

# Strategy focused instruction in literacy education and second language learning for adults (LESLLA) in the Netherlands

Kaatje Dalderop<sup>1</sup>, Sible Andringa<sup>1</sup> and Judith Rispens<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication, University of Amsterdam*

**Abstract** Research has shown that use of language learning strategies tends to improve learning outcomes. Few studies, however, have focused on teachers' roles in strategy training, and adult second language and literacy learners (LESLLA learners) have largely been ignored in the research. This survey study focused on the strategies that LESLLA teachers in the Netherlands model and train in their classes. A questionnaire was developed, aiming at tapping into four different strategy types: metacognitive, social, affective and cognitive strategies. Eighty two LESLLA teachers participated in the study. The results showed that the teachers focused more frequently on metacognitive and social strategies and less on affective and cognitive strategies. Strategy focus could not be related to teacher characteristics, such as their training or their years of teaching experience, and also not to the proficiency level of their learners. Further research is needed to explore how teachers develop strategy focus.

**Keywords** LESLLA, second language and literacy teaching, adult literacy, language learning strategies, strategy instruction

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## Corresponding author

Kaatje Dalderop,  
c.m.dalderop@uva.nl

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## 1 Introduction

*"How do you work on reading strategies in your LESLLA<sup>1</sup> classes?"*

*"We don't. I believe that is for later. First I need to teach my students how to crack the code, teach them phonics. Next, they need to learn how to retrieve basic information from a text. And then, may be, I would teach them strategies."*

This is a brief conversation from a teachers' workshop on reading for LESLLA practitioners. Without intending to suggest that the thinking it reflects is typical for LESLLA teachers, the response as well as the lack of surprise in the fellow trainees is thought provoking. Would this be a generic belief among LESLLA teachers in the Netherlands? This would be potentially problematic, as research has related strategy instruction to learning outcomes (see Plonsky, 2011 and 2019 for meta-analyses).

LESLLA learners are a diverse group in terms of countries of origin, first language, gender, age, expectations and motivation (Kurvers et al., 2021). Many LESLLA learners have never been to school in their home countries and have been denied their human right to education and literacy (Mokatef, 2009; UNESCO, 2013). They face the dual chal-

lence of learning a new language as well as learning how to read and write, often for the first time, in the new language. This is a laborious process and for the learner there often is a lot at stake. Therefore, this paper focuses on the question of *how* teachers support their learners in their classroom practice. Do learners get any support in developing the strategies to proceed in the process? If so, what do their teachers focus on? What are the strategies they model and train? This paragraph will now first summarize the major findings in the literature on learning strategies. Subsequently, we will discuss learning paradigms proposing a strategic approach for LESLLA; then we will discuss the Dutch context in which the study was situated.

The topic of how to learn languages effectively has over the last decades extensively been researched in the second language acquisition (SLA) field of language learning strategies (e.g. Chamot & O'Malley, 1987; Cohen, 2011; Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Griffiths, 2008; Oxford, 2017; Rubin, 1975). Oxford (2017) defined language learning strategies as:

... dynamic thoughts and actions, selected and used by learners with some degree of consciousness in specific contexts in order to regulate multiple aspects of themselves (such as cognitive, emotional, and social) for the purpose of a) accomplishing language tasks, b) improving language performance, and c) enhancing long term proficiency. [...]. Strategies are teachable. (Oxford, 2017, p. 48)

Language learning strategies can be classified by function and different classifications have been proposed. Chamot & O'Malley (1987) distinguished between metacognitive, cognitive, and social-affective strategies, while Cohen (2011) listed four categories, with social and affective strategies separated. An often used tool in strategy research is Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1989), in which six strategy types are tapped into: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. In her 2017 strategic self-regulation (S2R) model, Oxford distinguished between cognitive, social, affective, and motivational strategies, while meta-strategies are overarching each of these strategy clusters. The main roles of meta-strategies are paying attention, planning, organizing learning and obtaining resources, and monitoring and evaluating (p. 155). Hence, in the S2R model, cognitive strategies are guided by metacognitive strategies, social strategies by meta-social strategies, affective strategies are guided by meta-affective strategies and motivational strategies are guided by meta-motivational strategies.

Many studies on language learning strategies have seen the light and two main types of studies can be distinguished. A body of research, typically based on questionnaires like Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1989) has related strategy use to a variety of learner characteristics and to learner proficiency. As early as 1995, already 40 studies based on the SILL had been published (Green & Oxford, 1995) and Amerstorfer (2018) has argued that the SILL is still not 'past its expiry date'.

