Social-affective strategy instruction in EFL materials: The case of English textbooks and official programs in Tunisia

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Abstract

This paper reports on the findings of a descriptive study which sought to evaluate the integration of social-affective strategy instruction in EFL official documents and textbooks used in basic and secondary education in Tunisia. The study relied on document survey, and used qualitative and quantitative methods. The corpus under investigation included official programs, textbooks, and teacher’s guidebooks for grade 6 and 9 of basic education, and grade 3 of secondary education in Tunisia. The results of the study indicated that the implementation of social-affective strategy instruction in textbooks was limited and mostly implicit. Although the official programs tended to provide solid foundations for strategy instruction, they fell short of offering explicit guidelines thereof. A promising finding, however, was that the textbooks made use of content areas and activities which can very well host social-affective strategy instruction if intended by teachers and material designers. Implications of the study as well as recommendations for teachers and material designers are presented and discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Social-affective strategies, Strategy instruction, Material design, EFL textbooks, Oral skills, Task-based instruction.
Introduction

The strategy area in second language (L2) learning has cumulated so far almost 40 years of research with variance in research activity rate and a constant debate on future research directions. However, a general consensus among strategy researchers implies that learning strategies are characteristics of effective learners (Wong and Nunan, 2011), and that strategy instruction may lead to success in language learning if explicitly integrated in the curriculum (Chamot, 2004; Cohen, 2009; Griffiths & Oxford, 2014). Although promising strategy instruction models have been carried out (Chamot, 2005; Cohen & Weaver, 2005; Harris & Grenfell, 2004; Nakatani, 2005; Naughton, 2006), only few studies dealt with the use and design of strategy-based textbooks in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

This study attempted to investigate strategy instruction in EFL materials with a focus on social-affective strategies in oral skills, an area which received little but significant attention in strategy research (e.g., Cohen, 1998; Gunning & Oxford, 2014; Graham & Macaro, 2008; Ma & Oxford, 2014; Nakatani, 2005, 2006). It was also the intention of the present study to bring together three learning aspects, namely, materials development, oral skills (listening and speaking), and social-affective strategies in order to give an account of a domain-specific strategy instruction. It should be noted however that the results and implications of this study are to be considered carefully, taking into account degrees of abstraction dictated by the study’s scope. A critical reading of the findings implies a holistic approach to strategy instruction that emphasizes the interdependence between social-affective strategies – the focus of this study – and other strategy categories, application of strategy use to the different skills, and considering learner variables, task specificities and the context of learning. This paper starts with a theoretical discussion on relevant issues to strategy instructional materials, then presents and discusses results and implications of the present study.

1. Theoretical background

Social-affective learning strategies are the different mental and behavioral mechanisms learners use either to come to grips with emotional and socio-cultural challenges they encounter in their learning process or to improve their learning capacities. Griffiths (2010) defines social-affective strategies, among other strategy types, as the “activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning” (p.1). Affective strategies, also called self-motivational strategies (Dörnyei, 2003), assist learners in dealing with personality factors which are believed to impair their progress in learning and using the language such as debilitating anxiety, low self-esteem, and negative attitudes. Social strategies, sometimes referred to as sociocultural strategies (Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002), “help the learner work with others and understand the target culture as well as the language” (Oxford, 2003: 14).

The fact that social-affective strategies have been found to exhibit positive correlations with different learner variables such as motivation (Dörnyei, 2003), learning styles (Cohen, 2009; Ma & Oxford, 2014; Uhrig, 2015; Wong & Nunan, 2011), personality types (Liyanage &
Bartlett, 2013), multiple intelligences (Akbari & Hosseini, 2008), and self-regulation (Bidjerano & Dai, 2007), and relate significantly to success in language learning (see for e.g., Bremner, 1999; Griffiths, 2010; Griffiths & Oxford, 2014; Lan & Oxford, 2003; Wong & Nunan, 2011; and Yammamori, Isoda, Hiromori, & Oxford, 2003) have led many strategy scholars to call for the inclusion of these techniques in FL curricular.

1.1. Rationale for teaching social-affective strategies

There is sound evidence in strategy research that social-affective strategies can facilitate L2 learning and may contribute to language proficiency (Chou, 2004; Ma & Oxford, 2014; Oxford, 1990, 2003; Wong & Nunan, 2011). In a paper on social-affective strategy use, Chou (2004) postulates that social-affective strategies have the potential to improve learners’ communicative competence and motivation if these techniques are seriously considered in the classroom. Earlier studies on learning strategies and strategy training (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Ross & Rost, 1991; Wenden & Rubin, 1987) have identified many strategy features that have to do with the learnability as well as the teachability of these techniques. More recently, Griffiths and Oxford (2014) and Wong and Nunan (2011) among others still advocate the potential of integrating social-affective strategies in teaching. Evidence from outside strategy research also advances the concept of social-affective strategy instruction. Two main sources have helped and supported the inclusion of these techniques into language classrooms: Humanistic education and self-regulated learning, both of which bear a close relationship to the social-affective strategy domain.

Humanistic approaches to language learning and teaching (Legutke & Thomas, 1991; Moskowitz, 1978) have called for humanizing the FL classroom by promoting learners’ self-actualization and personal growth. This view has also been endorsed by educational psychology research into the concept of self-regulated learning (SRL) (for a review of SRL, see Bidjerano & Dai, 2007; Cleary, 2006). Social-affective strategies fall into the self-motivating category of the SRL model, and are considered as prerequisites for developing learners’ motivation (Dörnyei, 2003) and the different dimensions of learners’ self concept, namely, self-regulation and self-efficacy (Bidjerano & Dai, 2007).

