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The Effectiveness of the Wilen and Phillips Strategy in Enhancing English Achievement and Future-Oriented Thinking among Second-Year Undergraduate Students

Nawal Ahmed Mahmood

Department of English Language, College of Education for Humanities, University of Kirkuk, Iraq

*Corresponding Author's Email: nawalahmed@uokirkuk.edu.iq

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Abstract

Background: Proficiency in English remains a central objective of higher education, yet many non-specialized university students struggle to attain it. Traditional teacher-centered instruction is often criticized for failing to engage learners cognitively or cultivate higher-order thinking, and although the Wilen and Phillips strategy has been proposed as an active-learning remedy, its effects on linguistic achievement and future-oriented thinking remain underexplored. **Objective:** This study investigates the effect of the Wilen and Phillips strategy on English achievement and future-oriented thinking among second-year undergraduate students in the Department of Arabic Language at the University of Kirkuk. **Methods:** An experimental design with two equivalent groups was adopted. The 63 participants were assigned to an experimental group taught through the Wilen and Phillips strategy and a control group taught by the traditional method, using *Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus*. An English achievement test and a future-oriented thinking scale, both validated and reliability-tested, were administered after the treatment. **Results:** The experimental group outperformed the control group in English achievement ($M = 32.30$ vs. $M = 23.71$; $t = 7.78$, $\alpha = 0.05$), indicating marked improvement in vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and functional language. Comparable gains emerged in future-oriented thinking ($M = 98.38$ vs. $M = 75.87$; $t = 4.73$, $\alpha = 0.05$), while significant within-group growth ($M = 93.70$ to $M = 98.38$; $t = 4.677$, $\alpha = 0.05$) confirmed genuine development in students' capacity to anticipate outcomes and link present learning to future goals. **Implication:** The strategy offers a practical means of strengthening both cognitive and linguistic outcomes, supporting recommendations to integrate active learning into English instruction for non-specialized university students.

Keywords: Wilen and Phillips strategy, English achievement, future-oriented thinking, active learning, EFL.

Introduction

Higher education institutions worldwide face significant challenges in teaching English as a Foreign Language, particularly when students come from non-specialized departments where English is not the primary focus of their academic training. Arabic-language majors often exhibit low English proficiency due to limited exposure to the language and a predominant reliance on traditional pedagogical methods that emphasize memorization over communicative competence and critical engagement(Alrabai, 2016; Al-wossabi, 2023). This challenge is especially pronounced in Iraqi universities, where Arabic language majors often exhibit low English

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proficiency because of their limited exposure to the language and the predominant reliance on traditional pedagogical methods that emphasize memorization over communicative competence and critical engagement (Ahmed & Hussein, 2022; Rashid & Taha, 2022). Consequently, students in the Department of Arabic Language at the University of Kirkuk, like many of their peers in similar programs across the Middle East, frequently struggle to meet their academic objectives and use English effectively in future-oriented tasks such as academic research, professional communication, and career planning (Mohammed & Ali, 2024).

Nevertheless, contemporary EFL course materials such as Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus offer communicative exercises, functional language applications, and real-world scenarios designed to promote active engagement and meaningful language use. In particular, these materials align well with the development of future-oriented thinking skills because units such as "Making Plans" and "Life Choices" provide students with opportunities to discuss future goals, express aspirations, and articulate expectations. However, the mere availability of such materials does not guarantee improved learning outcomes. Instead, instructional strategies must be effectively aligned with pedagogical goals to maximize their potential (Khalil & Ibrahim, 2025; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

In this regard, active learning strategies have increasingly been recognized as essential for fostering both linguistic and cognitive development in EFL contexts (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2021; Li & Kim, 2022; Lu & Watanapokakul, 2025). Among these strategies, the Wilen & Phillips strategy, which emphasizes teacher modeling, guided practice, reflection, and active participation, has demonstrated particular promise for students with low English proficiency. More specifically, this approach systematically supports learners by gradually shifting responsibility from the instructor to the students. As a result, it enhances comprehension, confidence, and the ability to apply language skills in real-world situations (Park & Lee, 2025; Wilen & Phillips, 2015). Therefore, by integrating this strategy with the communicative content of Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus, instruction can promote both English achievement and future-oriented thinking, which are increasingly critical in today's rapidly evolving educational and professional landscapes (Omar & Al-Shammari, 2023).

The Wilen & Phillips strategy provides a framework for effective classroom management and active learning. Its emphasis on structured participation, teacher guidance, and purposeful interaction can improve students' engagement, retention, and problem-solving skills. Later studies have applied this approach in different educational contexts and have reported positive effects on learning outcomes (Anggriyani et al., 2025; Park & Lee, 2025; Zainal & Rahman, 2025). These findings indicate that the strategy is more than a method for managing classroom behavior; it is an integrated instructional framework that supports students' cognitive engagement and academic development. This broader role provides a strong basis for examining its effectiveness in EFL instruction, particularly among students who need structured support and more opportunities for meaningful participation.