This research base has shown that effective learners apply a larger number of language learning strategies than less effective learners (e.g., Griffiths, 2008; Gu & Johnson, 1996; Rubin, 1975; Seker, 2016), and it also revealed how diverse groups may differ in their strategy use and strategy preferences. Takeuchi et al. (2007), for example, reviewing this research base, showed how strategy use can be influenced by learner attributes like age and gender, motivation, their reasons for study, and their proficiency in the L2. Peacock and Ho (2003) compared strategy use among students of different academic disciplines and saw that their preferences differed.

Another body of research consists of studies with experimental and quasi-experimental designs. In these studies, an experimental group is typically trained in using one or more strategies (e.g., goal setting or reading strategies) and compared to a control group of learners who did not receive training. In two extensive meta-analyses including a total number of 77 studies and 7890 learners, Plonsky (2011, 2019) showed that strategy training can be related to improved learning outcomes as on average trained learners outperform control groups with two-thirds of a standard deviation (Plonsky, 2019, p. 8). Note that this body of research not only uncovers the importance of strategies for language learning but also shows trainability of strategies.

However, most research into language learning strategies has focused on educated research participants and little attention has been paid to the strategy use of LESLLA learners (Harris, 2019; Jones, 2016). None of the studies mentioned so far has included LESLLA participants. Jones (2016) advocated to assess how diverse groups use strategies, because less privileged groups will favor strategies different from those of highly educated learners. His argument draws for a large part on social learning theories. A basic assumption of those theories is that engagement in social practices is the fundamental process in which we learn (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff et al., 2016; Wenger, 1999). Lave and Wenger (1991) showed how informal learning draws on participation in culturally mediated activities and practices. Harris (2019) highlighted that 'instead of just a cognitive process located within the mind of the individual student, learning a language is also shaped in interaction with the world around them' (p. 39). Jones (2016) concluded: It is therefore that repertoires of practice of underprivileged groups reflect social and coping strategies most and educators should build on the assets that learners bring to the learning endeavor.

As said, the research interest in language learning strategies of LESLLA learners has been limited. Based on a data base search in the University of Amsterdam Library search engine, ten studies from LESLLA contexts were identified that focused on language learning strategies or were implicitly related to it. The search engine searches over 500 databases, including PsycINFO, Scopus, ERIC, and LLBA and search terms included *language learning strategies*, *learning to learn*, *self-regulation*, *autonomy*, *co-operative learning*, all combined with *adult literacy* and *adult second language literacy*. The ten studies are as said diverse, often small scale, and not in all cases specifically focussing on language learning strategies.

Two studies addressed LESLLA learners' strategy preferences. In Finland, a study among Arabic speaking learners of Finnish with limited literacy in their first language (L1) was conducted, using Oxford's SILL (Naif & Saad, 2017). As said, SILL is a questionnaire based on self-assessment and aims to elicit the strategies that learners use. Since the questionnaire draws on literacy skills, the researchers orally translated the statements for their participants. The study revealed that the participants used social and metacognitive strategies most frequently. An ethnographic case study situated in Sweden described different strategy preferences in a LESLLA student and their teacher: While the learner indicated to prefer a social strategy – asking for help-, the teacher overruled the learner by insisting on the use of a cognitive strategy (Norlund Shaswar & Wedin, 2019). This study thus drew attention to the unequal power relationship between the student and the teacher. Bigelow & Vinogradov (2011) already pointed to the fact that L2 teachers differ from their LESLLA students in their educational and literacy experience, which may cause a mismatch between learners' needs and the teachers' practices.

Studies with a (quasi-) experimental design, focusing on strategy training for LESLLA learners, were conducted by Reimer (2008) and Huang and Newbern (2012). Reimer (2008) aimed at improving autonomous learning in a study among Hmong learners of English (N=11) in the US. Learners were trained in a variety of language learning and language use strategies: creating and using flash cards, organising notebooks, using circumlocution, and talking to L1 speakers. After practicing the strategies in class, strategies were evaluated with the learners, asking about usefulness of the strategies and how often the learner had used the strategy out of class. The outcomes were rather confusing: learners indicated to find a specific strategy useful but at the same time reported not to use it, and the other way around. It remains unclear whether the strategies, the training, or the evaluation method caused these contradictory results. Huang and Newbern's study (2012) focused on reading strategies. Basic literacy students (N=36) were trained in highlighting important information, previewing the text for main ideas, rereading selected content, guessing meaning of unfamiliar words and applying prior knowledge. Each strategy was trained following the five phases of the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) (Chamot & O'Malley, 1987). These include preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and expansion. The results showed that the experimental group made more gains in reading. Students were also asked to reflect on their progress; they showed increased strategy awareness, felt their reading had improved and they had gained confidence in reading (Huang & Newbern, 2012).

