

An Analysis of Students' English Learning Strategies Based on Oxford's Strategy

Marnita¹, Muthia Sandra Riphasa², Tara Duhana³

^{1,2,3}Department of English Language and Arts, University of Riau

email: marnitaa30@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed students' English language learning strategies based on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning. The study employed a quantitative descriptive design involving 30 students. Data were collected through a questionnaire that examined six categories of language learning strategies, namely memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify the frequency and level of strategy use among the participants. The findings revealed that all categories of language learning strategies were used at a high level. Among the six categories, compensation strategies were identified as the most frequently used strategies. These strategies enabled students to overcome limitations in language knowledge and maintain communication during English learning activities. Memory and affective strategies were also frequently used, indicating that students actively employed techniques for vocabulary retention and emotional regulation. In addition, cognitive and metacognitive strategies were used to support language processing, learning management, and self-monitoring. Social strategies were found to be the least frequently used category, although they remained within the high level of use. Overall, the findings indicated that students actively employed a variety of language learning strategies to support their English learning process. The study provided valuable insights into students' strategic learning behavior and highlighted the importance of promoting a balanced use of learning strategies. The results may assist English teachers in designing instructional activities that encourage more effective, autonomous, and communicative language learning.

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I. INTRODUCTION

English has become one of the most important international languages in communication, education, business, science, and technology (Crystal, 2003). As a global lingua franca, English plays a crucial role in facilitating communication among people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In the era of globalization and digital transformation, proficiency in English is increasingly essential for accessing information, pursuing higher education, participating in international collaboration, and enhancing career opportunities. Consequently, English is widely taught as a foreign language in many countries, including Indonesia, where it is an important subject in secondary and higher education.

In the Indonesian context, English proficiency is considered a valuable competence that supports students' academic and professional development. The rapid growth of digital technology, online learning platforms, and global communication networks has increased the demand for English skills among students. English enables learners to access academic

sources, scientific publications, and digital content that are predominantly available in English. Therefore, educational institutions continuously strive to improve the effectiveness of English language teaching and learning to prepare students for global challenges.

Despite its importance, many students still experience difficulties in learning English. These challenges include limited vocabulary knowledge, difficulties in understanding grammatical structures, problems in listening comprehension, lack of confidence in speaking, and anxiety when using English in communication (Brown, 2007). Such difficulties may affect students' motivation, participation, and overall language achievement. In addition, differences in learners' backgrounds, cognitive abilities, and learning environments also contribute to variations in learning success.

To address these challenges, researchers emphasize the importance of language learning strategies in facilitating successful language acquisition. Language learning strategies are specific thoughts, behaviors, or actions used by learners to support their language learning process. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) define language learning strategies as special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to comprehend, learn, or retain new information. Similarly, Griffiths (2013) states that learning strategies help learners become more autonomous and active in their learning process.

Among various frameworks, Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is one of the most widely used models in language learning strategy research. Oxford classifies language learning strategies into two main categories: direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies include memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. Memory strategies help learners store and retrieve information, cognitive strategies assist in understanding and producing language, while compensation strategies help learners overcome limitations in their language knowledge. Indirect strategies include metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning; affective strategies relate to managing emotions and motivation; and social strategies involve interaction and cooperation with others.

Previous studies have shown that language learning strategies play an important role in students' language achievement. Green and Oxford (1995) found that successful learners tend to use a wider range of strategies compared to less successful learners. Similarly, Magogwe and Oliver (2007) reported that cognitive and metacognitive strategies are frequently used by effective language learners. More recent studies also confirm the relevance of learning strategies in EFL contexts. For instance, Lee (2023) found that digital literacy influences learners' strategy use in language learning. In addition, Rianto (2020) found that Indonesian university students predominantly employed metacognitive strategies, indicating a strong tendency toward self-regulated learning. Similarly, Melvina et al. (2020) reported that field specialization and gender influenced students' strategy preferences among senior high school students in Pekanbaru. Daflizar et al. (2022) revealed that Indonesian tertiary EFL students demonstrated high use of metacognitive strategies but moderate use of several other strategy categories. Furthermore, Noprivala and Alfian (2024) found that Indonesian EFL learners employed all six categories of Oxford's learning strategies, with metacognitive strategies emerging as the most dominant. Likewise, Loviani et al. (2024) reported that English education students frequently utilized metacognitive strategies to manage and monitor their learning process. Although these studies have contributed significantly to the understanding of language learning strategies in Indonesia, their findings

reveal variation in the dominant strategies reported across different groups of EFL learners. Such variation raises a theoretical question regarding whether language learning strategies should be understood as relatively stable learner preferences or as context-dependent strategic responses shaped by learners' communicative demands, self-regulation, and learning environments.