In EFL settings, existing studies indicate that the Wilen & Phillips strategy can strengthen both language competence and higher-order thinking when implemented consistently and systematically (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2021; Li & Kim, 2022). Its structured sequence of teacher

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modeling, guided practice, and reflection provides learners with explicit support while progressively encouraging independent performance. This combination is particularly valuable in EFL classrooms, where students often need both guidance in using English accurately and opportunities to apply it meaningfully. Accordingly, the strategy has been associated with increased student confidence, improved communication skills, and greater cognitive engagement (Ahmed & Hussein, 2022; Khalil & Ibrahim, 2025). These findings support its potential as an effective instructional framework for integrating language development with higher-order thinking and provide a strong rationale for examining its impact in the present EFL context.

However, limited empirical research has examined the combined impact of the Wilen & Phillips strategy and communicative textbooks on both English achievement and future-oriented thinking, particularly in Iraqi institutions and among students with low English proficiency. Research conducted in Iraq has underscored the need for further investigation into the effectiveness of active-learning approaches in non-specialized EFL contexts (Mohammed & Ali, 2024; Rashid & Taha, 2022). Similarly, El-Khalil & Nassar (2024) emphasize the importance of understanding how active learning strategies can be tailored to address the specific challenges facing EFL students in the Middle East. Current evidence suggests that instructional designs must prioritize higher-order thinking and meta-cognitive awareness to bridge the gap between passive reception and meaningful application (Nikbakht et al., 2024).

Despite the growing body of research on active learning strategies, few empirical studies have examined the combined effect of the Wilen & Phillips strategy and communicative textbooks on the English achievement and future-oriented thinking of non-specialized students in Iraqi universities. Accordingly, the present study seeks to address this gap by investigating the impact of this instructional approach on second-year Arabic language students at the University of Kirkuk.

However, second-year undergraduate students in the Department of Arabic Language at Kirkuk University continue to exhibit poor English proficiency despite having access to contemporary English-language textbooks. This deficiency may be attributed to the constant use of conventional teaching techniques, which are often insufficient to actively involve students or encourage higher-order and future-focused thinking skills. Consequently, it is necessary to investigate the effectiveness of modern instructional strategies, such as the Wilen & Phillips strategy, in improving students' English achievement and their ability to think in a future-oriented manner. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the impact of applying the Wilen & Phillips strategy in teaching Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus on English achievement and future-oriented thinking among second-year undergraduate students.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There is a statistically significant difference in English achievement between students taught using the Wilen & Phillips strategy and those taught using conventional methods.

H2: There is a statistically significant difference in future-oriented thinking skills between students taught using the Wilen & Phillips strategy and those taught using conventional methods.

Literature Review

Effective English language instruction requires pedagogical strategies that promote not only

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linguistic achievement but also the cognitive development necessary for meaningful and independent language use. Traditional approaches, which rely heavily on rote memorization, teacher transmission, and passive reception of information, have been widely criticized because they provide limited opportunities for students to communicate, apply knowledge, or develop higher-order thinking skills (Brown, 2007; Prince, 2004). These limitations are particularly consequential in EFL contexts, where students must move beyond recalling isolated vocabulary and grammatical rules to using English purposefully in academic, professional, and real-world situations. By contrast, active learning strategies engage students in meaningful interaction, problem-solving, guided practice, and reflective learning (Albedaiwi, 2022; Chung & Ginting, 2021). Through these processes, learners assume greater responsibility for constructing and applying knowledge, which can strengthen both language acquisition and critical cognitive abilities (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2021; Zainal & Rahman, 2025). Accordingly, active learning provides a stronger pedagogical foundation for improving English achievement while also cultivating the planning, reflection, and decision-making skills required for future-oriented thinking.

The Wilen & Phillips model constitutes a systematic active-learning approach that integrates teacher modeling, guided practice, reflection, and student-centered activities into a coherent instructional sequence. Rather than treating students as passive recipients of information, the model positions them as active participants who progressively observe, practice, evaluate, and apply newly acquired knowledge. This structure reflects constructivist principles, which hold that learners develop knowledge through active engagement with content and social interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Its central process—the gradual release of responsibility from instructor modeling to guided performance and, ultimately, independent student application—also corresponds with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. By providing support while tasks remain beyond students' unaided performance, the model enables learners to develop confidence and competence before assuming full responsibility for their learning. Consequently, the approach is particularly well suited to EFL classrooms, where structured assistance can help students move from understanding linguistic forms to using them independently in meaningful communicative contexts.