A few studies that did not explicitly focus on learning strategies still provided outcomes that could be related to strategy practices. These included studies on portfolio, use of L1 in class and studies with a focus on LESLLA learners' learning goals. In a study conducted in the Netherlands, aiming at identifying what works in the LESLLA practice, Kurvers and Stockmann (2009) found that the use of a language portfolio in class was related to more gains in learning. The language portfolio is a tool that is designed to facilitate planning, monitoring and evaluation of the learning process (Little, 2009).

Portfolio techniques thus draw on the metacognitive processes in learning (Oxford, 2017) and facilitate the use of metacognitive strategies. In Canada, a portfolio was used as a formal assessment tool in adult literacy classes and in an interview study, it was evaluated how its use was appreciated by the teachers and learners. Teachers reported that the formal portfolio assessment that was implemented in their context caused stress for the learners. Learners agreed that the assessments caused stress, but still reported to find the portfolio useful for their learning (Abbott et al., 2021). The results indicate that a portfolio might be a useful tool for the LESLLA practice.

In an ethnographic study on absenteeism in adult literacy classes, Schalge and Soga (2008) found that learners who did not receive tuition focusing on their own goals and levels were more likely to drop out. The importance of working on own goals and immediate needs was also a finding in an interview study by Benseman, (2014). These findings suggest that LESLLA learners are aware of their learning goals, thus drawing on metacognitive processes in learning and also imply that it might be beneficial to work on goal setting and evaluation in classroom practice.

Another topic that has been addressed in LESLLA research, is using learners' first languages (L1) in class. Some studies showed that using L1 could be related to more gains in learning (Condelli & Wrigley, 2008; Kurvers & Stockmann, 2009). Eek (2021) investigated the role of bilingual assistants in the LESLLA classroom. She found that the language assistants contributed to various aspects of the learning process such as improved investment in learning as well as improved understanding of the language system, as language assistants supported contrastive analysis of the home language and the target language. This suggests that use of L1 in class may contribute to affective as well as cognitive processes in learning.

Not only have (some) researchers focused on language learning strategies, also some teaching approaches with a focus on strategic learner behavior have been proposed, of which the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) is probably the best known. MALP is an instructional model developed by DeCapua and Marshall (DeCapua, 2016; DeCapua & Marshall, 2011, 2015) focusing on the teaching of second language learners aged 16–17, with emerging print literacy and limited formal education. The authors argued that these learners have developed learning strategies based on informal learning (DeCapua & Marshall 2015, p. 358). While formal learning draws on the written word and on abstract problem solving and prepares students for their life after school, informal learning is based on orality, focuses on pragmatic funds of knowledge and on immediately applicable knowledge and skills. MALP suggests that educators should on the one hand respond to and build on what learners bring to class; This means that instruction should build on interconnectedness and immediate relevance, as this meets LESLLA learners' learning conditions. On the other hand, MALP introduces learners gradually into more abstract academic ways of thinking, using oral and written modalities simultaneously and drawing on group responsibility (reflecting the attitudes learners are assumed to bring to the class) as well as on individual accountability (reflecting the demands of the

US school system), while working on academic learning activities. The reader may recognize the strategy clusters the model draws upon: interconnectedness allows the learner to draw on social strategies, while immediate relevance is connected to metacognitive processes in learning, especially goal setting. Academic ways of thinking, like abstract reasoning, analysis, comparison and contrast, reflect cognitive strategies. Cole and Elson reported on implementing MALP for adult learners; they found that MALP reduced cultural dissonance and encouraged active participation of learners (Cole & Elson, 2015).

In Germany, LESLLA researchers and practitioners have proposed a teaching concept aiming at learner autonomy by strengthening metacognitive processes in learning (Feldmeier, 2015; Markov et al., 2015). The approach is based on individual coaching. In conversations between a learner and a coach, the learner is supported to set individual learning goals, to select strategies that will help them to take steps towards their goals, and to evaluate their progress as well as their experiences with the strategies used. In the Netherlands, the European language policy and the Language Portfolio have strongly influenced second language teaching for some time. A Dutch portfolio model designed for LESLLA learners included a section focusing on recognition of informal learning achievements aiming at strengthening learners' (and teachers') awareness of their prior learning, aiming at strengthening self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001). The portfolio helped learners to set micro-goals and supported self-evaluation (Stockmann, 2005).

