



IRAQI
Academic Scientific Journals



العراقية
المجلات الأكاديمية العلمية

ISSN: 2663-9033 (Online) | ISSN: 2616-6224 (Print)

Journal of Language Studies

Contents available at: <https://jls.tu.edu.iq/index.php/JLS>



Suggesting an Agency–Based Cubic Strategy and Exploring its Effect on EFL Iraqi University Female Students’ Agency for Learning

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Received: 1/ 10 / 2024, Accepted: 20/1 /2025, Online Published: 30 /9 /2025

Abstract

The study aims to suggest a strategy named (Agency–Based Cubic Strategy) based on learner agency theory. And exploring its effect on students' agency for learning (autonomy, motivation, and self-efficacy). Also to enhance students’ autonomy and engagement by incorporating a structured approach that promotes decision-making, self-regulation, and interactive learning. The sample of this experimental quantitative study consists of 98 Third-year EFL university students in the College of Education for Women\ University of Baghdad during the 2024-2025 academic year. To achieve the aims of this study, a Likert-scale questionnaire of 28 items based on Code (2020). The data has been analyzed using SPSS. The results indicate that implementing the cube strategy significantly improved students’ sense of

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agency, leading to increased engagement, confidence, and language proficiency. The study concludes that incorporating agency-based strategies can contribute to more effective and empowering learning experiences in English as a foreign language.

Keywords: Agency-based cube strategy, autonomy learning, learner agency, engagement, self- efficacy, motivation.

اقتراح استراتيجية المكعب المسندة الى التمكن وتقصي اثرها في التمكن من التعلم لدى طالبات
الجامعة العراقية الدراسات اللغة الانجليزية لغة اجنبية

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المستخلص :

تهدف الدراسة إلى اقتراح استراتيجية تسمى (استراتيجية المكعب القائمة على التمكن) بناءً على نظرية تمكن المتعلم. وتقصي أثرها على تمكن الطلاب من التعلم . تتكون عينة هذه الدراسة الكمية التجريبية من 98 طالبة جامعية تدرس اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية في السنة الثالثة في كلية التربية للبنات / جامعة بغداد، خلال العام الدراسي 2024-2025. لتحقيق أهداف هذه الدراسة، تم استخدام مقياس ليكرت في استبيان (كود ، 2020) المتكون من 28 فقرة موزعة على مجالات المقياس (الاستقلالية، الدافعية، الكفاءة الذاتية) . تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام البرنامج الاحصائي للعلوم الاجتماعية. يهدف البحث إلى تعزيز استقلالية الطلاب وتحفيزهم ومشاركتهم من خلال دمج نهج منظم يعزز اتخاذ القرار والتنظيم الذاتي والتعلم التفاعلي. تشير النتائج إلى أن تطبيق استراتيجية المكعب أدى إلى تحسين شعور الطلاب بالتمكن بشكل كبير، مما أدى إلى زيادة المشاركة والثقة وكفاءة اللغة. وخلصت الدراسة إلى أن دمج الاستراتيجيات القائمة على التمكن يمكن أن يساهم في تجارب تعلم أكثر فعالية وتمكينًا في اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استراتيجية المكعب القائمة على التمكن، التعليم الذاتي، تمكن المتعلم.

فاعلية الذات، الدافعية

1. INTRODUCTION

An agency-based strategy is used to model effective reading strategies. This approach could foster a love for reading and support language development in various ways. Students must participate to engage in the teaching-learning process, which means being active in EFL class.

Despite the numerous studies on reading, it still poses a significant challenge for students. With the significant advancements in society, educational methods, and the demands of the modern era, which require students to possess certain skills and abilities to be effective members of society, capable of reading the information they need at the right time and within a specific timeframe, all this has led to the adoption of Bandura's social theory, which introduced the concept of enhancing the learner's ability to learn independently and effectively (Bandura, 1999).

Ahmed and Alwan (2019) first studied academic buoyancy among Distinguished School students in Iraq. Their results evoke the idea of studying this variable in EFL university students. In the EFL field, Saalh and Kadhim (2020) studied academic buoyancy in reading and listening. While agentic learning works as a scaffold to support the student's learning, the learner should be autonomous and handle the learning process, not only be a passive learner (Alsaadi & Saalh, 2013).