Teaching Strategies in English Language Learning

Research consistently shows that active teaching strategies produce better learning outcomes than passive, lecture-based methods because they increase student participation, encourage deeper processing, and provide more opportunities to apply knowledge (Konotop, 2025; Park & Lee, 2025; Sutharshan & Nishanthine, 2025). Within this framework, the Wilen & Phillips strategy is particularly useful because it combines observation, structured coaching, guided practice, and reflection. This sequence helps students move from passive recipients of information to active users of language. It can improve comprehension and retention while enabling learners to apply new language skills in practical communicative situations. When combined with a communicative textbook such as *Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus*, the strategy provides authentic and purposeful contexts for students to practice language, solve problems, and reflect on their learning (Ahmed & Hussein, 2022; Soars & Soars, 2018). This integration strengthens the instructional value of the

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textbook and supports the development of English achievement and the higher-order thinking skills needed for independent and future-oriented language use.

The *Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus* textbook provides a suitable foundation for active learning because its activities combine language development with meaningful communication and cognitive engagement. Interactive tasks, such as role-playing and problem-solving, require students to use English spontaneously rather than simply recall vocabulary and grammar rules. Questions about future plans and personal goals also allow students to practice language while expressing intentions, planning, and considering possible outcomes. In addition, the textbook presents contextualized situations related to students' academic and professional lives, which encourages them to apply English in practical contexts (Khalil & Ibrahim, 2025). Integrating *Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus* with the Wilen and Phillips strategy can therefore create a coherent instructional framework. Students can observe language use, practice with structured support, and gradually apply their knowledge independently. This integration is expected to improve English achievement and support the development of future-oriented thinking.

Research by Li & Kim (2022) shows that guided practice, a central element of the Wilen and Phillips approach, supports second language acquisition by providing structured opportunities to use newly introduced language forms and receive immediate feedback. This process is particularly important in EFL settings, where students may have few opportunities to use English outside the classroom. Guided practice helps students move from understanding language rules to using them accurately and confidently in communication. These findings are consistent with research in Middle Eastern contexts, where active-learning approaches have improved EFL outcomes despite challenges such as limited instructional resources and large class sizes (Al-Balushi & Al-Lamki, 2013; Gasmi & Nadabi, 2023; Hassan & Rahman, 2023). Overall, the evidence supports the use of the Wilen and Phillips approach to improve English achievement through active participation, corrective feedback, and the gradual development of learner independence.

English Achievement

English achievement includes several aspects of language proficiency, such as reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, and the practical use of English. In Iraqi institutions, especially in non-English departments, students often rely heavily on rote memorization. However, this approach is not sufficient for developing broad and transferable language proficiency (Mohammed & Ali, 2024; Rashid & Taha, 2022). Although memorization can help students recall individual vocabulary items and grammatical rules, it offers few opportunities to use English in meaningful communicative contexts. As a result, traditional methods limit language development and do not adequately support communicative competence, independent learning, or the practical English skills needed for academic and professional success (Hashim, 2025; Nazarova, 2024). This limitation highlights the need for teaching approaches that encourage students to use, apply, and reflect on English rather than simply reproduce memorized information.

Research on instructional strategies and English achievement consistently shows that interactive, student-centered approaches produce better outcomes than teacher-centered instruction. These approaches increase participation, encourage deeper thinking, and provide more opportunities for meaningful language use (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2021; Kassem, 2018; Prince, 2004). When used

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with communicative textbooks such as Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus, they can improve academic performance by connecting classroom activities with authentic communicative purposes. They can also increase motivation by making learning more relevant to students' academic and professional goals (El-Khalil & Nassar, 2024). The Wilen & Phillips strategy is especially useful because it combines teacher modeling, guided practice, and reflection to address the limitations of traditional lecture-based instruction. Modeling shows students how to perform language tasks, guided practice allows them to develop new skills with support, and reflection helps them evaluate their progress and consolidate their learning (Wilen & Phillips, 2015; Zainal & Rahman, 2025). By gradually moving students from supported participation to independent performance, the strategy promotes active engagement, confidence, retention, and the practical use of English. Therefore, combining the Wilen & Phillips strategy with Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus offers a coherent and suitable framework for improving English achievement among EFL learners.