The current study is situated in the Netherlands. LESLLA teachers in the Netherlands usually hold one of the following certificates: They may have been trained as an elementary school teacher. Their training has prepared them for teaching emerging literacy, but not as much for teaching second language to adult migrant learners. Teachers may also hold a qualification provided by the association for Dutch as a second language teachers (BVNT<sub>2</sub>). This organization, by and for teachers of Dutch as a second language, has defined its own professional standards (Janssen-van Dieten, 2005). There are various ways to earn the BVNT<sub>2</sub>-certificate but there is no full bachelor's or master's program one could follow in order to become a certified second language teacher. Often certified teachers hold a bachelor's or master's degree in any field and in addition they take a short – one academic years' – practice based training in teaching Dutch as a second language. The focus on LESLLA tuition in these trainings is limited. Since training only prepares LESLLA teachers for their job to a certain extent, it could be assumed that proficiency as a LESLLA teacher comes with experience and that more experienced teachers will be able to tailor their tuition to the learners' needs more adequately than novice teachers (Berliner, 2001).

LESLLA practice in the Netherlands is anchored in the Literacy Framework (Stockmann, 2004). The Framework describes development of both technical literacy and communicative reading and writing skills, under the assumption that these skills need to be developed simultaneously. Oral skills are considered to precede written skills (Kurvers, 2010). The framework describes three literacy levels, named Alfa A, B and C. Learners working towards the A-level are emerging readers, working on phonics and on very famil-

lar basic reading tasks. On the B-level, more complex phonemes are added to the mix and the functional repertoire is broadened, while at the C-level learners develop fluency and are able comprehend and produce a variety of short, simple texts (Stockmann, 2004). The C-level matches the A1-level of the Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2001).

Instructional models like MALP, educational coaching and the LESLLA portfolio may have raised strategy awareness and strategy focus in teachers, but neither of the approaches, or any strategy focused approach in the LESLLA context has been thoroughly researched. At best anecdotal evidence is available on the implementation of these approaches, as well as on their impact on learners in terms of outcomes, investment in learning, and wellbeing (e.g. Cole & Elson, 2015; Nuwenhoud, 2015). With limited evidence substantiating the relevance of learning strategies in the LESLLA context, our study aimed to explore which strategies LESLLA teachers model and train. This survey study is part of a larger project, with next steps also focusing on the learners' perspectives on their strategy use and on strategy development in the classroom. Inspired by the success of strategy training in the broader SLA field drawing on educated samples, it was felt that strategy training may help improve class room practice in the LESLLA context as well. Therefore it was important to understand to what extent language learning strategies were already focused on in the LESLLA classroom, since paucity of research does not necessarily mean that there is a lack of attention for strategies in practice. Thus, this study was designed to gain a better understanding of current classroom practices.

For the present study, a survey was developed and administered among LESLLA teachers in the Netherlands. The survey aimed at collecting data from a larger group of teachers and explore their strategy preferences. The questions we aimed to answer, are:

1. *What are the strategies that Dutch LESLLA teachers model and train in their LESLLA practice?* Based on Cohen's strategy model (Cohen, 2011), we looked into metacognitive, social, affective and cognitive strategies.
2. *Does strategy training vary with teacher characteristics?* It is conceivable that strategy focus may be related to or influenced by the training teachers have received, to their years of experience or to the setting they work in.
3. *Does strategy training vary with group characteristics?* The strategy focus of teachers may well be related to the language and literacy proficiency of the learners, as was reflected in the little conversation in our introduction. Also, more proficient learners may have strategy needs different from their novice peers, and this may be reflected in the teachers' strategy focused behaviour.
4. *Can different teacher profiles be distinguished regarding strategy focused instruction?* Possibly, teachers have specific strategy preferences or they may show specific patterns of strategies they favour and dislike.

## 2 Method

### 2.1 Participants

For participation in this survey study, we invited teachers teaching second language and literacy to adults and young adults ('LESLLA teachers'). The survey was available online for a six-week period in September and October 2021. Teachers were recruited through various teacher networks, websites, and groups on social media and multiple reminders were sent out. Participation was voluntary, no personal data were collected, and no incentives were given. Ethics approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of the University of Amsterdam, Faculty of Humanities.

The questionnaire was filled out by 84 LESLLA teachers. It is unclear how many LESLLA teachers there are in the Netherlands, but of the 2726 teachers registered by the professional organization of teachers Dutch as a second language (BVNT<sub>2</sub>), 124 teachers identified as literacy teachers (personal email communication, March 2022). Although there are most likely more than 124 LESLLA teachers in the Netherlands, the figures indicate that we may have reached a fair proportion of the target population. Two respondents submitted their questionnaires with multiple missing data and were removed from the analyses. Eighty two teachers provided information on their strategy related practices as well as on their background and their students. Nineteen of them (23%) worked in schools for young adults and 63 teachers (77%) worked in adult education. Teachers' experience varied: 17 respondents (20%) taught LESLLA classes for less than 3 years, 37 teachers (45%) reported three to six years of experience, the remaining 28 (35%) taught LESLLA learners for seven or more years. Sixty nine respondents (84%) were certified by their professional association (BVNT<sub>2</sub>), thirty one (38%) were trained as a primary education teacher. Twenty three respondents (28%) held both qualifications.