Studies investigating the relationship between strategy use and proficiency (see for e.g., Bremner, 1999; Griffiths, 2010; Gunning & Oxford, 2014; Lan & Oxford, 2003; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Yammamori, Isoda, Hiromori, & Oxford, 2003) have shown that the relationship is generally held to be a significant one, particularly in oral performance (Cohen, Weaver, & Li, 1998; Gunning & Oxford, 2014; Nakatani, 2006; Naughton, 2006). In their study on EFL elementary school children, Lan and Oxford (2003) found that high-proficiency learners attended to social-affective strategies with a higher frequency than did their medium- and lower-proficiency peers. Likewise, Nakatani (2006), investigating strategy use among EFL Japanese learners, has demonstrated that students scoring high on an oral test employed social-affective strategies more than did those with low scores. Intervention studies (for e.g., Cohen, Weaver, & Li, 1998; Naughton, 2006; O’Malley, 1987) have also come up with evidence showing a
significant improvement in learners’ achievement after receiving a special training in strategy use relative to a control group which did not undergo the training. Other studies have shown that affective strategies are underused by learners (see Bremner, 1999; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006), and that social strategies like cooperation do not attract students unless they undergo a special training, and get teacher encouragement (Harish, 2014).

It is also worth mentioning that the potential of social-affective strategy instruction is not limited to proficiency. Training learners in the use of social-affective strategies has been shown to play a major role in enhancing learner autonomy and self-confidence (Chamot, 1999), self-direction (Gan, 2004), motivation and positive attitudes (Dörnyei, 2003; Kao & Oxford, 2014), and learner self-evaluation (Nikolov, 2006). It should be noted, however, that the incorporation of social-affective strategies in EFL programs and materials evokes a number of challenges teachers and educators should take into account.

1.2. Materials in strategy instruction

Designing or adapting teaching materials to incorporate social-affective strategies among other strategies requires a number of prerequisites such as considering task nature, content, and the appropriate models and frameworks for strategy instruction (see Cohen, 1998, 2003, 2009; Oxford, 1990). Issues related to process material and task-based instruction, learners’ needs and socio-cultural background, and experiential learning approaches definitely come into play in this regard given their inherent relationship with social-affective strategies.

1.2.1. Process material and the issue of ‘task’ in strategy instruction

The orientation of language classroom research and syllabus design towards a process-oriented approach to teaching that emphasizes the process of learning in addition to its outcome (Breen, 2001; and Spada, 1987) has strong links with strategy instruction. In fact, the concept of strategy rests on the idea that learners need to know how to learn in order to attain autonomy and self-direction in the learning task (Cohen, 2009; Holec, 1992; Oxford, 2001). This shift in focus had led researchers to the identification of “task-based and process syllabus types” (Breen, 2001: 153; see also Nunan, 2004) which bear an obvious connection to learning strategies in general, and social-affective strategies in particular (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 2001; Oxford, Cho, Leung, & Kim, 2004).

The relationship between social-affective strategies and process and task-based learning/teaching seems to be reciprocal. On the one hand, social-affective strategy instruction inherently requires materials and activities that focus on the learning process since social-affective strategies pertain to a great extent to the latter. On the other hand, social-affective strategies, in their turn, can constitute actual learning tasks or what is referred to as “meta-communicative” tasks (Breen, 2001: 153). Learning or meta-communicative tasks, as opposed to, yet compatible with, communicative tasks, aim at facilitating “learners’ engagement in communicative or target-like tasks” by involving them in activities that reflect upon how

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language is learned or used (Breen, 2001: 153; see also Nunan, 2004, for ‘pedagogical tasks’). It has also been shown that strategy instruction is particularly susceptible to task nature and requirements (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 2001; Oxford, Cho, Leung, & Kim, 2004). Oxford, Cho, Leung, and Kim (2004), after investigating the impact of task on second language university and community school students’ strategy use, found that learners’ strategy choice was partly influenced by the presence and difficulty of the task undertaken. Consequently, Oxford, Cho, Leung, and Kim (2004) and Cohen (1998) have advanced the notion of, and called for, the incorporation of task-based strategy instruction by language teachers.

Accordingly, it comes to reason that teachers, wishing to develop or adapt materials for strategy instruction, are required to consider activities and content areas that focus on, and raise their students’ awareness to, the learning process in general, and learning strategies in particular. The extent to which tasks encourage students to use appropriate strategies in a meaningful and individualized way is also of a special relevance in designing strategy-based materials.

1.2.2. Designing and integrating social-affective strategy-based activities

The first issue in this regard is that available materials designed to teach learning strategies are scarce, which requires teachers to produce their own materials (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990), or at least adapt existing ones to include strategy-based activities (Cohen, 1998). Tomlinson (2001: 67) declares that “an effective classroom teacher needs to be able to evaluate, adapt, and produce materials (…)”. Oxford (1990) also refers to the strategic teacher as a creative figure in the language classroom. However, for teachers to be creative and take the responsibility of developing classroom materials, they should undergo intensive and special training (Cohen, 1998).

Regarding materials content and activities, Cohen (1998, 2009) argues for materials that include both awareness-raising and strategy-based activities, which help the learner gain knowledge and skill in language learning in general and strategy use in particular. Tasks should also be relevant to the learners, and involve their individual experiences and “communicative intentions” of their own (Littlewood, 1992: 86). Examples of these tasks may include problem-solving activities, simulations and discussions that make use of “referential or real questions” (Lynch, 1996: 108) to which the teacher, or the student interlocutor, does not know the answer in advance. Such activities, due to their unpredictable aspect, may provide the learner with opportunities to engage in genuine and cooperative turn-exchange and discussions (Littlewood, 1992). Consequently, social-affective strategies such as cooperation, asking questions, expressing feelings and attitudes, and taking calculated risks among others may be intrigued and used.

