

Abbreviations used in tables 3, 4, and 5 are:

TSP: Total Test Score in the Proficiency Test

SSP: Structure Scores of the Students in the Proficiency Test

RCSP: Reading Comprehension Scores of the Students in the Proficiency Test

VCP: Vocabulary Scores of the Students in the Proficiency Test

TGS: Total Scores of the Subjects in the General Strategies[1] of the Questionnaire

TSS: Total Scores of the Subjects in the Structure plus General Strategies of the Questionnaire

TRCS: Total Scores of the Subjects in the Reading Comprehension plus General Strategies of the Questionnaire

TVS: Total Scores of the Subjects in the Vocabulary plus General Strategies of the Questionnaire

TQS: Total of the subjects' Questionnaire cores

OSS: Only the scores of the subjects in the Structure Strategies of the Questionnaire

ORCS: Only the scores of the subjects in the Reading Comprehension Strategies of the Questionnaire

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1. Because general strategies can be used in all test types, they are taken into account along with specific strategies usually employed in doing structure, reading comprehension, and vocabulary test items.

OVS: Only the scores of the subjects in the Vocabulary Strategies of the Questionnaire

2. 4. 2. Intermediate Students

Regarding the scores of the intermediate students in the proficiency test, the results of a 2-tailed correlation reveal that the only significant correlation was between reading comprehension section of this test and the vocabulary strategies. It was 0.396. As it is evident from Table 4, other sections of the test show no relationship with the subjects' scores in the test-taking strategies.

Table 4: Correlation among the scores in the language test and the various strategies – Intermediate students

	TGS	TSS	TRCS	TVS	TQS	OSS	ORCS	OVS
TSP	.018	.080	-.007	.163	.117	.186	-.026	.287
SSP	-.044	.049	-.048	.048	.069	.269	-.033	.151
RCSP	.191	.204	.123	.344	.226	.074	.019	.396*
VSP	-.172	-.174	-.136	-.112	-.114	-.038	-.056	.020

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

2. 4. 3. Elementary Students

The same statistical measure was used for analysing the scores of the elementary group. It is interesting to note, as Table 5 shows, that no significant correlation was found between the elementary students' scores in the proficiency test and their

scores in the various sections of the questionnaire. These subjects displayed no tendency to use test-taking strategies. Two possible explanations suggest themselves. Firstly, they probably needed more time to understand the tests and therefore had less time to exploit the strategies available to them. Secondly, as the scores of these subjects in the questionnaire show, they had less knowledge of test-taking strategies and claimed that they use fewer strategies in doing a test than the other two groups.

Table 5: Correlation among the scores in the language test and the various strategies – Elementary students

	TGS	TSS	TRCS	TVS	TQS	OSS	ORCS	OVS
TSP	.064	.067	.110	.011	.060	.016	.151	-.106
SSP	.070	.093	.156	.027	.153	.097	.249	-.076
RCSP	-.075	.060	-.141	-.077	-.158	.052	-.207	-.048
VSP	.057	.022	.058	.034	.000	-.135	.046	-.029

2. 5. Results

The findings of the present study reveal that the three groups of students had different approaches towards using test-taking strategies. The advanced students, on the whole, used more strategies in doing the language test than the other two groups. With respect to the elementary students, their total scores in the test and their scores in the various sections of the test did not correlate with their scores in the different types of strategies.

This means that they reported that they did not use strategies in taking the test.

2. 6. Conclusion and Discussion

In the present study, it was intended to see which group of subjects: the advanced, the intermediate, or the elementary, is test-wise and uses more of the test-taking strategies. Purpura (1998) examining the relationship between strategy use and second language test performance with high- and low-ability test takers concludes that the metacognitive strategy use and second language test performance models produced almost identical factorial structures for each group, while the cognitive strategy use models were somewhat different. He believes that high- and low-ability language learners utilise strategies differently and that these differences are related to differential performance (333). He further concludes that elementary students use more strategies than the intermediate students and that intermediate students, in turn, use more strategies than the advanced students.

The findings of the present study, disconfirmed what Purpura (1998) states. Although the three levels of the participants had different approaches towards using test-taking strategies as the advanced students used more strategies than the other two groups, the difference, however, between the advanced students and the intermediate students in the language test was not so significant. The intermediate students were more inclined to use

test-taking strategies in the test. With respect to the elementary students, their total scores in both tests and their scores in the various sections of the test did not correlate with their scores in the various types of strategies. This can suggest that they did not make use of strategies in doing the language test.

It seems that the advanced students usually concentrate on their knowledge of the language being tested; they are less willing to engage their minds in using test-taking strategies. They resort to using strategies only if they find it necessary to do so. However, as the reading comprehension section of language tests is usually more challenging, in order to improve their performance in this section, advanced students showed a greater willingness to exploit their test-taking skills as well as their linguistic knowledge to obtain higher scores.

It was shown that the elementary students made the least use of test-taking strategies. This was reflected in their lowest means in all the strategy types. The reasons why the elementary students did not use test-taking strategies so much might be that they had to spend much of their time concentrating on the content of the test. Therefore, they did not have enough time to utilise these skills. Moreover, it might also be the case that they did not have enough command of the skills.

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