The present study will answer the following questions investigate the impact of an agency-based cubic strategy on enhancing student agency among EFL Iraqi university female students, by using an Agency for learning questioner.

The research aims to:

1. Suggest a strategy named (Agency–Based Cubic Strategy) based on learner agency theory.
2. Find out the effect of the strategy on students' agency for learning (autonomy, motivation, self-efficacy).
3. Propose and evaluate a new agency-based cubic strategy designed to enhance
4. Develop a structured strategy that fosters student agency by integrating: cognitive dimensions, emotional dimensions, and behavioral dimensions of learning.
5. Examine the impact of the agency-based strategy on students' ability to:
 - a. Take ownership of their learning,
 - b. Make independent decisions,
 - c. Actively engage in their educational process.
6. Identify challenges and benefits associated with implementing an agency-based approach in an EFL learning environment.

The current research hypothesizes the following:

1. There is no statistically significant difference at 0.05 level of significance between the experimental group who taught according to suggested strategies and the control group who taught according to the conventional method in their responses to the agency for learning questionnaire.
2. There are no statistically significant differences among the mean scores of literary analysis components in the experimental responses to the agency for learning questionnaire.

This research is limited as followed:

1. Third-year EFL university students
2. College of Education for Women\ University of Baghdad.
3. Academic year 2024-2025.
4. A literary genre (Novel, Wuthering Heights).
5. Bandura's theory of human agency (2001).

The current study could be valuable and beneficial for:

1. The EFL university students, by helping them improve their literary analysis skills, which are often challenging for those learning English as a foreign language, and encouraging them to be independent and responsible for their own learning.
2. The EFL university teachers, by offering new teaching ideas that may help them find new ways to guide students in learning and analyzing literature, and adding useful ideas to the field of language education.
3. The curriculum designers to provide the textbooks and syllabi with such a strategy.
4. The researcher by making use of this study literature review, tools, and results for further studies.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Human Agency

Human agency is the intentional influence of one's functioning and life circumstances. People are self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting. They are not simply onlookers of their behavior. They are contributors to their life circumstances, not just products of them (Bandura, 2001).

2.1.1 Agency

Agency in social cognitive theory is present in the ability of people to regulate and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior through the influence of existing self-beliefs (self-efficacy) (Bandura, 1986)

Agency is the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own choices within given constraints or opportunities. It reflects a person's ability to make intentional decisions and take actions that influence their learning environment and outcomes (Ahearn, 2001). Miller (2012) emphasized the agency's fundamental role in shaping learner identities and facilitating effective learning. Agency refers to a student's desire, ability, and power to determine their own course of action, whether that means choosing a learning goal, a topic to study, an activity to pursue, or a means of pursuing it.

2.1.2 Learner Agency

Learner Agency means students taking intentional actions to influence their learning, setting goals, planning, and regulating their own progress, which involves students being active participants in their learning journey, making decisions, and taking responsibility for their educational outcomes, guided by their motivation and self-regulation skills. Also, it means the student's ability to exercise control over their learning process by making deliberate choices and taking action toward their learning goals (Bandura, 2006).

Learner agency can be described as a complex mix of choices and reasoning associated with learner investment and motivation. Learner agency is closely linked with the idea of

personalized learning. Agentic learners have a sense of accountability and control their own learning with teacher support (Richmond, 2022).

Learner agency means students being active learners who can make choices and take actions to fully participate in their learning communities. Learners need opportunities to realize that they can make good things happen; therefore, Learner agency is a big idea of education that is achieved through everyday interactions, such as Assessment for Learning or formative assessment practices that set up routines and practices for lifelong learning. Educational researchers have defined agency as “the ability to exert control over and give direction to one’s life” (Biesta & Tedder, 2007, p. 134).

Marín, de Benito, and Darder (2024) defined it as a set of behaviors or abilities that prepare for life. More concrete approaches conceive it as part of the planning of specific learning situations.

2.2 Social Cognitive Theory

To effectively navigate a complex world full of risks and challenges, "people must make good judgments about their abilities, anticipate the likely effects of different events and courses of action, assess social and cultural opportunities and constraints, and regulate their behavior accordingly" (Bandura, 2001, p .10).