Another type of learning tasks that is likely to fit social-affective strategy instruction is project work. Nunan (2004) acknowledges that learning strategies are inherent in project-based instruction. Legutke and Thomas (1991) underscore the effectiveness of project work in language classrooms, and provide a comprehensive and detailed framework for project-based learning in their process-competence model. Littlewood (1992: 93) advocates that social strategies, if
integrated in regular instructional materials and activities, could involve learners in “experiential learning” through project work. Tudor (1996) has provided empirical evidence showing that students engaging in a content-based project work reported using social-affective strategies.

Material content should also be challenging to the learner not only intellectually, but also emotionally and strategically (Dewaele, 2005; Tomlinson, 2001). Tomlinson (2001: 68) points out that tasks which have the potential to involve the learner emotionally are “more likely to facilitate learning than neutral texts which do not”. Social-affective strategy instruction, in particular, requires students to engage in activities that involve discussing their emotions and attitudes, and expressing their fear, hopes, desires and so on. However, they may find some difficulty in so doing due to insufficient linguistic repertoire. Dewaele (2005: 374, 375-376) reports on empirical findings showing that native speakers use more emotion words than L2 users when engaged in the same task and that people tend to recall and express emotional events in their first language rather in their L2. He attributed this to the absence of emotional involvement in “teaching material[s]” which, as such, “do not prepare L2 learners to become proficient L2 users”. He then suggests inserting emotion vocabulary into textbooks and exploring emotionally challenging and authentic material such as movies. However, teachers should pay attention not to engage students in activities that are emotionally demanding. Legutke and Thomas (1991: 60) warn of “high-risk” activities which may cause resistance in learners.

1.2.3. I.T.-related materials and activities

In addition to the traditional materials, such as books, newspapers, and T.V., the Internet proved to be particularly relevant to the teaching of social-affective strategies. Using the Internet may provide the learner with genuine opportunities and tools to initiate conversations with native speakers, fellow students or other students all over the world by exchanging e-mails or via online chat, and engage in project work (Gonglewski, Meloni, & Brant, 2001; Warschaur, 2001). Also, using e-mails and blogs can serve as a fast and easy extra-class medium of communication between students and their teachers, whereby teachers can overcome the problem of lack of time to give the needed feedback to students, and learners can in their turn come to grips with their shyness to ask questions in the classroom (Warschaur et al., 2000). Stepp-Greany (2003: 3), discussing how affective issues can be addressed through instructional technology, states that “[t]he computer may inform and prompt appropriate strategies, providing the opportunity for success in risk-taking in a judgment-free environment”. Warschaur (2001) adds that technology-based activities can be very motivating to learners if they do not conflict with their learning goals and preferences. Griffiths, Oxford, Kawai, Y., Kawai, C., Park, Ma, Meng, and Yang (2014) report on an interesting strategy-based I.T. project developed by Yang in Taiwan which was designed to support and assess strategy use through portfolios. The authors gave accounts on increasing learner collaboration and participation, lower stress, and effective teacher feedback and guidance. Strategy materials, therefore, can very well invest in I.T.-related activities, and use technology as a “catalyst” (Griffiths, Oxford, Kawai, Y., Kawai, C., Park, Ma, Meng, & Yang, 2014: 62) to support strategy use eventually, and language learning ultimately. It is one of the
intentions of this study to bring to focus strategy-based activities and topics that promote social-affective strategy use.

2. The study

This study explored the integration of social-affective strategies in three EFL textbooks and the accompanied teacher’s books and programs. The textbooks and programs were designed by a team of Tunisian EFL teacher trainers who had been EFL teachers prior to serving as trainers and material designers. The three textbooks represent the official teaching materials approved by the Tunisian Ministry of Education, and adopted in 6th and 9th grade basic education, and 3rd grade secondary education in all public and private schools. The educational system in Tunisia encompasses 9 years of basic education – with the first 6 years equivalent to primary education – and 3 years of secondary education prior to university pursuits. Adherence to the official EFL programs and the use of textbooks are mandatory in public and private schools. However, teachers can supplement the existing materials with extra-activities.

2.1. Research questions

The aim of the present study was to evaluate the integration of social-affective strategies in EFL textbooks and official programs, and addressed the following research questions:
1. To what extent social-affective strategies are integrated in textbooks and official programs?
2. To what extent the textbooks and official programs are process-oriented?
3. Do the textbooks and programs support social-affective strategy instruction?

2.2. Method

The researcher relied upon document survey to evaluate the implementation of social-affective strategy. This included teacher and student manuals as well as the official programs of 6th and 9th grades basic education, and 3rd grade secondary education. The official program for 6th grade was not available. While evaluating these documents, the researcher focused on the extent to which social-affective strategies were included in the materials and the official programs, whether the strategies were integrated within the lesson content and activities, the degree of explicitness within which these learning tools were considered, and oral/aural skills and subskills to which the strategies in question were applied. The evaluation procedure also sought to assess the extent to which the documents stimulated social-affective strategy awareness, use, instruction, transfer, and evaluation as well as out-of-class use.

To ensure precision in the evaluation process and to supplement the qualitative data, the researcher developed an evaluation framework (Appendix, Table 1) which was based on the strategy literature and on some insights from Lake (1997). The framework consisted of the main criteria required by the strategic teaching approach (see for e.g., Cohen, 2003, 2009). A five-point scale ranging from 0 = not at all (of the criterion) to 4 = very much (of the criterion) was used to determine the extent to which the materials incorporated each criterion (Appendix, Table 2). The
quantitative evaluation was limited to the evaluation of textbooks, and excluded the official programs and teachers’ guidebooks as some evaluation criteria did not fit them. The official programs and guidebooks, however, were surveyed with regard to more relevant strategy instruction criteria including social-affective strategy scope, the degree to which the strategies in question were integrated, and whether they were explicitly or implicitly stated. Issues relating to materials and content areas were considered as well.