Teachers often taught heterogeneous proficiency levels groups: 78% reported to teach learners of various language and literacy proficiency. Teachers with homogeneous groups usual taught beginner learners (17%). Classes received most often six to ten hours of tuition weekly (54%), while 18% of the teachers taught less intensive classes and 27% taught more intensive classes. Group size was most often between 10 and 15 learners (64%); 28% of respondents taught smaller groups and 8% taught larger groups.

### 2.2 Development of the questionnaire

As for our goal no previous research was found, a questionnaire had to be constructed and subsequently validated. Cohen's (2011) classification of language learning strategies was taken as a starting point. The model distinguished between four strategy categories: metacognitive, cognitive, affective, and social, and was chosen for its concision. For each strategy category, a list of potentially useful strategies was drawn up. Our sources for this



draft questionnaire included: Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, 1989), the Survey of Reading strategies (SORS) (Mokhtari & Sheory, 2002), the LESLLA strategy research base as reviewed earlier in this article, and an analysis on strategies in LESLLA course ware (Phoa, 2021). We aimed at developing a questionnaire that would not take up more than half an hour of the participants' time, as advised by Dörnyei & Taguchi (2010). For strategies that were assumed to potentially suit the needs of LESLLA learners, we have set the following criteria:

- The strategy is assumed to be potentially useful for learners;
- The strategy is easy to model and discuss;
- The strategy does not draw upon written language as a tool (although it may focus on written language as a learning goal);
- The strategy is likely to be in the toolbox of at least some LESLLA teachers.

The preliminary strategy list was tested and discussed with four LESLLA experts. The experts all fulfilled more than one of the following roles in the literacy field: they were teachers, developers, researchers, teacher trainers and /or auditors. In four sequential sessions, using a think aloud technique, they reflected on the draft questionnaire. After each session, the list was slightly adapted based on the feedback and observations. This resulted in a questionnaire with 81 items, to be rated on a four-point Likert type scale (Uebersax, 2006). Scale points were labeled (translated for this article): 1 = (very) often; 2 = regularly; 3 = sometimes; 4 = (almost) never. As our study focused on strategy-related practices that teachers initiate (promote, model or train), this was reflected in the wording of the survey items: all items addressed the teacher as an actor. The questionnaire is shared as supplementary material, S1. The data were collected using Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, 2021).

### 2.3 Validation of the questionnaire

Validation of a questionnaire includes assessing item quality and identifying or confirming the underlying components of the questionnaire and the internal consistency of each component (Collingridge, 2022; Harpe, 2015). Analyses were conducted using JASP, version 0.16 (JASP Team, 2021). Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each of the strategy categories in order to assess the internal consistency of the subsets. Items that suppressed Cronbach's alpha were removed. Item-rest correlations were calculated and items with an item-rest correlation of .30 or below were also removed. Subsequently, items were assessed for skewness. Items with a median of 1 or 4 (indicating that most respondents had chosen 1 or 4 for an answer) were considered skewed and were removed. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFI) with four factors was performed on the 58 selected items (Ellis, 2017). The CFI revealed a satisfactory level of fit to the four factor model (CFI = .981; RMSEA = .052,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, this selection was considered as the finite ques-

tionnaire and was used as the basis for the analyses conducted to answer our research questions. See S2 for the item analysis data and S3 for the factor analysis.

## 2.4 Data analysis

Since the LESLLA field in the Netherlands is small, it was not possible to validate the questionnaire in a separate round of data collection. Instead, data were collected in one round and analyzed with two goals. The first round of data analysis focused, as said, on the validation of the questionnaire and in the second round, based on the well-functioning items, further analyses were conducted with focus on the research questions.

There is ongoing debate on how Likert scale data can – or should – be processed, concentrating on the question whether ordinal data can be treated as numbers. Harpe (2015) summarized the debate between what he called the ‘ordinalist view’ (stating that only nonparametric techniques are appropriate) and those with a more liberal viewpoint. He argued that the ordinalist viewpoint is overlooking the difference between individual items and Likert scales – typically consisting of a group of items – and recommended to treat aggregated rating scales as continuous data. In this study, we followed Harpe’s advice. For this reason, we used parametric tests if there were no violations of the assumptions.