1. Intentionality

Intentionality is about being aware and making deliberate choices based on thoughts or ideas. It involves turning intentions into actions through goal-setting and planning. Being planful means making thoughtful decisions rather than acting impulsively. Students show competence when they choose environments that align with their goals and values, enabling them to take control of their lives in an organized and purposeful way, guided by foresight (Code, 2020).

2. Forethought

Forethought involves the ability of an individual to anticipate the outcomes of actions. By practicing forethought, students motivate themselves and direct their actions in anticipation of future events. Self-determination theory distinguishes three different types of motivational orientation and intentionality based on different goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Students are motivated if they are doing something that interests or enjoys them, and they are extrinsically motivated if they are externally prompted to act. Once students are motivated to act, they regulate their behavior to achieve their specific goals (Garcia-Martin & Garcia-Sanchez, 2020).

3. Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is “an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment” (Pintrich, 2000, p. 453). Self-regulation for academic success involves being aware of one's actions and intentionally choosing and using the right strategies to

meet clear or underlying learning objectives. Agency grows through ongoing reflection and assessment of progress toward completing tasks.

4. Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to functional self-awareness in which students are able to evaluate their personal effectiveness, thoughts, actions, and the purpose of their efforts and make adjustments when needed. It involves assessing the fit between their plans and the outcomes of their actions. This cognitive ability to evaluate one's thoughts and actions is a uniquely human aspect of agency (Bandura, 2006).

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to achieve success and is fundamental to human behavior and performance. These beliefs shape behavior by influencing the decisions individuals make and the actions they take (Bandura, 1997).

The meaning of agency in language learning is still debated because agency is viewed primarily through a sociocultural lens as the capacity (ability) to take action in the light of a conscious assessment of circumstances. Agency can be described as (autonomy, motivation, self-initiative, and self-regulation), which has led to the proposal of three main factors to define agency. The agency includes initiative or (self-regulation) by the learner or a group of learners. The agency is interdependent as the social and cultural context mediates it. The agency includes awareness of responsibility for one's actions towards the environment (Van Leer, 2008).

The agency is not easy to define; it is linked to concepts such as motivation and self-regulation and ideas such as free will and freedom of choice. It is also largely linked to an individual's beliefs, emotional state, and other psychological factors. The agency is also considered a socio-cultural construct in a way that reinforces the learner's idea of his importance and role in society and that his actions affect him and society as a whole (Teng, 2018).

In an EFL classroom, student agency, especially in higher education, involves students taking control of their own learning through self-regulated learning and becoming active participants in their educational process. This agency is shaped by various personal, relational, and participatory resources, which impact how students engage in intentional and meaningful learning actions. Technology-enhanced learning (TEL) is essential in creating learning ecosystems and shaping the design of learning activities that foster student agency (Marín, de Benito, & Darder, 2024).

2.3 Related Previous Studies

The study titled " Understanding EFL learner agency in collaborative activities: A case study in a Taiwanese English course ". The study aims to illustrate how a wordless picture book project was designed and implemented in a Taiwanese English course. Explore how college learners approached collaborative tasks. The study used audio recordings of group activities. Class observations and Interviews. The sample consisted of 31 college students enrolled in an English course in Taiwan. The study aims to develop a deeper understanding of the story content through peer discussions. By utilizing their own resources and monitoring their language use (both Mandarin and English) to achieve task objectives. Learner agency was influenced by the specific communities of practice in

which students participated. The findings highlight the importance of designing collaborative tasks that encourage peer discussion and self-initiated actions that recognize the influence of social and cultural contexts (communities of practice) on learner agency (Liao,2019)

The study titled "Using Quizlet to Enhance Learner Agency and Self-Efficacy in EFL" explores using Quizlet, a digital flashcard tool to motivate independent study; students were introduced to Quizlet, an online flashcard application. Exploratory research provided insight into the extent to which Quizlet affects the construction of learner agency and learner self-efficacy. The study employed a mixed-methods approach that involved pre- and post-tests to measure vocabulary acquisition and a questionnaire to gauge motivation and learner attitudes. The study sample was 180 second-year EFL University students in Turkey enrolled in an EFL course. The results of the study showed that Quizlet positively influenced vocabulary acquisition and learner motivation. The gamified and interactive nature of Quizlet was particularly appreciated by students, which made learning more engaging. Quizlet was found to be an effective tool for supporting EFL learners' vocabulary development and fostering a sense of self-efficacy and agency (Carman,2019)

The present study aims to investigate the impact of an agency-based cubic strategy on enhancing student agency among EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Iraqi university female students by using an Agency for Learning questionnaire.