2.3. Results and discussion

The results of the present study generally indicated that social-affective strategies were implicitly integrated in the materials with a lack of precision and explicitness as to the methods of application in actual teaching. The results will be presented and discussed in this section, and attempts to suggest possible alternatives will be delineated as well.

2.3.1. Social-affective strategies in the official programs

In the following analysis reference will be made to Programmes of English for Basic Education (PEBE) and English Programmes for Secondary Education (EPSE). PEBE was meant for grade 7, 8, and 9 of basic education. The official program for grade 6, however, was not available or did not exist. EPSE covered the curriculum for 3rd and 4th grade secondary education.

2.3.1.1. Scope of social-affective strategy instruction

While going across the program booklets set up for basic and secondary education, one clearly notices that both maintained exclusively the same objectives and assumptions. For this reason, only PEBE will be referred to in the analysis relating to the scope of social-affective strategy instruction. In defining the status of English as a subject, the program authors stated that

“[A]s a means of communication, English will foster learner self-expression as well as appropriate interaction with peers and other interlocutors, which, in turn, will ensure access to universal culture through Anglophone contexts” (PEBE, 2006: 4, italics mine).

This definition bears a close relationship to social-affective strategies given the authors’ emphasis on the individual, the interactional, and the cultural potential of English language, which are at the core of social-affective strategy. By definition, social-affective strategies aim the advancement of the personal and interpersonal as well the sociocultural skills of the learner (Grainger, 2012; Harish, 2014; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002), which goes in line with the underlying assumptions of both programs.

In like manner, the principles, assumptions and methodology which were stated in the programs related to a great extent to the social-affective strategic approach. Regarding the principles and assumptions on which both curricular are based, it was emphasized that the teaching/learning process should consider the learner as a central figure, encourage learners’ autonomy, and foster their “self-confidence and social relationships”, which are meant to
“nurture in learners positive values and a sense of identity” (PEBE, 2006: 5). These premises support social-affective strategy instruction, being a means whereby students can eventually develop their “self-other awareness” (Legutke and Thomas, 1991: 38; see also Harish, 2014), autonomy (Cohen, 1998; Wong & Nunan, 2011), and ultimately a positive self-image (Csizár & Dörnyei, 2005).

Under the same heading, ‘Principles, assumptions, and methodology’, the authors stated that not only should students be active figures in their classrooms, but should also reflect on the learning process, which imply a metacognitive awareness (Harris and Grenfell, 2004; O’Malley and Chamot, 1990) by reflecting on the learning process itself. In delineating lesson activities and tasks, the authors asserted that “[p]roject work activities, portfolios, research and web quests are meant to foster socio-psychological skills, research strategies and learner autonomy” (PEBE, 2006: 5). In this regard, social-affective strategies may very well be stimulated by web quests and project work. Task-based strategy instruction (see Cohen, 1998; and Oxford, Cho, Leung, & Kim, 2004), of which project work is an essential part (Nunan, 2004), also pertain to the social-affective strategy domain (see Littlewood, 1992; and Tudor, 1996). The authors have also emphasized social-affective strategy use by referring to ‘socio-psychological skills’.

Furthermore, the authors explicitly mentioned learning strategies by emphasizing that classroom activities and tasks were meant to assist the students in developing both language features and learning strategies. It was also stated that learner assessment should focus on the process, and not exclusively on the product of learning, which related to social-affective strategies since they pertain to the learning process, and, thus, involve formative assessment.

The different assumptions discussed above showed that the objectives and principles included in the two programs went in line, though mostly in an implicit way, with those evoked by social-affective strategy instruction literature. These assumptions, though very promising, did not find support in the subsequent sections of the programs in which it was expected to find specific techniques and classroom procedures whereby the teachers could bring these claims into practice. Actually, it is very common that, drawing on Lake (1997: 171), while language programs start by establishing an attractive scope for strategy instruction, “(…) but gradually taper off to no mention of the topic whatsoever”. It is very well the case with the two programs at hand as we will see in the analysis below.

2.3.1.2. Social-affective strategy instruction in oral skills

PEBE included two lists under each of which a number of different strategies and skills relating to the four skills were randomly presented. The first list entitled ‘Reading and Listening skills and Strategies’ (PEBE, 2006: 8 – 9) included 52 items while the second taxonomy labeled ‘Speaking and Writing Skills and Strategies’ (PEBE, 2006: 10) had 28 items. The two lists, however, neither specified which items constitute the ‘skills’, and which correspond to the ‘strategies’, nor did they differentiate between what items relate to which skill. It was also noticeable that the items which were attributed to reading and listening skills outnumbered those
devoted to speaking and writing, with a difference as big as 24 items. The different statements relating to skills and strategies were presented in a random manner, and no categorization was being adopted whatsoever. As far as social-affective strategies are concerned, only cooperation was mentioned, though indirectly as it could be inferred from items involving pair and group work.

Listening and speaking subskills were not an exception in this regard as no reference to social-affective strategies for pronunciation, vocabulary or grammar was mentioned. Though PEBE devoted a whole section for grammar, the focus was exclusively on grammatical typology and discrete language structures. The rationale behind each item and specific procedures to help the teachers link the items to lesson activities and content were not provided as well. Some items were also too vague. For example, one item which appeared in both programs stating: "Employ the strategy appropriate to one’s purpose and/or text type" (EPSE, 2006: 10) fell short of giving any direction to particular strategies or specific use.

Virtually all the strategies which were included in PEBE fell within the cognitive type, while social-affective strategies and other strategy categories such as metacognitive and communicative ones were overlooked. The lists were a melting pot of cognitive strategies, language functions, and discrete grammatical and phonological items randomly assigned to the four skills without any rationale or clear guidance as to how, where, and when each item could be put into operation in the classroom.