Future-Oriented Thinking

Future-oriented thinking encompasses cognitive processes such as planning, anticipating and evaluating possible outcomes, setting goals, and making informed decisions about future scenarios (Alshaikh, 2024; Pawlak & Moustafa, 2023; Seligman et al., 2013; Zayed, 2024). In education, it represents more than merely thinking about the future; it involves connecting present learning experiences with anticipated academic, professional, and personal goals. This construct has gained increasing attention because it is closely related to students' academic persistence, career readiness, decision-making, and overall life satisfaction (Damon et al., 2003; Omar & Al-Shammari, 2023; Zayed, 2024). Students who can envision meaningful future possibilities are more likely to recognize the value of current learning, regulate their effort, and sustain engagement when they encounter academic challenges. Accordingly, instructional practices that promote self-reflection, goal-setting, problem-solving, and discussion of future possibilities can strengthen both students' cognitive abilities and their academic motivation (Hassan & Rahman, 2023; Schunk, 1991; Yan et al., 2026). Developing future-oriented thinking is therefore particularly important in language education, where learners must connect present English learning with future communication demands and educational or professional opportunities.

In EFL contexts, future-oriented thinking is particularly important because students must often connect present language learning with anticipated academic, professional, and personal goals that depend on English proficiency (Park & Lee, 2025). The Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus textbook provides a suitable context for developing this capacity through its focus on life choices, future plans, and practical communication. When implemented through the Wilen & Phillips strategy, these topics can be transformed from textbook content into opportunities for active reflection, structured discussion, and purposeful language use. The strategy's emphasis on modeling, guided participation, and reflection encourages students to articulate future goals, consider possible outcomes, and evaluate the steps required to achieve them. Consequently, integrating Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus with the Wilen & Phillips strategy is expected not only to strengthen students' English achievement but also to develop the cognitive and metacognitive abilities required for planning, decision-making, and sustained engagement with future possibilities (Omar & Al-Shammari, 2023; Seligman et al., 2013).

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Methods

Research Design

The current study adopts a quasi-experimental, pre-test–post-test design involving two equivalent groups to empirically evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed pedagogical intervention. This design was selected because it enables the researcher to compare changes in English achievement and future-oriented thinking between students who receive instruction through the Wilen and Phillips strategy and those who receive instruction through the conventional method. Pre-test scores will establish the initial equivalence of the groups, while post-test scores will indicate the extent to which the intervention affects the dependent variables. The design is presented as follows:

Table 1. Research design variables

Group	Pre-test	Intervention	Post-test	Variables
Experimental	Achievement & Future Thinking	Wilen & Phillips Strategy	Achievement & Future Thinking	Independent & Dependent
Control	Achievement & Future Thinking	Conventional Method	Achievement & Future Thinking	Independent & Dependent

Population of the Study

The study population comprised all second-year undergraduate students enrolled in the Department of Arabic Language at the University of Kirkuk. This population was selected because the students represented the target group for evaluating the effectiveness of the Wilen & Phillips strategy in improving English achievement and future-oriented thinking within the context of university-level EFL instruction. The sample of the study includes the experimental group (n=32) and control group (n=31).

Equivalence of Groups

Equivalence of Groups

To establish the internal validity of the experimental design, the experimental and control groups were compared on key baseline variables before the intervention. These variables included students' age, parents' educational levels, pre-test English achievement scores, and pre-test future-oriented thinking scores.

Age Equivalence

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the experimental and control groups differed significantly in age before the intervention. As presented in Table 2, the obtained t-value was not statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. This result indicates that the groups were equivalent with respect to age at the outset of the study. Therefore, age-related differences are unlikely to have influenced the subsequent post-test results, strengthening the internal validity of the comparison between the Wilen and Phillips strategy and the conventional teaching method.

Table 2. Age Equivalence of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean (Months)	SD	t-value	Sig.
Experimental	32	205.50	14.85	2.00	NS
Control	31	207.48	20.36	----	NS

NS= Not significant at a=0.05

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Parents' Educational Level Equivalence

Chi-square tests were conducted to compare the distributions of fathers' and mothers' educational levels across the experimental and control groups. Educational attainment was classified into three categories: "College or above," "Secondary/Intermediate," and "Primary or below." As reported in Tables 3 and Table 4, the chi-square results revealed no statistically significant differences between the groups for either fathers' or mothers' educational level. Thus, the groups were comparable with respect to parental education before the intervention.

Table 3. Fathers' Educational Level Distribution by Group

Level	Experimental	Control	χ^2	Sig
College or above	3	3	3.14	NS
Secondary/Intermediate	7	7	----	NS
Primary or below	22	21	----	NS

NS= Not significant at a=0.05

Table 4. Mothers' Educational Level Distribution by Group

Level	Experimental	Control	χ^2	Sig
College or above	3	3	3.14	NS
Secondary/Intermediate	7	7	----	NS
Primary or below	22	21	----	NS

NS= Not significant at a=0.05

Pre-test Scores

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the pre-test English achievement scores of the experimental and control groups. As shown in Table 5, the obtained t-value was not statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. This finding indicates that the two groups did not differ significantly in their English achievement before the intervention and were therefore comparable in terms of their initial achievement levels.