3 . METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

It is worth mentioning that this research was experimental and quantitative, employing a survey research design. A survey is conducted by asking participants a series of questions using a questionnaire to collect data.

Table (1)

Study design

The Groups	Agency of learning	Treatment	Agency of learning
EG		An agency-based cubic strategy	
CG		Conventional method	

3.1.1 Population and Sample

The population of this research was female Iraqi students, except for the Kurdistan region, for the academic year 2024-2025. The sample of this research includes (98 students) in the College of Education for Women University of Baghdad.

3.1.2 Group Equalization

The questionnaire was applied to the experimental and control groups in order to equate the two groups. The results from Table (3.7) for the (t) test formula showed that the calculated (t) test value is (0.652), which is less than the critical (t) test value, which is (2) at a degree of freedom of (66) and level of significance (0.05). Therefore, there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups according to this variable, as

shown in Table (2) below:

Table (2)

Equalization in the Agency for Learning

Group	No.	Mean	SD	Computed t - value	Critical t - value	Df.	Level of Sig. 0.05
CG	35	95.68	11.429	0.652	2	66	0.517
EG	33	97.39	10.083				

3.1.3 The Instrument

In the present study, a questionnaire based on Code (2020) was prepared using a Likert scale. The questionnaire consists of 28 items which were divided into four dimensions. The questionnaire included IN (PC) = Intentionality: Planful Competence; IN (DC) = Intentionality: Decision Competence; F (EM) = Forethought: Extrinsic Motivation; F (IM) = Forethought: Intrinsic Motivation; SR (SR) = Self-regulation: Self-Regulation; S (SE) = Self-Reflectiveness: Self-Efficacy. Items 1–23 use a Likert scale from 1 = does not correspond to 5 = corresponds exactly. Items 24–28 use a Likert scale from 1 = not confident to 5 = extremely confident.

3.1.4 Validity

Validity is one of the most important considerations while building tests. The subjective assessment of test takers, administrators who determine its use, and other non-psychometric observers is known as face validity. It describes how well a test appears to measure the knowledge or skills it purports to measure (Brown,2004)

3.1.5 Face Validity

Face validity is one of the most important types that should be considered in assessments. According to experts and professionals in a certain field, validity is the extent to which a test accurately evaluates what it is meant to evaluate (Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

A panel of specialists from several Iraqi universities who specialized in EFL view the agency for learning questionnaire to ascertain their face validity. The jury members find the questionnaire appropriate. Nevertheless, some changes are implemented based on the jurors' recommendations.

3.1.6 Construct validity

Construct validity means the degree to which a test or measurement accurately represents the theoretical concept it aims to measure. It ensures that the test assesses the intended construct rather than unrelated variables. Construct validity is established through various methods, including factor analysis, convergent validity by showing a strong relationship

with similar measures, and discriminant validity by showing little correlation with unrelated constructs (Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991)

Pearson's correlation coefficient means a correlation between two groups. Item analysis of the questionnaire means the relationship between the item with the overall degree. The critical degree is 0.25 and the results show that all of them is higher than this degree, which means that all of them are significant in degree of freedom 66 and level of significance 0.05. The analysis shows that all items have a significant correlation with the total scale, ranging from **0.209 to 0.653**, meaning they all contribute to the overall construct. Items with lower correlations, like **1, 5, 9, 14, 23, and 25**, may have a weaker impact, while items with higher correlations, such as **16, 17, 20, 26, and 27**, are strong contributors. **Item 17 (0.653)** has the highest correlation, suggesting it plays a key role in the scale

Table (3)

Item- total Correlation of the questionnaire items

Items	Pearson Correlation	Sig. 0.05
1.	0.209	Significant
2.	0.414	Significant
3.	0.314	Significant
4.	0.336	Significant
5.	0.297	Significant
6.	0.254	Significant
7.	0.328	Significant
8.	0.381	Significant
9.	0.296	Significant
10.	0.314	Significant
11.	0.423	Significant
12.	0.428	Significant
13.	0.461	Significant
14.	0.296	Significant
15.	0.452	Significant
16.	0.514	Significant
17.	0.653	Significant
18.	0.312	Significant
19.	0.371	Significant.
20.	0.487	Significant
21.	0.415	Significant
22.	0.364	Significant.
23.	0.296	Significant.