The following analyses have been conducted: In order to answer the first research question, *What are the strategies that Dutch LESLLA teachers model and train in their LESLLA practice?* sum and mean scores per strategy cluster (metacognitive, social, affective, cognitive) were calculated. In order to answer the second research question *Are there teacher variables related to strategy training?* analyses that were conducted, included Welch’s t-test, used to compare strategy focus of teachers in adult education and teachers working in schools for young adults. Welch’s t-test is recommended for comparing unequal size groups. Welch’s t-test was also used to compare strategy focus of teachers trained for elementary school and teachers trained differently; A series of one way ANOVA’s, with experience as an independent variable and each of the strategy types as dependent variables was conducted to evaluate if teachers experience influenced their strategy focus. ANOVA’s were also conducted in order to answer the third research question, *Are there group variables related to strategy training?* Here, proficiency level was the independent variable with each of the strategy types as dependent variables. The fourth and last research question is: *Can different teacher profiles be distinguished?* Since our data set was not large enough to allow for advanced techniques like latent profile analysis (Spurk et al., 2020), we chose to use a non-refined factor score, a mean score per participant per strategy type and an overall mean score, (Distefano et al., 2009) to compare the frequency of strategy modelling and training of the respondents.

### 3 Results

#### 3.1 Use of strategies (RQ1)

The first research question was: *What are the strategies that Dutch LESLLA teachers model and train in their LESLLA practice.* Figure 1 shows per strategy category the percentages of the various response options that were chosen. The figure can be interpreted as follows: over all 14 selected items in the metacognitive strategies scale, the option ‘very often’ was chosen by the respondents in 20,7% of the cases, the option ‘regularly’ was chosen in 40,6% of the cases, etc.

Table 1 shows sums, means and standard deviations per strategy category. Note that strategy focused teachers are recognized in the data by their lower sum and mean scores. Both Figure 1 and Table 1 show that social strategies are the most commonly modeled and trained, followed by metacognitive strategies, and cognitive strategies are least focused on. Table 1 also shows that teachers vary tremendously in their strategy focus, from teachers reporting to model and train all strategies (very) often to teachers reporting to nearly never teach any strategies at all.

#### 3.2 Differences based on teacher characteristics (RQ2)

From the previous section it can be concluded that among the teachers participating in this study, focus on strategies differed remarkably. To explore if these differences could be attributed to specific teacher characteristics, we looked into relationships between the field in which teachers worked, their training, and their teaching experience on the one hand and their strategy focus on the other hand.

To compare strategy focus of teachers working in adult education and teachers teaching young adults, Welch’s t-test was conducted with mean scores per strategy category and total mean score as dependent variables and educational setting as grouping variable, as it was assumed that these groups may differ (Berliner, 2001). Shapiro Wilk’s test of normality was nonsignificant, confirming normal distribution of the data, and Levene’s test was also nonsignificant, confirming that variances were equally distributed: the assumptions for Welch’s t-test were met. All tests were nonsignificant, indicating that strategy focus of teachers in adult education and those in schools for young adults are unrelated. The analyses are presented in S4.

Welch’s t-test was also conducted to compare strategy focus of teachers trained for elementary schools (N= 31; 38%) and teachers trained differently (N=51; 62%). It was expected that these groups may show differences, as elementary school teachers are trained to teach emerging literacy learners while teachers holding different qualifications potentially have received little training in literacy teaching. However, no significant differences between the groups were found. See S5 for the analyses.