Unlike PEBE, EPSE provided rather detailed skill and strategy taxonomies which encompassed relevant, though very few, examples of social-affective strategies. Two strategy lists were presented under two headings corresponding to the Reading/Listening and Speaking/Writing skills respectively. The first list (EPSE, 2006: 10-11) which was assigned to reading and listening included 62 strategies of which only four (or 5%) were social-affective. The four social-affective strategies related mainly to cultural understanding with the exception of one strategy which referred to “expanding knowledge” of both culture and “self”. Examples of the strategies included in the list are “Develop awareness of aspects of the target culture” and “Develop appreciation of self, environment and culture”.

The list attributed to speaking and writing included almost the same number of strategies (N= 61) as those assigned to listening and reading (N = 62), which was an advantage comparing to PEBE’s number (N = 28) and distribution of the strategies assigned to speaking and writing. However, the list did not mention any social-affective strategy explicitly. Some strategies such as ‘using the Internet’, ‘discussing feelings’ and ‘writing diaries’ could only be implied. In fact, social-affective strategies were indirectly referred to through reference to language use functions, and/or as a supplement or extension of other strategies and work arrangements. For instance, the so-called strategy “Express one’s appreciation of peers’ contribution” referred to a language function more than a strategy. Nonetheless, it could have stood for a (social-affective) strategy if it were formulated, for instance, as ‘Appreciate one’s peer’s contribution’, and subsequently followed by explaining the rationale behind it. In like manner, another item stating “Work in pairs/groups to perform a task such as solving a problem” was actually an example of work
arrangement which might or might not entail strategic use, contrary to what is implied by the heading ‘strategies’ under which this item was included. Though pair and group work inherently imply cooperation and other social strategies, this might not necessarily lead to effective and conscious strategy use, nor could it help the learner know which strategies were relevant to specific tasks and skills.

Same as PEBE, EPSE focused on cognitive strategies at the expense of social-affective strategies and other strategy categories. The program not only focused on language functions and discrete linguistic elements, but also took some of them as strategies. Also, some so-called strategies were too vague and should have been reformulated and supplemented with a rationale and specific ways to implement them within the relevant skills and activities in the textbooks. As it was expected, the strong introduction of the two programs did not find support when probing into specific skills and activities. How teachers could foster their students’ ‘self-confidence’, social relationships’, and autonomy as well as positive values and a ‘sense of identity’, as mentioned in the introduction to the program, seemed to be left to chance.

2.3.1.3. Course materials and content areas

Both programs provided separate sections for content areas and materials. The material sections included in the two programs were almost the same, but the topics differed. Various I.T. tools and media-related materials such as the Internet, software, cartoons, and T.V. which related to social-affective strategies were included in both programs. Other materials including use of diaries, poetry and drama as well as magazine and newspaper articles, which might stimulate students to discuss their feelings, develop cultural understanding, and relax while learning, were also highlighted. The topics in both programs were also very challenging and interesting, and, consequently, could encourage the students to attend to social-affective strategies if intended and scaffolded by their teachers.

PEBE included topics such as “Free Time and Entertainment”, “Relationship with Peers”, “Civility”, and “Education”, which were very likely to trigger social-affective strategy use. EPSE offered a variety of content areas including themes which explicitly catered for students’ different attitudes and preferences. Topics such as “Generation Gap”, “communication technology”, “eating out”, “chatrooms”, “success and failure”, and “tolerance” were pertinent enough to host social-affective strategy-based tasks. It was also very interesting that topics such as “Relating to Others” and “Attitudes and Values”, which related to a great extent to social-affective strategies, were presented as major content areas. Not less interesting was the fact that education-related topics which might lead the students to reflect upon the learning process were also included. Most illustrating examples of such consciousness raising themes were “Why learn English” and “Autonomous Learners”. This could eventually stimulate strategy use and Metacognitive awareness, and ultimately lead them to reflect on the learning process and be independent learners.
Accordingly, it could be claimed that the two programs offered a range of topics and materials which were very relevant to social-affective strategy instruction. Still, both of them did not provide guidance as to how social-affective strategies could be integrated within such challenging content areas. A serious deficiency in this regard was that the topics were cut off from the skills and the strategies. However, if the strategy taxonomies were linked to the topics and materials, the teachers might then recognize specific ways to make use of the content areas strategically.

To conclude, the strategy lists provided in both programs were far from being exhaustive, and lacked variety and specification. The focus on cognitive strategies and language functions as well as on discrete linguistic items tended to suggest structural and functional rather than strategic and communicative approaches to learning/teaching. Both programs focused on ‘what to teach’, but overlooked ‘how to teach’ it. Other gaps in both programs were the lack of a rationale behind each instructional component including strategy teaching, specific procedures whereby the strategies could be operationalized in the classroom, and an evaluation component which is essential in any strategy instruction (Cohen, 2008; Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). It could have been more practical if more strategy types including social-affective ones were added to the lists along with a rationale, and specific ways to implement them within the skills and topics. Linking the strategies to the different skills and content areas is also recommended, so that the teachers could recognize which strategies to assign to specific skills and topics as well as to the different tasks in the textbooks.

2.3.2. Social-affective strategies in textbooks and teachers’ guidebooks

Students’ textbooks and the corresponding teachers’ guides (except 6th grade teachers’ guidebook which was not available) were analyzed according to specific criteria dictated by the strategic approach to teaching (see Appendix, Table 1) and partly inspired from Lake (1997). A 5-point scale was used to determine the extent to which the textbooks incorporated each criterion. Teachers’ guides were not included in the scale evaluation because they did not fit all the criteria; however, they were analyzed separately. The final scores for each textbook can be found in Table 2 below. The following analysis will include textbooks for grade 6 (‘Prime English’), Grade 9 (‘Say it in English’) of basic education, and grade 3 (‘Activate and Perform’) of secondary education as well as the corresponding teachers’ guides.