Table 5. Pre-test English Achievement

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Experimental	32	28.45	6.12	0.85	NS
Control	31	27.80	5.94	------	NS

NS= Not significant at a=0.05

In Table 6, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the pre-test future-oriented thinking scores of the experimental and control groups. Table 6 shows no statistically significant difference was found, confirming that both groups had equivalent levels of future-oriented thinking prior to the intervention.

Table 6. Pre-test Future-Oriented Thinking Equivalence

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Experimental	32	93.70	6.63	1.369	NS
Control	31	91.15	8.07	------	NS

NS= Not significant at a=0.05

Research Instruments

To ensure the accurate measurement of English achievement and future-oriented thinking, the study employed two research instruments: an English achievement test and a Future-Oriented Thinking Scale. Both instruments were reviewed and evaluated before their administration to

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establish their suitability for the study objectives and target population.

Achievement Test

The researcher developed a 40-item English achievement test based on the content and learning objectives of *Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus*. The test covered four essential areas of language proficiency: vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and functional language. The test items were reviewed by a panel of specialists in English language teaching and educational measurement to evaluate their clarity, relevance, and alignment with the instructional content. Their feedback was used to revise ambiguous or unsuitable items before the final administration. The reliability of the test was examined using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.89. This high reliability coefficient indicates strong internal consistency and supports the use of the test for comparing students' achievement before and after the intervention.

Future-Oriented Thinking Scale

Future-oriented thinking was measured using a 38-item scale developed by the researcher. Each item provided three response alternatives, enabling students to express the extent to which they demonstrated future-oriented thinking in situations related to planning, anticipation, decision-making, and goal-directed behavior. The items were examined for clarity, relevance, and suitability for the participants. Item discrimination was also tested to determine whether each item effectively differentiated between students with relatively higher and lower levels of future-oriented thinking. The reliability analysis produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Therefore, the scale was considered sufficiently reliable for assessing changes in students' future-oriented thinking across the pre-test and post-test administrations.

Teaching Plans

Two sets of teaching plans were prepared to ensure that the experimental and control groups received instruction based on the same general content while differing in instructional approach. The experimental group was taught through lessons developed from *Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus* and implemented according to the Wilen and Phillips strategy. These lessons incorporated teacher modeling, guided practice, active student participation, reflective activities, and opportunities for interaction and problem-solving. The control group was taught the same general language content through the conventional teaching method. Maintaining comparable instructional content across the two groups helped reduce the possibility that differences in post-test performance were caused by variations in the material taught. Consequently, any statistically significant differences between the groups could be interpreted more confidently as effects of the instructional strategy rather than differences in curricular coverage.

Statistical Methods

Several statistical procedures were used to analyze the data and evaluate the research hypotheses. Independent-samples t-tests were used to compare the experimental and control groups on their pre-test and post-test scores. The pre-test comparison was conducted to verify the equivalence of the groups before the intervention, whereas the post-test comparison was used to determine whether the Wilen and Phillips strategy produced greater gains than the conventional teaching method. Paired-samples t-tests were used to compare the pre-test and post-test scores of the same

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participants within the experimental group. This analysis made it possible to determine whether students' English achievement and future-oriented thinking changed significantly following exposure to the instructional strategy. Chi-square tests were used to examine the equivalence of the groups with respect to categorical background variables, including parents' educational levels. In addition, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the internal consistency of both instruments. Item difficulty and discrimination indices were examined for the achievement test and the Future-Oriented Thinking Scale to support the quality of the individual items. Together, these procedures strengthened the methodological basis of the study by addressing instrument reliability, item quality, group equivalence, between-group differences, and within-group development.

Results

Results of the First Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis One: There is no statistically significant difference between the mean post-test scores of the experimental group taught English using the Wilen & Phillips strategy and the control group taught using conventional methods. To test this hypothesis, the researcher applied the independent-samples t-test to the post-test scores of English achievement. The results are shown in Table 7:

Table 7. Post-test Achievement Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Experimental	32	32.30	4.56	7.78	S
Control	31	23.71	7.00	----	----

Significant at a = 0.05

The results demonstrate a statistically significant difference in post-test achievement in favor of the experimental group. Students taught through the Wilen and Phillips strategy achieved a substantially higher mean score ($M = 32.30$) than students taught through conventional methods ($M = 23.71$), and the obtained t-value of 7.78 was significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. Accordingly, the first null hypothesis was rejected. This finding suggests that the Wilen and Phillips strategy contributed to improved English achievement by combining teacher modeling, guided practice, active student participation, and reflective exercises. These interconnected components likely strengthened students' comprehension, provided opportunities for immediate application and feedback, and increased their engagement with the learning process. Therefore, the observed advantage of the experimental group can reasonably be attributed to the instructional strategy rather than to differences in the general content taught, which was kept comparable across the two groups.