However, despite the large number of studies on language learning strategies, the findings remain inconsistent regarding the most dominant strategy used by learners. Some studies report metacognitive strategies as the most frequently used, while others highlight cognitive, social, or affective strategies. These inconsistencies suggest that strategy use may vary depending on learning context, educational background, and learner characteristics. Moreover, the rapid development of digital learning environments may also influence how students apply language learning strategies in contemporary settings. These inconsistencies also suggest that strategy use may be related to broader constructs such as learner autonomy, self-regulated learning, metacognitive awareness, and learner agency. Although Oxford's SILL provides a comprehensive framework for categorizing strategy use, the framework alone may not fully explain why learners prioritize particular strategies in different learning contexts. Therefore, examining strategy use through these broader theoretical perspectives may provide a more nuanced understanding of how learners actively regulate and adapt their strategic behavior.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze students' English language learning strategies based on Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), with particular attention to the variation and dominance of strategy categories among EFL learners. By identifying the most frequently used strategy categories, this study seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of learners' strategic behavior and its potential relationship with broader concepts of learner autonomy, self-regulation, metacognitive awareness, and learner agency.

Accordingly, the research questions are formulated as What language learning strategies are used by students in learning English based on Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)? and Which category of language learning strategies is most frequently used by students?

The objectives of this study are to identify the types of language learning strategies employed by students and to determine the dominant strategy category in their English learning process. The findings are expected to contribute to the field of English language teaching by providing insights into students' strategic learning behavior and offering a broader understanding of how strategy use may reflect learners' autonomy, self-regulation, metacognitive awareness, and agency. The findings may also help teachers design instructional activities that support more effective, autonomous, and communicative language learning.

II. METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to describe and interpret the phenomenon under investigation based on numerical data without manipulating the research variables (Creswell, 2014).

This design was considered appropriate because the study sought to identify and describe the language learning strategies used by EFL students based on their responses to

the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire developed by Oxford (1990). Through this approach, the researcher was able to determine the frequency and level of students' strategy use across different categories of language learning strategies.

Participants

The participants of this study were 30 fifth-semester undergraduate students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at a university in Riau, Indonesia. The participants were selected because they had been actively engaged in English learning and had experienced various language learning activities throughout their academic study, making them an appropriate group for investigating language learning strategies. The study employed total sampling, in which all members of the accessible population were included as research participants. This sampling technique was selected because the population was relatively small and all members of the population were accessible to the researchers. Therefore, all 30 fifth-semester students in the accessible population were included in the study.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire adapted from Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) developed by Oxford (1990). The questionnaire was adapted from Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and translated into Indonesian to ensure that the participants could understand each statement clearly. The translation process focused on maintaining the conceptual meaning of the original items while adjusting the wording to suit the Indonesian higher education context. Minor contextual modifications were made where necessary without changing the underlying constructs or the six original strategy categories proposed by Oxford (1990), namely memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

The SILL was selected because it is one of the most widely used and well-established instruments for identifying learners' language learning strategies. It provides a comprehensive framework for measuring the frequency of strategy use across six categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The questionnaire was administered to all participants, who responded to each item using a Likert-scale format to indicate how frequently they used each strategy. The collected data were then analyzed to identify the dominant language learning strategies employed by the students, thereby addressing the objective of the study to examine students' language learning strategy preferences.

The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale:

- 1 = Never or almost never true
- 2 = Usually not true
- 3 = Somewhat true
- 4 = Usually true
- 5 = Always or almost always true

The use of a Likert scale enabled the researcher to measure the frequency of students' strategy use quantitatively.

Validity and Reliability

Before conducting the main analysis, the questionnaire was tested for validity and reliability to ensure the quality of the research instrument. The validity test was conducted using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. According to Arikunto (2018), an item is

considered valid if the obtained correlation coefficient (r-count) is higher than the critical value of r-table. In this study, the critical value was 0.361 at the significance level of 0.05 with 28 degrees of freedom. The items were considered valid when the obtained correlation coefficient exceeded the critical r-value of 0.361. Based on this criterion, all questionnaire items were considered valid and retained for the subsequent analysis.