24.	0.429	Significant.
25.	0.217	Significant.
26.	0.455	Significant.
27.	0.490	Significant.
28.	0.346	Significant

3.1.7 The Subscale-total correlation

Pearson correlation of the subscales and the total scale. Pearson correlation values indicate the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the subscales and the total score. Generally, a higher correlation suggests that a subscale strongly contributes to the overall construct being measured

All subscales exhibit moderate to strong correlations with the total score, confirming that they are relevant components of the overall construct. However, **forethought (0.811)** appears to be the most influential factor, followed by **intentionality (0.739)**. **Self-regulation (0.630)** and **self-reflectiveness (0.553)** also contribute meaningfully but to a lesser extent. These findings suggest that while all subscales are important, **forethought** and **intentionality** might be the primary drivers of the construct being measured.

Table (4)

Subscale -Total correlation

Subscale	Pearson Correlation
Intentionality	0.739
Forethought	0.811
Self-Regulation	0.630
Self-Reflectiveness	0.553

3.1.8 Discrimination power of the questionnaire items

Discrimination power is defined as "calculating the level to which the findings of a specific item correlate with the results of the entire test" (Alderson ,1995, p. 80). For an item to be truly distinctive, its t-value should be higher in the upper group than in the lower group. To assess this, we select 27% of respondents from both the highest and lowest-scoring groups, resulting in 18 participants in each group. At a significance level of 0.05 and a degree of freedom of 34, the critical t-value is 2. Since all calculated t-values exceed this threshold, there is a significant difference between the two groups, favouring the higher group. This indicates that the items have good discriminating power.

3.1.9 Reliability

Reliability pertains to the stability and consistency of the evaluation's findings. Put differently, reliability refers to how well an evaluation yields consistent results when given again or by various assessors under comparable circumstances. Brown (2004).

The most important factor in reliability is the consistency of scores for the same people. If these results remain steady and continuous, the test is deemed reliable. Conversely, if the results tend to vary, the test is not dependable.

Alpha-Cronbach Technique is used to evaluate test reliability. The scores of the statistical analysis sample (68 students) are statistically manipulated. It is determined that the reliability coefficient is (0.743).

3.2 Final Application

The questionnaire was distributed to a total of 98 female students at the College of Education for Women, University of Baghdad. Thus, the process took approximately one month to complete. The questionnaire was administered before and after the strategy implementation in the second week of October and in the second week of February, the questionnaires were distributed to the study participants. The questionnaires were accessed via a link created using Google Forms. The Google Form was available, and during this time, all students participated. The response was successful without facing any problems.

3.3 Statistical Methods

To achieve the aims, the statistical methods used in the current study are calculated by the SPSS

1. Means: to identify the responses on each item of the questionnaire.
2. Pearson correlation coefficient is used to find out the item-total correlations for the scale.
3. Alpha Cronbach: equation to assess the internal consistency for the study instruments.
4. Discrimination Power: It measures the discrimination power of the agency of learning.

3.4 Data Analysis

The results of comparing the two groups, the experimental and Control groups. The Experimental group consists of 33 students, with a mean score of (105.96) and a standard deviation of (11.49), while the Control group, which consists of 35 students, with a mean score of (96.00) and a standard deviation of (9.93), in a degree of freedom (df) 66, and the computed t-value is (3.83), comparing it with the critical t-value which is 2. The significance value (Sig.) is (0), which is less than 0.05. This indicates that the difference between the two groups is statistically significant and suggests that the experimental group performed significantly better than the controlled one see Table 5.