Null Hypothesis Two: There is no statistically significant difference between the mean post-test scores of the experimental and control groups in future-oriented thinking. The independent-samples t-test was applied to the post-test scores of the Future-Oriented Thinking Scale. Results are shown in Table 8:

Table 8. Post-test Future-Oriented Thinking Score

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Experimental	32	98.38	7.606	4.73	S
Control	31	75.87	16.21	----	----

Significant at α = 0.05

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The experimental group substantially outperformed the control group, indicating that the Wilen and Phillips approach was more effective in developing future-oriented thinking than conventional instruction. By integrating introspection, dialogue, and problem-solving into authentic tasks drawn from *Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus*, the approach required students to plan, anticipate possible outcomes, justify decisions, and connect classroom learning with future situations. These activities likely promoted both active engagement and reflective thinking, thereby strengthening students' ability to formulate goals and consider alternative courses of action. Accordingly, the significantly higher post-test performance of the experimental group provides strong evidence that the Wilen and Phillips approach contributed to the development of students' future-oriented thinking abilities.

Null Hypothesis Three: There is no statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test future-oriented thinking scores of the experimental group.To test this hypothesis, a paired-samples t-test was conducted because the pre-test and post-test scores were obtained from the same participants. This analysis directly assessed whether the experimental group experienced a statistically significant change in future-oriented thinking following the intervention, rather than merely identifying differences between independent groups. Because a paired-samples t-test requires a matched score for each participant at both measurement points, the analysis was based exclusively on the 32 participants who completed both the pre-test and post-test. Restricting the analysis to these complete matched cases ensured that the comparison reflected actual within-participant development and that changes in scores could be more confidently associated with exposure to the Wilen and Phillips strategy.

Table 9. The results of the paired-samples t-test for the experimental group.

Measure	N	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Pre-test	32	93.70	6.63	4.677	S
Post-test	32	98.38	7.63	----	----

Significant at α = 0.05

The results reveal a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's future-oriented thinking scores from the pre-test to the post-test. The mean score increased from 93.70 to 98.38, and the paired-samples t-test produced a statistically significant value of 4.677 at $\alpha = 0.05$. This result provides clear evidence that the improvement was unlikely to have occurred by chance and supports the rejection of the third null hypothesis. More importantly, because the comparison involved the same participants at both measurement points, the finding demonstrates meaningful within-group development following exposure to the Wilen & Phillips strategy. The strategy appears to have strengthened students' planning, forecasting, and decision-making abilities by combining structured reflection, guided practice, discussion, and active engagement with future-oriented content. These activities required students to consider possible outcomes, evaluate alternatives, and connect present decisions with future consequences. Although the results cannot establish that the strategy alone caused every observed change, the significant pre-test-to-post-test improvement, together with the systematic implementation of the intervention, provides strong support for its contribution to students' cognitive development.

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Discussion

The superior performance of the experimental group on the English achievement post-test can be plausibly attributed to the systematic implementation of the Wilen & Phillips strategy and its coordinated use of teacher modeling, guided practice, and reflective activities. Teacher modeling provided students with clear exemplars of target-language use, thereby reducing uncertainty, supporting comprehension, and establishing a concrete framework for subsequent practice (Barahona & Davin, 2021; Wilen & Phillips, 2015; Zainal & Rahman, 2025; Zubair, 2026). Guided practice then enabled students to apply language structures in structured settings with immediate feedback. This progression from observation to supported application likely reinforced accurate usage, allowed misconceptions to be addressed in real time, and gradually increased students' independence in using English (Li & Kim, 2022; Zhao et al., 2023). Reflective activities, including self-evaluation and peer discussion, further strengthened the intervention by promoting metacognitive awareness and encouraging students to identify their strengths, recognize areas for improvement, and monitor their own learning (Aljohani, 2022; Arora et al., 2024; Fathi & Derakhshan, 2021).