The reliability test was performed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to determine the internal consistency of each strategy category. According to George and Mallery (2020), a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 indicates acceptable reliability, while values between 0.60 and 0.70 indicate marginal reliability.

Table 1. Reliability Results of Language Learning Strategies Categories

STRATEGY CATEGORY	MEAN SCORE	LEVEL
Memory Strategy	0.629	Low–Marginal
Cognitive Strategy	0.730	Acceptable
Compensation Strategy	0.549	Low
Metacognitive Strategy	0.702	Acceptable
Affective Strategy	0.616	Low–Marginal
Social Strategy	0.740	Acceptable

The reliability analysis showed that three strategy categories demonstrated acceptable internal consistency, namely Cognitive Strategy ($\alpha = 0.730$), Metacognitive Strategy ($\alpha = 0.702$), and Social Strategy ($\alpha = 0.740$). Meanwhile, Memory Strategy ($\alpha = 0.629$) and Affective Strategy ($\alpha = 0.616$) demonstrated marginal internal consistency, whereas Compensation Strategy showed low internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.549$). Since the primary purpose of the study was to describe the patterns of students' language learning strategy use, the results were retained for descriptive analysis. However, the relatively low internal consistency of the Compensation Strategy category should be considered when interpreting its position as the most frequently used strategy category.

The data were collected through questionnaire administration. Prior to data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured that their responses would remain confidential and be used solely for research purposes. The questionnaires were distributed directly to the participants. Students completed the questionnaires individually based on their actual experiences in learning English. After all responses had been collected, the data were coded, tabulated, and prepared for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. First, the questionnaire responses were coded and entered into Microsoft Excel before being transferred to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis. The mean score of each language learning strategy category was then calculated to determine the reported frequency of strategy use.

The mean score was calculated using the following formula:

$$M = \Sigma X / N$$

where:

M = Mean score

ΣX = Total score obtained

N = Number of respondents

The mean scores of each strategy category were then interpreted using Oxford's (1990) classification scale:

4.5 – 5.0 = Always or almost always used

3.5 – 4.4 = Usually used

2.5 – 3.4 = Sometimes used

1.5 – 2.4 = Generally not used

1.0 – 1.4 = Never or almost never used

This classification enabled the researcher to determine the frequency level of each language learning strategy and identify the most and least frequently used strategies among the participants.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Students' English Language Learning Strategies

The data collected from 30 fifth-semester students were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify the types and frequency of English language learning strategies based on Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The analysis focused on six categories of language learning strategies: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean Score of Students' Language learning Strategies

STRATEGY CATEGORY	MEAN SCORE	LEVEL
Compensation	3.99	High
Memory	3.88	High
Affective	3.88	High
Cognitive	3.84	High
Metacognitive	3.81	High
Social	3.51	High

Table 2 presents the mean scores of the six categories of English language learning strategies reported by the participants. All six strategy categories were classified at a high level, with mean scores ranging from 3.51 to 3.99. The overall mean score ($M = 3.82$) also indicates that the participants reported frequent use of language learning strategies during their English learning process.

Among the six categories, compensation strategies obtained the highest mean score ($M = 3.99$), indicating that they were the most frequently reported strategy category among the participants. This was followed by memory strategies ($M = 3.88$) and affective strategies ($M = 3.88$), which shared the same mean score and were ranked second. Cognitive strategies ranked fourth with a mean score of 3.84, followed by metacognitive strategies with a mean score of 3.81. Although social strategies recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 3.51$), they were still classified at a high level of use.

The differences among the mean scores were relatively small, ranging from 3.51 to 3.99. This indicates that the participants reported frequent use across all six language learning strategy categories rather than relying exclusively on a single strategy type. Nevertheless, the ranking of the mean scores shows that compensation strategies were the

most frequently reported, whereas social strategies were the least frequently reported, although both categories were classified at a high level of use.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that students employ all six categories of Oxford's (1990) language learning strategies at a high level. Among these strategies, compensation strategies emerged as the most frequently used, followed by memory, affective, cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. This pattern suggests that students actively utilize various strategic behaviors to support their English learning process, particularly in overcoming linguistic limitations during communication.

The dominance of compensation strategies ($M = 3.99$) indicates that students frequently rely on strategies such as guessing meaning from context, using synonyms, paraphrasing, and maintaining communication despite limited linguistic knowledge. This finding is consistent with Oxford (1990), who states that compensation strategies are essential for enabling learners to overcome gaps in vocabulary and grammar knowledge during communication. It is also supported by Brown (2007), who emphasizes that compensation strategies play a crucial role in developing communicative competence, especially in EFL contexts where learners often face limitations in language exposure. Similarly, Green and Oxford (1995) found that successful language learners frequently employ compensation strategies to maintain communication when encountering linguistic difficulties.