Table (5)

Two- samples t-test

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	Computed -t	Critical-t	Sig.	Sig. 0.05
Total	Ex	33	105.96	11.49	66	3.83	2	0	Sig.
	Co	35	96.00	9.93					

The mean values for each subscale indicate that there is clear differences among them. Subscale 2 has the highest mean (38.818), followed by subscale 1 (31.06). Subscale 4 (19.303) is slightly higher than subscale 3, which has the lowest mean (16.788). This conclude that subscale 2 has the highest values, while subscale 3 has the lowest.

Table (6)

Subscale Mean Scores

Subscale	Mean
1	31.06
2	38.81
3	16.78
4	19.30

In the pairwise comparisons, subscale 2 has the highest mean (38.81), as it is significantly higher than all of the other subscales. In contrast, subscale 3 has the lowest mean (16.78), being significantly lower than all other subscales except for Subscale 4 (19.30). Subscale 4 is higher than Subscale 3, and Subscale 1, which is (31.06), is lower than Subscale 2; all comparisons are statistically significant, showing meaningful differences between the subscales. Overall, the results show significant differences among all subscales. These significant differences suggest that each subscale represents a distinct aspect of the measured variable see Table 7.

Table (7)

Pairwise Comparisons

(I) subscale	(J) subscale	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
1	2	-7.758*	0.000
	3	14.273*	0.000
	4	11.758*	0.000
2	1	7.758*	0.000
	3	22.030*	0.000

	4	19.51 5*	0.00 0
3	1	- 14.273*	0.00 0
	2	- 22.030*	0.00 0
	4	- 2.515*	0.00 6
4	1	- 11.758*	0.00 0
	2	- 19.515*	0.00 0
	3	2.515*	0.00 6

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that EFL educational college students have a high level of student agency. This study explored the impact of the Agency-Based Cubic Strategy on fostering learner agency among EFL Iraqi university female students. The results indicate that implementing this strategy led to important improvements in students' ability to be independent and to be active students. Also, it enhanced their confidence, motivation, and engagement in learning. Students start to be active, and they start to play a crucial role in the process of learning.

The implementation of the Agency-Based Cubic Strategy influences the sense of agency in learning English among EFL Iraqi University female students; the findings suggest that the Agency-Based Cubic Strategy positively impacts EFL Iraqi University female students' sense of agency by enhancing their self-efficacy, motivation, and autonomy in learning English. Through structured activities that promote decision-making, goal-setting, and self-regulated learning, students reported increased confidence in their abilities and a greater willingness to be active in their educational journey. Quantitative and qualitative analyses indicate significant improvements in students' ability, engagement, participation, and reflective learning practices.

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Agency for Learning Scale

	Items	corresponds exactly	corresponds a lot	Neutral	corresponds a little	Does not correspond
1	I take a lot of care before choosing.					
2	I consider how best to carry out a decision.					
3	I try to be clear about my objectives before choosing.					
4	When making decisions, I like to collect a lot of information.					
5	I like to consider all of the alternatives.					
6	I feel confident about my ability to make decisions.					
7	I think that I am a good decision maker.					
8	The decisions I make turn out well.					
9	Because it is one of the best ways I have chosen to develop other aspects of my life.					
10	Because it is an extension of me.					
11	Because through school, I feel that I can now take responsibilities for changes in my life.					
12	Because training hard will improve my performance.					
13	Because I want to show myself that I can succeed in my studies.					
14	Because I experience pleasure and satisfaction while learning new things.					
15	For the pleasure I experience when I discover new things never seen before.					
16	For the pleasure that I experience in broadening my knowledge about subjects which appeal to me.					
17	For the satisfaction I feel when I am in the process of accomplishing difficult academic activities.					
18	Because my studies allow me to continue to learn about many things that interest me.					
19	I know exactly how to decrease my nervousness.					
20	Most of the time I feel at peace with myself.					
21	I can rapidly relax myself even when I am in a state of strong internal tension.					
22	When something upsets me, I can easily calm down.					
23	I can reduce my tension level if it starts bothering me.					
24	Study when there are other interesting things to do.					

		extremely confident	Confident	Neutral	Somehow confident	not confident
25	Always concentrate on school subjects during class					
26	Plan my school work for the day.					
27	Organize my school work.					
28	Motivate myself to do school work .					