The effectiveness of the strategy therefore appears to derive not from any single component, but from the complementary relationship among these components. Modeling clarified the expected performance, guided practice transformed that understanding into active language use, and reflection encouraged students to evaluate and consolidate what they had learned. This instructional sequence provided both structured support and opportunities for active participation, offering a stronger learning environment than conventional methods centered primarily on explanation, memorization, or passive practice (Abri et al., 2024; Roslaini et al., 2026). Because the two groups were taught comparable course content, the experimental group's higher achievement is consistent with the view that the Wilen & Phillips strategy enhanced how students engaged with and processed the material. Although the design does not establish that the strategy alone caused every observed gain, the convergence of the post-test difference with the strategy's theoretically coherent instructional mechanisms provides strong support for its contribution to the experimental group's improved English achievement.

These findings are consistent with previous research conducted in comparable EFL contexts. For example, Ahmed & Hussein (2022) reported that active learning strategies significantly improved English achievement among Iraqi university students, attributing this improvement to increased student engagement and greater opportunities for meaningful language practice. Similarly, Khalil & Ibrahim (2025) found that structured instructional approaches integrated with communicative textbooks produced substantial gains in language proficiency among non-specialized students in Iraqi universities. Taken together, these studies provide relevant empirical support for the present findings by indicating that active participation, structured support, and communicative practice can enhance English learning in Iraqi higher-education settings. The present study extends this evidence by demonstrating the specific effectiveness of the Wilen & Phillips strategy when integrated with Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus instruction. In particular, the results suggest that the strategy's combination of teacher modeling, guided practice, reflection, and active engagement may offer a coherent explanation for the experimental group's superior achievement. Although differences in participants, instructional materials, and research designs

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limit direct comparisons across studies, the convergence of the findings strengthens the argument that the Wilen & Phillips strategy contributed meaningfully to the observed improvement in English achievement.

Furthermore, these results corroborate the findings of Fathi & Derakhshan (2021), who demonstrated that active learning approaches can improve both linguistic achievement and critical-thinking skills. The present study extends this evidence by indicating that guided practice and reflection, central components of the Wilen & Phillips approach, may be especially valuable for learners with limited prior exposure to English. Guided practice provides structured support, feedback, and repeated opportunities for application, while reflection encourages students to evaluate their performance and recognize areas for improvement. Together, these processes can facilitate gradual skill development, strengthen metacognitive awareness, and build learner confidence (Steinert et al., 2024; Sukkamart et al., 2023; Zainal & Rahman, 2025). The alignment between the present findings and those reported in Fathi & Derakhshan (2021) therefore reinforces the argument that the effectiveness of the Wilen & Phillips strategy derives from the purposeful integration of active participation, instructional guidance, and reflective learning rather than from isolated classroom activities.

The significant improvement in future-oriented thinking scores among the experimental-group students can be attributed to the Wilen & Phillips strategy's deliberate integration of planning, discussion, and reflective activities. Throughout the intervention, students were systematically encouraged to generate ideas, anticipate possible outcomes, evaluate alternatives, and make informed decisions through structured tasks and guided discussions. These activities required students not merely to recall information but to connect present actions with prospective consequences, thereby directly engaging the cognitive processes underlying future-oriented thinking. In addition, reflective tasks prompted students to evaluate their goals, reconsider their choices, and monitor the development of their ideas (D'Argembeau et al., 2010; Tanguay et al., 2023). This combination of active participation, structured guidance, and reflection likely strengthened both their cognitive and metacognitive skills and provides a plausible explanation for the experimental group's significant improvement (Omar & Al-Shammari, 2023; Seligman et al., 2013).

This finding is consistent with the research of Hassan & Rahman (2023), which showed that instructional practices emphasizing self-reflection and goal-setting can significantly enhance future-oriented thinking among EFL learners. Similarly, Park & Lee (2025) reported that active learning approaches in higher education contribute to students' forward-thinking abilities by engaging them in envisioning future scenarios, evaluating possibilities, and planning appropriate courses of action. The convergence of these findings with the present results strengthens the argument that the Wilen & Phillips strategy fostered future-oriented thinking not merely as an incidental outcome of language instruction, but through its deliberate use of reflective, goal-directed, and participatory learning activities. The present study extends this body of literature by demonstrating that integrating the strategy with Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus can effectively support future-oriented thinking among Arabic language majors, a comparatively under-researched population. Nevertheless, because the present study was conducted within a specific institutional and instructional context, further research with larger and more diverse samples is

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needed to determine the broader applicability of this effect.

The improvement in future-oriented thinking also provides evidence of the transferability of skills developed through the Wilen & Phillips strategy. As students engaged in discussions about future goals and life choices within the Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus curriculum, they practiced planning, evaluating alternatives, anticipating consequences, and making reasoned decisions—cognitive processes that extend beyond language learning to broader academic and life-planning contexts (Busse & Walter, 2013; Damon et al., 2003; El-Khalil & Nassar, 2024; Gui & Ismail, 2024). The observed gains therefore suggest that the strategy supported not only immediate language development but also the application of higher-order cognitive skills to personally meaningful future concerns. This broader transfer strengthens the argument that the Wilen & Phillips strategy contributed to long-term cognitive development rather than producing improvement limited to the instructional tasks or language outcomes targeted in the intervention.