From the perspective of strategic competence, the frequent use of compensation strategies suggests that students are able to mobilize alternative resources when their existing linguistic knowledge is insufficient to support communication. Rather than abandoning communication when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary or grammatical difficulties, learners appear to make strategic decisions to maintain meaning and interaction. This behavior also reflects an element of learner agency, as students actively respond to communicative challenges by selecting strategies that enable them to achieve immediate communicative goals. However, the frequent use of compensation strategies should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of fully developed learner autonomy. Instead, it may indicate an emerging capacity for autonomous strategic action, in which learners increasingly take responsibility for managing linguistic difficulties during communication.

However, this finding differs from Lee (2023), who reported that metacognitive strategies were the most dominant among EFL learners in digital learning environments. This difference may reflect variations in learning contexts, including the degree of digital integration, opportunities for autonomous learning, and the types of communicative demands experienced by learners. In the present study, the higher use of compensation strategies may indicate that students frequently encounter situations in which they need to manage immediate linguistic gaps during English use, whereas learners in other contexts may rely more heavily on strategies related to planning and monitoring their learning.

Memory and affective strategies shared the second-highest mean score ($M = 3.88$). The use of memory strategies indicates that students actively employ repetition, grouping, and association techniques to retain vocabulary. Schmitt (1997) argues that vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental component of language learning, and memory strategies are essential for strengthening long-term lexical retention. Meanwhile, the use of affective strategies suggests that students are aware of the importance of emotional regulation in language learning. This aligns with Oxford (1990), who highlights that affective strategies help learners reduce anxiety and increase motivation. Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter

Hypothesis further supports this finding, stating that lower anxiety levels facilitate language acquisition.

The relatively high use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies suggests that students engage in both direct processing of language input and reflective regulation of their learning. Metacognitive strategies, in particular, involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning progress. According to Wenden (1998), metacognitive awareness is closely associated with learners' ability to take greater responsibility for their learning, while Anderson (2002) emphasizes its contribution to self-regulated learning. The relatively high use of metacognitive strategies in the present study may therefore indicate that students engage in some forms of planning and monitoring of their learning. However, because learner autonomy and self-regulated learning were not directly measured in this study, these findings should be interpreted as possible associations rather than direct evidence of fully developed learner autonomy or self-regulation.

Social strategies obtained the lowest mean score ($M = 3.51$), although they were still classified at a high level of use. This indicates that, relative to the other strategy categories, students reported less frequent engagement in interactive learning activities such as asking questions, cooperating with peers, and practicing English with others. Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes that social interaction plays an important role in cognitive development and language learning. The relatively lower use of social strategies may be associated with several factors, including students' confidence in using English, the availability of opportunities for peer interaction, and the extent to which classroom practices encourage collaborative and communicative learning. Therefore, the finding should not be interpreted solely as an individual learner preference but may also reflect the interaction between learner characteristics and the learning environment.

The broader institutional and curricular context may also shape students' strategic choices. Language learning strategy use does not occur in isolation but is influenced by the learning opportunities, instructional practices, assessment demands, and exposure to English available within an educational setting. For example, classroom practices that emphasize individual assignments, examination-oriented learning, or teacher-fronted instruction may provide fewer opportunities for students to practice social strategies through meaningful interaction. In contrast, communicative and task-based activities may encourage learners to negotiate meaning, collaborate with peers, and use compensation strategies in authentic or semi-authentic communication. Thus, the relatively high use of compensation strategies alongside the comparatively lower use of social strategies may reflect not only students' individual strategic preferences but also the types of learning opportunities available within their academic environment.

Learner characteristics may further contribute to the observed pattern of strategy use. Previous research has suggested that factors such as English proficiency, prior learning experiences, motivation, confidence, and academic background can influence learners' strategic choices. In the present study, the participants' use of compensation strategies may be related to their perceived need to overcome linguistic difficulties during English use, while their relatively high use of memory and affective strategies may reflect the importance of vocabulary retention and emotional regulation in their learning experiences. However, because these learner characteristics were not directly examined in the present study, such explanations should be regarded as plausible interpretations rather than established causal factors.