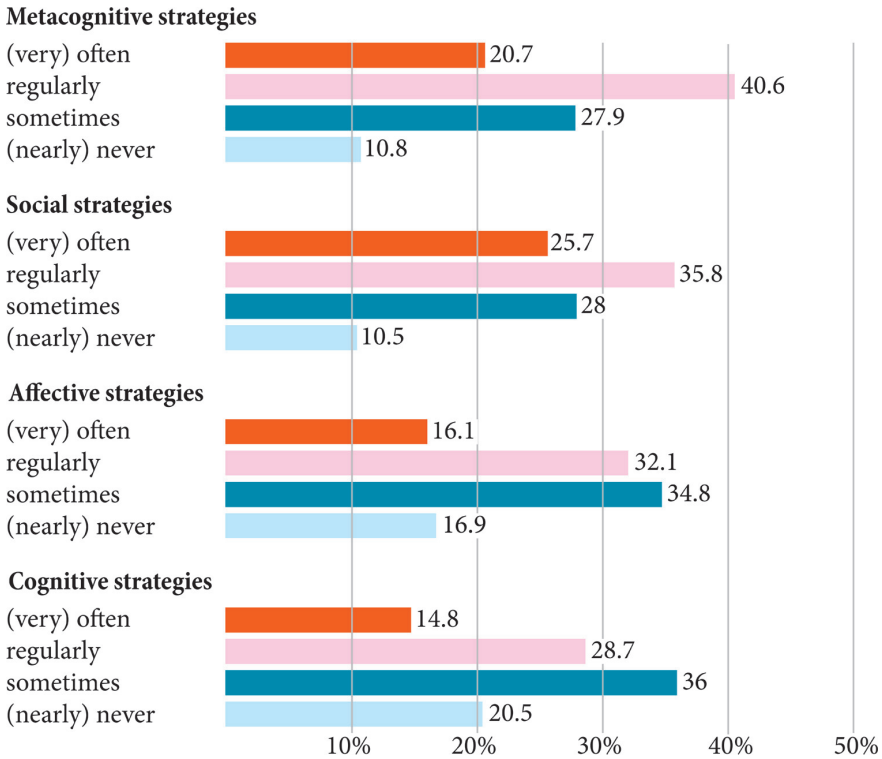


Figure 1 Summary of the responses

Table 1 Differences between strategy types

Items	Min attained (min attainable)	Max attained (max attainable)	Mean	SD
Metacognitive	17 (14)	49 (56)	2.29	.53
Social	10 (10)	36 (40)	2.23	.57
Affective	13 (10)	36 (40)	2.52	.55
Cognitive	28 (24)	91 (96)	2.62	.50
All	69 (58)	210 (232)	2.46	.47

To report on their experience as a LESLLA teacher, respondents could choose one out of three options: less than three years, 3–6 years, and 7 or more years of experience. To evaluate if teachers’ experience influenced their strategy focus, series of one way ANOVA’s was conducted, with experience as an independent variable and mean scores for each of the strategy types as dependent variables. For all ANOVA’s, Levene’s test was

nonsignificant, confirming equal distribution of variance. The ANOVA's were all non-significant, indicating that for all strategy types, there were no significant differences found for the three groups, based on experience. Details are to be found in S6.

### 3.3 Differences based on learner variables (RQ3)

The language and literacy proficiency levels of learners may play a role in the teachers' strategy focus, and we aimed to evaluate if this was the case. Regarding the proficiency of their learners, most teachers indicated that their groups were heterogeneous though and responses reflected a large variety in grouping practices. Due to the small total number of respondents, it was therefore unlikely that any relationship between the proficiency level of learners and their teachers' behaviour could be found. This happened to be true: no analysis related to the proficiency of learners provided any significant results. The tables are in S7.

### 3.4 Teacher profiles (RQ4)

The last research question, *Can different teacher profiles be distinguished?*, has turned out not to be easy to answer. We were well aware that in a small country like the Netherlands and in a small field like the LESLLA field, it would be difficult to find a number of respondents that would allow for techniques like latent profile analysis. Given the size of our sample and the explorative nature of our study, we decided to apply a simple, non-refined method for calculating factor scores, based on mean scores (Distefano et al., 2009). The results of this section should therefore be interpreted with caution.

For each respondent, a mean score for all four strategy categories and an overall mean score was calculated. Deriving teacher profiles from mean scores over all categories may raise questions, since a mean typically may wash away differences between respondents. To evaluate if the mean score would be a valid measure, we inspected the differences in mean scores over the four strategy categories for each respondent. More specifically, we inspected the range of the four mean scores for metacognitive, social, affective, and cognitive strategies. For only nine respondents, the difference between the mean score of their most preferred and their least preferred strategy type was more than 1 point, indicating that most often respondents showed consistency over the four strategy categories. Inspection of the nine less consistent respondents revealed that they most often strongly favoured social strategies over cognitive strategies, resulting in a bigger difference in scores for the two categories, but the groups are too small to justify profiles based on the mean scores per strategy. Hence, we decided on reporting on the overall mean score.

The reader is reminded that participants rated items on a four point scale, with 1 representing (very) often and 4 representing (nearly) never. Hence, higher strategy focus is reflected in means closer to 1. The mean score was considered as a strongly strategy focused teacher profile if it was a value below 2. The mean score was labeled as a weakly

**Table 2** LESLLA teachers' strategy focus

Teacher profile	Range	N	%
Strongly strategy focused	1.00–1.99	14	17 %
Strategy focused	2.00–2.49	34	41 %
Moderately strategy focused	2.50–2.99	26	32 %
Weakly strategy focused	3.00–4.00	8	10 %

strategy focused teacher profile if it was above 3. Two middle groups were distinguished, with mean scores ranging from 2 to 2,49, labeled as a strategy focused profile, and with mean scores ranging from 2,5–2,99, labeled as moderately strategy focused. Of course, all cut off scores are slightly arbitrary and teachers with scores close to the cut off scores may show behaviour that does not differ much from their colleague who's score is just on the other side of the cut off. Table 2 shows the percentage of respondents in each profile.