This study demonstrates that the Wilen and Phillips approach, when integrated with *Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus*, effectively enhances both English achievement and future-oriented thinking among second-year Arabic language students. The experimental group's superior performance on both measures provides compelling evidence that active learning strategies, particularly teacher modeling, guided practice, reflection, and meaningful student engagement, produce more favorable outcomes than traditional teacher-centered methods that rely heavily on memorization. These findings suggest that the approach strengthens not only students' linguistic competence but also their capacity to reflect, plan, evaluate alternatives, and connect present learning with future goals.

These findings align with and extend the broader body of research on active learning in EFL contexts. Foundational work has advocated instructional strategies that position students as active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of information (Brown, 2007; Prince, 2004). More recent studies have confirmed the continued relevance of these approaches in post-pandemic higher education, where active participation, collaboration, and learner autonomy are increasingly important for effective instruction (El-Khalil & Nassar, 2024; Park & Lee, 2025). The present study strengthens this body of evidence by demonstrating that the Wilen & Phillips strategy can produce measurable gains in both English achievement and future-oriented thinking. It also contributes empirical evidence from a comparatively under-researched context, non-specialized Arabic language majors in Iraqi universities, thereby extending the applicability of active-learning research beyond the settings in which it has most commonly been examined. In particular, the findings suggest that active learning is not merely a general alternative to teacher-centered instruction; when systematically implemented through modeling, guided practice, reflection, and meaningful engagement, it can address the linguistic and motivational needs of students with limited prior exposure to English while simultaneously promoting broader cognitive development.

The findings further corroborate previous research linking active learning with cognitive development (Fathi & Derakhshan, 2021; Li & Kim, 2022). By engaging students in reflective activities and future-oriented discussions, the Wilen & Phillips strategy did more than promote participation; it created structured opportunities for learners to analyze possibilities, evaluate

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alternatives, anticipate consequences, and connect present decisions with future goals. These processes are central to the development of higher-order thinking skills and may help explain the experimental group's improvement in future-oriented thinking. Accordingly, the results suggest that the strategy supported cognitive growth through deliberate reflection and goal-directed engagement rather than through language practice alone (Hassan & Rahman, 2023; Omar & Al-Shammari, 2023).

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample size was relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the results to EFL learners in Iraq and similar contexts. Future studies should replicate this research with larger and more diverse samples. Second, the intervention lasted only one academic semester. A longer intervention may produce stronger and more sustained improvements, particularly in future-oriented thinking, which may require more time to develop (Park & Lee, 2025). Longitudinal research is therefore needed to examine the lasting effects of the Wilen & Phillips strategy. Third, future-oriented thinking was measured through self-report data, which may be affected by response bias. Future studies should include additional measures, such as behavioral observations and performance-based assessments, to strengthen the findings. Fourth, pre-test English achievement scores were not reported because of data limitations. Although the groups were equivalent on other baseline variables, the absence of pre-test achievement data limits the assessment of baseline equivalence. Future research should collect and report pre-test data for all dependent variables. Finally, the researcher taught the experimental group, which may have introduced instructor bias. Future studies should involve multiple instructors or use blind assessment procedures to reduce this risk.

Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of the Wilen and Phillips strategy in improving English achievement and future-oriented thinking among second-year Arabic language students at the University of Kirkuk. The findings indicate that, when integrated with *Headway Pre-Intermediate Plus*, the strategy improved both language learning and cognitive development more effectively than traditional teaching methods. Students who received instruction through modeling, guided practice, and reflective activities performed better on the English achievement test and the future-oriented thinking scale. These findings highlight the value of active learning in EFL instruction, especially for non-specialized students with limited prior exposure to English and low motivation to learn the language. Through structured support and meaningful participation, the strategy addressed several limitations of teacher-centered instruction. The improvement in future-oriented thinking also suggests that active learning and reflection can support abilities beyond language acquisition, including planning, decision-making, and goal setting. Within the limitations of this study, the Wilen and Phillips strategy appears to be a promising approach for EFL instruction in Iraqi higher education, particularly in non-specialized departments. Future research should examine its effectiveness with larger and more diverse student populations and in different educational contexts.

Originality Statement

The author declares that this article is their own work and to the best of their knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of

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material which have been accepted for publication in any other published materials, except where due acknowledgement is made in the article. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom the authors have worked, is explicitly acknowledged in the article.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that this article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Copyright Statement

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