2.3.2.1. Prime English (Grade 6 basic education)

Although Prime English fell short of offering a comprehensive and explicit model for social-affective strategy instruction as shown in table 2 (Appendix), it could be claimed that it had a rather promising strategic potential. This textbook included very motivating and, mainly, personalized activities that might stimulate 6th grade students’ strategic awareness and use. For instance, song-based activities which were systematically arranged within each unit in this book might trigger a number of social-affective strategies. The listening activity (p. 9), which included a very reflective rhyme featuring different work arrangements with an apparent emphasis on...
group work, was a good example of an awareness-raising activity. This activity could not only raise students’ awareness of the different classroom work arrangements, but also stimulate social-affective strategies such as cooperation, discussing feelings, empathizing with peers, and relaxation (Kao & Oxford, 2014), as well as other strategies, depending on the lesson scope and objectives.

In addition to song-based activities, *Prime English* made use of e-mails (p. 35, 133 & 165) which were well integrated and sequenced within lesson units. Interestingly, e-mails might involve students not only in the use of social strategies such as using the Internet and developing cultural understanding, but also affective ones like discussing feelings. Though e-mails generally fit reading and writing, they could be extended to speaking as well by, for instance, having the students reflect on online interaction and discuss its cultural as well as personal aspects.

*Prime English* also included activities which made use of websites (p. 140) and texting (e.g., p. 155). For example, the ‘Homefun Project’ (p. 140) required the students to google the weather forecast on a local and international website, or text a weather forecast call center. In addition to encouraging the students to use I.T. tools in a well-contextualized and individualized manner, this task might assist them in engaging in a strategic task-based learning, taking on active roles, and expanding their strategy use outside the classroom (Cohen, 2008). Furthermore, *Prime English* offered many opportunities for students to relax and learn through the systematic and frequent insertion of fun pages, cartoons, games, and motivating pictures.

As shown in Table 2, *Prime English* had a total score of 24 (or 43%) out of an ultimate score of 56 (i.e., scoring 4 on all items, or 100%), which is slightly below the average of a comprehensive social-affective strategy instruction. *Prime English* featured some essential aspects of social-affective strategy instruction like motivation, learner involvement, and a variety of activities that suited students’ preferences and needs, and which deemed to be very flexible to host and stimulate social-affective strategies (see Appendix, Table 2 for the scoring of each feature). The book, however, missed some basic elements such as explicit focus on the strategies, a strategy evaluation component, and guidance for teachers, which were totally absent in the book as indicated in Table 2. Accordingly, it could be said that *Prime English* might help the teachers deliver a fairly comprehensive social-affective strategy instruction if it included more strategies and especially a rationale behind their use as well as guidance for teachers.

### 2.3.2.2. Say it in English (Grade 9 basic education)

The objectives set out for each lesson in the teachers’ guide to ‘*Say it in English*’ tended to be language-oriented as they virtually focused on discrete linguistic features and language functions such as ‘describing’, ‘giving directions’, ‘making requests’ and so on. No explicit claim was made about strategic and communicative objectives in this regard. However, it should be noted that the authors mentioned in the introduction to the teachers’ guide that “(…) [the] lists of objectives are not exhaustive and more objectives can be devised by the teacher in the light of
results obtained in class” (p. 3). Teachers, thus, were encouraged to include other objectives which possibly could cover social-affective strategies among other strategies and learning areas.

What was interesting in the teachers’ guide to *Say it in English* was that, unlike the corresponding official program, a separate heading was systematically devoted to strategies in each section. However, the strategy category exclusively focused on memory and mainly cognitive strategies, while other strategy categories namely social-affective strategies were missed out. It should also be noted that not only a small range of strategies was focused on in each lesson, but also too much emphasis was put on reading ‘strategies’ such as guessing meaning from context, matching, skimming and scanning, which were repeated over and over in almost every section. Social-affective strategies for speaking and listening were totally absent in this guidebook.

In much the same way, the textbook, *Say it in English*, did not feature social-affective strategies to a sufficient extent. As indicated in Table 2, this book had the smallest score comparing to *Prime English* and *Activate and Perform*, with an overall score of 11 (or 20% of a comprehensive strategic potential). Out of the 12 strategy features, only 6 were found in this book, among which only two aspects (‘variety and flexibility’ and ‘strategic potential’) were fairly salient.

Although strategy instruction was not catered for in *Say it in English*, there were some hints in the activities which might involve strategy instruction. For instance, 3 out of the 7 objectives set out in the teachers’ guide for lesson 1 (p. 5) included a social-affective strategy dimension as they involved learners’ reflection on themselves and peers, and peer-evaluation. Although the corresponding task in the textbook did not target directly the use of social-affective strategies, it could be extended to involve students’ feelings and attitudes towards themselves and their peers. The objective requiring students to “[e]ngage in collaborative work to assess peers’ results” embraced a strong social-affective and metacognitive dimension, and might stimulate the use of strategies such as cooperation and peer-assessment.

Furthermore, *Say it in English* activities which featured games (p. 17), questionnaires (for e.g., p.12 & p. 48), and songs (p. 28; p.141) evidenced a strong potential to stimulate social-affective strategies. For example, one lesson included a questionnaire (p. 48) requiring the students to report on some activities as whether their parents allow them or not. The questionnaire items dealt with activities such as surfing the Internet, watching T.V., and going to the cinema. In addition to leisure, those activities could be explored further as strategic learning experiences beyond the classroom.