#### 4 Discussion

This study reported on a survey on strategy-focused instruction in the LESLLA practice in the Netherlands. A questionnaire was developed, originally consisting of 81 items to be rated on a Likert type scale, aiming at reflecting four strategy categories: metacognitive, social, affective, and cognitive strategies. After item analysis, the questionnaire was reduced to 58 well-functioning items that showed a satisfactory level of fit to the four factor model that was used to construct the questionnaire.

The conversation we cited in the introduction of this article brought up the question if among Dutch LESLLA teachers, there was any focus at all on training and modeling of language learning strategies. After this survey we now know that this is the case: 82 teachers provided the data for this survey and many reported to use a broader repertoire of strategies on a regular basis. The respondents' strategy focus differed to a high extent though.

Metacognitive and social strategies were reported to be modelled and trained most frequently and affective and cognitive strategies received less attention. LESLLA teachers' preference for metacognitive and social strategies may show that teachers are well able to adapt to the learning repertoires that the learners bring to the class (Rogoff et al., 2016). Research into LESLLA learners' strategy preferences revealed that learners favor social and metacognitive strategies over other strategies (Naif & Saad, 2017). This may also be the reason why cognitive strategies receive less focus: these strategies are more drawn upon in educational settings and are less likely to be in the repertoire of learners who received little formal education. DeCapua and Marshall, based on their work with

younger learners who are facing some more years in compulsory education, point to the importance of cognitive strategies training for LESLLA learners, as these strategies are important for learning in an educational setting (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011, 2015). Especially in the context of adult education, one may question though, whether it is the learner who has to be trained to succeed in formal education, or if teachers should adapt and tailor to the needs and assets of learners. More research is needed to learn about what works best.

Other findings from previous research suggested that learners may benefit from the use of their first language in class (Condelli & Wrigley, 2008; Kurvers & Stockmann, 2009) and from the use of a portfolio (Kurvers & Stockmann, 2009; Nuwenhoud, 2015). Regarding both topics, the items from our survey happened to not function well and could not be selected for the final version of the questionnaire. Regarding the portfolio: this may be a tool on which not individual teachers but rather school management decides. Therefore, its use may not be related to other strategy focused practices. Regarding the use of L1 in class, we believe that this topic is controversial in Dutch classrooms and still many teachers believe that they serve their learners best with a monolingual policy.

From this study it remained unclear how teachers develop their strategy awareness and strategy teaching practices: the study could not relate differences in strategy focus between teachers to specific teacher characteristics, like their training, their years of experience, or the educational setting they are working in. Also, strategy teaching practices were not found to be related to group size or to the proficiency of learners. Here, grouping practices may have been of influence, as most groups were heterogeneous. Although we could not relate differences between teachers to those variables, we still could see that differences were large, from rare to very frequent strategy focus. Teacher trainers may want to dedicate more time to training LESLLA teachers in modeling and training of language learning strategies. Attention to learning strategies in handbooks for teachers may be an important step forward (e.g. Kuiken & Andringa, 2022).

This study is situated in the SLA field of language learning strategy research as well as in the field of LESLLA-studies. From the first, there is a lot of research that relates language learning strategies to growth in learning (Plonsky, 2011, 2019), but the research has not extensively focused on the role of the teacher, and the research on learners' strategies has only rarely included LESLLA participants. This study contributed to our knowledge of strategies that LESLLA teachers report to model and train. Some limitations must be mentioned: all data are self-reported; What strategy training looks like in classroom practice, and how (and if) the uptake of strategies by learners takes place, are questions that for now remain unanswered. Further research may shed more light on the learners' reflections regarding language learning strategies that work for them. Research into classroom practices may inform us about effective strategy instruction for LESLLA learners and about strategy training that takes learners' learning preferences and their autonomy into account (Gu, 2019). Our understanding is still limited about

how in the LESLLA context strategies can be related to growth, as well as to wellbeing and persistence in learning, and expanding this knowledge is important to do justice to this group of underprivileged learners.

### Supplementary materials

- S1 Questionnaire
- S2 Item selection
- S3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis
- S4 Welch's t-test, Educational setting
- S5 Welch's t-test, Teachers' training
- S6 ANOVA, Teachers' experience
- S7 ANOVA, Learners' language proficiency levels

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### Author contributions

Kaatje Dalderop, conceptualization, investigation, formal analysis, writing original draft; Sible Andringa, conceptualization, formal analysis, writing – review and editing, supervision; Judith Rispens, conceptualization, writing – review and editing, supervision

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### Conflicting interests

The authors have declared that there were no conflicting interests.

### Statement of technology use

No AI-based generative technology was used in preparation of this manuscript and the execution of the research that the manuscript reports upon.



## Notes

- 1 LESLLA is an acronym for Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults. It refers to second language tuition for L2 learners who have had little or no educational opportunities previous to migration, learning a second language and simultaneously learning how to read and write, in the new language, often for the first time.

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