This finding is consistent with Noprivala and Alfian (2024), who reported that Indonesian EFL students tend to rely more on individual strategies such as metacognitive

and cognitive strategies rather than social interaction. Similarly, Loviani et al. (2024) found that although students used all six strategy categories, metacognitive strategies were more dominant than social strategies. These similarities suggest that learners in similar EFL contexts often prioritize individual cognitive processing over social interaction in language learning.

Overall, the findings indicate that the participants employed a broad range of language learning strategies, with compensation strategies emerging as the most frequently reported category and social strategies as the least frequently reported. This pattern suggests that students' strategy use involves an interaction between immediate communicative needs, individual strategic resources, and the learning environment in which English learning takes place. The findings therefore support Oxford's (1990) view that language learning involves multiple interconnected strategy domains. At the same time, the dominance of compensation strategies highlights the importance of developing learners' strategic competence while also creating learning environments that promote metacognitive reflection, learner agency, and meaningful social interaction.

From a pedagogical perspective, the dominance of compensation strategies provides several implications for English language instruction. Rather than discouraging students from using compensation strategies, teachers should explicitly develop students' strategic competence by helping them use such strategies more effectively. Classroom activities can include training students to infer meaning from context, paraphrase unfamiliar expressions, use circumlocution, employ gestures appropriately, and negotiate meaning when communication difficulties arise. Teachers can also design communicative tasks that require students to maintain interaction despite limited linguistic resources. At the same time, frequent reliance on compensation strategies may signal areas of linguistic knowledge that need further development. Therefore, compensation strategy instruction should be complemented by systematic vocabulary development, opportunities for meaningful language practice, and activities that strengthen students' metacognitive awareness of when and why particular strategies are effective. In this way, compensation strategies can serve as a bridge for maintaining communication while students gradually expand their linguistic resources and develop greater strategic competence and learner agency.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

This study examined the language learning strategies employed by 30 fifth-semester students in an English Education Study Program using Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The findings showed that all six categories of language learning strategies were used at a high level. Among the six categories, compensation strategies obtained the highest mean score, indicating that the participants most frequently reported using strategies to overcome linguistic limitations during English learning and communication. This finding suggests that learners actively draw on alternative strategies when their existing linguistic resources are insufficient to achieve communicative goals.

The findings also highlight that language learning strategy use should be understood not only as an individual learner characteristic but also in relation to learners' strategic competence, agency, and learning environment. While the frequent use of compensation strategies may reflect learners' ability to manage linguistic difficulties, the relatively lower use of social strategies suggests the importance of providing greater opportunities for meaningful interaction and collaborative learning. However, because the study employed a descriptive design and focused

on self-reported strategy use, the findings should not be interpreted as direct evidence of learners' actual strategic competence, autonomy, or self-regulated learning.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of supporting learners in developing a wider and more strategic repertoire of language learning strategies. Compensation strategies can function as valuable resources for maintaining communication, but their use should be complemented by systematic vocabulary development, metacognitive reflection, and opportunities for meaningful social interaction.

Suggestions

First, English teachers should explicitly incorporate strategy instruction into classroom practice, particularly by helping students use compensation strategies more effectively. Teachers can provide activities that train students to infer meaning from context, paraphrase unfamiliar words or expressions, use circumlocution, and negotiate meaning when communication difficulties arise. Rather than discouraging students from using compensation strategies, teachers should guide them to recognize when and how these strategies can be used appropriately. At the same time, compensation strategy instruction should be accompanied by systematic vocabulary development and opportunities for meaningful communication so that students can gradually reduce their dependence on compensatory strategies as their linguistic resources expand.

Second, classroom practices and curriculum design should provide learners with more opportunities to develop a balanced repertoire of language learning strategies. Communicative and task-based activities can be incorporated to encourage students to use compensation strategies while interacting with peers. Collaborative tasks, problem-solving activities, role plays, and information-gap activities may help students practice negotiating meaning and maintaining communication despite linguistic limitations. In addition, reflective activities such as learning journals or strategy reflection tasks can encourage students to become more aware of the strategies they use and evaluate their effectiveness.

Third, future research should investigate language learning strategies using larger and more diverse samples across different educational institutions and proficiency levels. Since the present study relied on self-reported questionnaire data and employed a quantitative descriptive design, future studies could combine SILL questionnaires with interviews, classroom observations, think-aloud protocols, or learning diaries to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how and why learners employ particular strategies. Further research could also examine the relationships between language learning strategies and learner autonomy, self-regulated learning, metacognitive awareness, or communicative competence.

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