Nevertheless, the textbook strategic potential was diminished by the fact that most of the activities made use of examples of people, places and events that were not likely to fit the students’ preferences, age, and/or cultural background. For instance, unlike the other two textbooks, *Say it in English* activities over-emphasized the British cultural context at the expense of the broader Anglophone and global culture, and even the local context. Many themes and
personalities were also old-fashioned and could barely trigger interest in the students. For instance, one task (p.47) included pictures of the British Royal Family many years ago. The task then required the students to tell who is who. Other pictures (e.g. p. 120) featured famous personalities exclusively from the eighties and early nineties such as Sophia Loren and Steffi Graff. More up-to-date figures that would match the students’ cultural repertoire would have been more stimulating however. Also, the students were not involved directly in so many activities, which might make them feel distant as far as the activities are concerned. Such activities might diminish the opportunities for students to attend to social-affective strategies, given that those techniques are to a great extent task- and content-sensitive. Revisions of the textbook activities and content areas so as to be tailored to the learners’ preferences and cultural repertoire are highly recommended in this regard.

2.3.2.3. Activate and Perform (Grade 3 secondary education)

In the introduction to Activate and Perform teachers’ guide, the authors explicitly included statements featuring strategy awareness, learner identity, and autonomy through self-evaluation and positive values. The authors mentioned that the teachers should explain the objectives to their students while tackling each module, and guide them to assess their progress and “set their own goals” (p. 5) through self-assessment forms to be filled in at the completion of each module. Accordingly, the authors concluded, students will be given

> “the self-confidence, the autonomy and the responsibility they need to become aware of their learning strategies, monitor their progress and continue learning by themselves, beyond the programme” (p. 5, italics mine).

Such introduction makes up a promising blueprint for strategy instruction, and, consequently, could be claimed to raise teachers’ awareness of social-affective strategy instruction. Although the teachers’ book provided a strong introduction to strategic teaching, it lacked guidance as to which specific procedures teachers were expected to follow in order to operationalize those claims. This was apparent when examining the strategies and subskills included in the teacher’s guidebook, which were randomly put under the corresponding major skills. Cognitive strategies dominated the list much more than the other strategy categories. In fact, social-affective strategies were only touched upon in the ‘helpful notes’ provided for the teachers within each sections.

Examples of these notes were “Encourage the students to overcome their shyness” (p. 11), “Let the students interact and talk fluently without worrying too much about mistakes” (p. 15), “Have the students construct meaning in the cartoons and enjoy the humorous aspect” (p. 49), and “have the students express their opinions, compare and respond to the different attitudes” (p. 49). One prompt saying “Give help when asked for only” (p. 10) would have been more strategic if it were formulated as ‘Encourage students to ask for help’. As such, students would be stimulated to use this strategy instead of waiting for them to initiate, or not initiate, it. Also, it is advisable that these notes make part of the strategy list so that teachers consider them as basic teaching components, rather than mere ‘helpful notes’.
However, *Activate and Perform* gave a considerable support to the claims stated in the introduction to the teachers’ guide. In fact, it offered the most comprehensive social-affective strategy scope comparing to 6th and 9th grades textbooks. According to table 2, *Activate and Perform* had an average score of 31 (or 55% overall strategic potential), featuring 12 out of the 14 criterion. This textbook could have been of much more relevance to social-affective strategy instruction if it included explicit strategies and guidance to the teachers; two aspects which were totally overlooked as shown in Table 2.

What was promising about *Activate and Perform* is the amount of self-assessment given to students in a systematic manner. As mentioned in the introduction to the teachers’ guidebook, a self-assessment checklist was provided at the end of each module. For example, the checklist (p. 168) was an example of successful, though implicit, social-affective strategy incorporation. Not only did this checklist include out-of-class strategy use as indicated in the item: “*My classmates and I work together outside the classroom*”, but also could assist the students and teacher to figure out appropriate social-affective test-taking strategies as they report on another item stating: “*When I sit for a test I get frightened*”. Still another Item (“*Tests give me clear ideas about my weaknesses and strengths*”) might also help the students reflect on test-taking strategy use and the learning process, and pave the way for the teacher to provide guidance and more consciousness-raising thereof. More interesting was the fact that the checklist was included in a speaking lesson through which students were required to discuss their answers. Although reference to social-affective strategy use was minimal in this regard, the other checklists could be stretched out to include more strategies of this kind.

The textbook objectives which were given in the beginning of each module may feature a more comprehensive strategic rationale, given the fact that teachers were encouraged in the guidebook to insert more objectives that might deem necessary for their classes. Another noticeable feature in *Activate and Perform* was the frequent and systematic inclusion of project-based tasks which have a strong potential to trigger students’ existing social-affective strategies, and trigger new ones. In addition, Language functions and content areas of the textbook might also encourage the students to attend to social-affective strategies as both components dealt with students’ attitudes, feelings, needs and preferences. For instance, one module entitled “*We Learn to Give, Share and Care*” was a perfect example of humanistic learning/teaching (Legutke and Thomas, 1991) which definitely suited social-affective strategy instruction. One final aspect to mention in this regard is the fact that the textbook included a humor page at the end of each module, thus, encouraging students to use laughter both to relax and learn.

Finally, considering the above analysis and the fact that *Activate and Perform* also included very motivating, up-to-date, and context-relevant pictures, and that it made use of I.T. areas and well-chosen poems, it could be said that this book had a fair potential to offer a comprehensive social-affective strategy instruction if two conditions were met. First, the book should include more social-affective strategies orchestrated with other strategy types. Second, an explicit focus on strategy use regarding the objectives, practice, and assessment for both teachers
and students is highly recommended. Adding clearer and more concise guidelines in the teachers’ guidebook would be of a great benefit as well.

2.4. Conclusion and recommendations

The official programs for basic and secondary education included promising assumptions and objectives which generally catered for social-affective strategy instruction. However, it was found that these principles were not supplemented with specific applications and guidelines that could help the teachers implement social-affective strategies in lesson content. The different curricular attributes; namely, skills, strategies, materials and content areas were cut off, and, fell short of constituting a solid model for a strategy-based course. The teachers’ guidebooks had the same tendency as the corresponding programs since these guidebooks reflected the same assumptions and procedures.

The three textbooks had an overall score of 22 (or 39% overall strategic potential) which is a small level, with considerable variance among them. The textbooks featured important strategy attributes like challenging topics, use of I.T.-based activities, and involving the learners through personalized activities and self-/peer-assessment. However, this might not necessarily lead to strategy use and awareness unless explicit focus on social-affective strategies and guidance to teachers were included.

It was also found that the programs and materials under investigation proved to encompass a strategic dimension as far as the general principles and objectives are concerned. However, when probing into specific task and skill areas, the documents tapered off to emphasizing discrete language items and functions at the expense of strategy use. In addition, the programs focused too much on cognitive strategies, particularly, for the reading skill, while other strategies which are relevant to the remaining skills were overlooked. Program and material designers are then required to fine-tune their documents to include more strategies, a rationale behind their use, and specific ways to integrate them into classroom tasks and materials. Program designers, whether following a task, skill or content-based approach, would not find too much difficulty in so doing given the fact that strategy use is inherent in all tasks and skills, and, thus only require attention and explicit guidelines to make them more salient and transferable to other tasks and learning situations. A promising finding in this regard was that the textbooks included challenging and reflective content and activities which could be easily tailored to social-affective strategy instruction if supplemented with a rationale and strategy-relevant guidelines.

Strategy guidebooks and assessment tools are available for teachers and material designers wishing to incorporate strategy instruction. Teachers can consult strategy assessment inventories such as Oxford’s (1990) SILL questionnaire or more up-to-date and validated strategy lists (for e.g., Nakatani, 2006; Cleary, 2006; Tragant, Thompson & Victori, 2013). An interesting strategy instruction guidebook designed by Cohen and Weaver (2005) can be very helpful in designing strategy-based activities as well. It should also be noted that integrating social-affective strategies requires careful consideration of the learners’ needs (Sadeghi, 2014), styles
(Wong & Nunan, 2011, Uhrig, 2015), personality types (Liyanage & Bartlett, 2013), and their socio-cultural background (Grainger, 2012). Teachers and material designers are advised to fine-tune existing materials to their immediate context and the local norms while keeping informed by international research and interventions. A final note is that further research that investigates the use of strategy-oriented materials in EFL classrooms is definitely needed to account for a broader perspective of the matter. Future studies may address teachers’ and learners’ attitudes towards strategy instruction in materials, complementarity between curricular theory and practice in materials design, or the impact of strategy-based tasks on learner advancement. Investigations that adopt socio-cognitive and critical evaluation frameworks (Santos, 2016) is also called upon in recent literature on material evaluation.
References


*Say it in English: 9th Year Basic Education Pupil’s book.* Tunis: National Pedagogic Centre (2007), ref. 141 903.

*Say it in English: 9th Year Basic Education Teacher’s book.* Tunis: National Pedagogic Centre (2007), ref. 141 903.


## Appendix

### Table 1. Evaluation criteria of the textbooks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scope of social-affective strategy instruction</td>
<td>Extent to which the basic components of social-affective strategy instruction namely social-affective strategies, metacognitive knowledge, and motivation/attitudes are incorporated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General approach</td>
<td>Extent to which the material activities are process-oriented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breadth of focus</td>
<td>Type, range and combination of social-affective strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit focus on social-affective strategies</td>
<td>Extent to which the purpose of an activity is clearly stated regarding the use of social-affective strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of social-affective strategies</td>
<td>Whether the strategies are integrated within aural/oral activities and tasks or separate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety and flexibility</td>
<td>- Range of task/activity types to suit students' strategy knowledge, interests and learning styles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Extent to which social-affective strategies can be inserted within the existing tasks/activities and content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic potential</td>
<td>Extent to which the activities and content can stimulate social-affective strategy use and instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy awareness</td>
<td>Extent to which materials raise students' awareness as to the use of social-affective strategies and its different attributes including reflecting on the learning process, metacognitive awareness, and being aware of themselves as language learners as well as of other (peer) learners and users of the T.L.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy transfer</td>
<td>Extent to which the activities and content help students to apply the strategies being taught or used in new learning contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy evaluation</td>
<td>Evaluation procedures included to enable students to assess their performance and progress, such as questionnaires, strategy checklists, and self-evaluation tools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-class strategy use and long term involvement</td>
<td>Extent to which the activities and content encourage and guide students to use social-affective strategies beyond the classroom context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective involvement</td>
<td>Amount of affective involvement given to students, and the level of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Para-materials | interest it will generate
--- | ---
Guide for teachers | Inclusion of additional materials to supplement and support existing materials, such as visuals, audio/video tools, kinesthetic (Tomilson, 2001), checklists etc.
Extent to which the rationale, procedures for strategy instruction, and the expected outcomes as well as teacher and students' roles are explained and demonstrated.

Table 2. Results of textbooks analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Scores on a 5-point scale* for each textbook</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prime English</td>
<td>Say it in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope of social-affective strategy instruction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General approach</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breadth of focus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit focus on social-affective strategies</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of social-affective strategies</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety and flexibility</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic potential</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic awareness</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy transfer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy evaluation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-class strategy use and long term involvement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective involvement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Para-materials</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide for teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Scale Transcription: 0 = Criterion is not incorporated  1 = Criterion is incorporated to a small extent  2 = Criterion is incorporated to a moderate extent  3 = Criterion is incorporated to a great extent  4 = Criterion incorporated to a much greater extent