

A Look at Language Learning Strategies of Indonesian High School Students as Foreign Language Learners

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Abstract: A look at Language Learning Strategies of Indonesian High School Students as Foreign Language Learners. Objective: This study analyzed Indonesian high school student's choice of language learning strategies as EFL users, predominantly determining the most frequently used strategies. By understanding learning strategies, it can help EFL students to accelerate their language learning. **Methods:** One hundred and forty Darul Hasan high school students of Padangsidimpuan participated in this survey. All grades from 2020/2021 participated in this survey study. The Oxford's strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) translated version was implemented to decide their learning strategies. **Findings:** The result showed that the students are medium strategy users. The affective strategy was found to be the most dominant strategy used by the students. The students do not seem aware that learning strategies were a part of their learning process. **Conclusion:** The students and teachers need to improve the learning language strategy for a better learning process.

Keywords: language learning strategy, Oxford's strategy inventory for language learning, survey method.

Abstrak: Tinjauan Strategi Pembelajaran Bahasa Siswa SMA Indonesia sebagai Pembelajar Bahasa Asing. Tujuan: Penelitian ini menganalisis pilihan strategi pembelajaran bahasa oleh siswa SMA Indonesia sebagai pengguna EFL, terutama menentukan strategi yang paling sering digunakan siswa. Dengan memahami strategi pembelajaran, dapat membantu siswa EFL untuk mempercepat pembelajaran bahasa mereka. **Metode:** Seratus empat puluh siswa SMA Darul Hasan Padangsidimpuan, berpartisipasi dalam studi survei ini. Semua tingkatan 2020/2021 berpartisipasi di penelitian ini. Terjemahan inventaris strategi Oxford untuk pembelajaran bahasa (SILL) diterapkan untuk memutuskan strategi pembelajaran mereka. **Temuan:** Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa adalah pengguna strategi sedang. Strategi afektif adalah yang paling dominan. Para siswa tidak menyadari strategi pembelajaran adalah bagian dari proses belajar. **Kesimpulan:** Para siswa dan guru perlu meningkatkan strategi pembelajaran bahasa untuk proses pembelajaran yang lebih baik.

Kata kunci: strategi pembelajaran bahasa, Oxford's strategy inventory for language learning, metode survei.

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■ INTRODUCTION

As the fourth-largest workforce in Asia, Indonesia lack of workforce with strong English language skills. According to the English Proficiency Index released in 2020, Indonesia is in 74th rank out of 100 countries, with a score of 452 considered low (Education First, 2020). It potentially reduced the economic competitiveness among its neighboring rivals. The government has tried various strategies to address the shortage in education. English is now an essential skill for the labor force, and it is critical for all industries to communicate in English. Therefore it is vital to start it from an early age.

Madya (2002) critic stated that Indonesia failed to reach the English teaching and learning goal due to the over-centralized education system. The decentralized system gives the school/region more opportunity to develop the standard of English learning.

Each region has the ability of students, facilities that support learning, and the competence of teachers differently. The gap in the quality and availability of learning support facilities between students in the city and the regions seems apparent. Thus, the decentralized system has a crucial role in upgrading the access and quality of education in Indonesia as the decentralized policy forms the education system more conformable to the local needs.

The decentralized system pays attention to the diversity of languages, cultures, and backgrounds in the natural environment. In the end, this diversity will also accommodate the different needs of students in various regions, as the reformation of education from centralized to decentralized regards increasing the effectiveness of schools in the region in improving the quality of their education. These regions and schools can better regulate the needs of their students in the learning process independently.

This system's reformation is better supported by prioritizing a shift approach from

the teacher center to the learner center. This claim is in line with (Madya, 2002) statement that the education decentralization system aims to build a successful education of Indonesia so that the Indonesian people can solve individual problems, both locally and nationally, and improve living standards and can even participate globally must be followed by shifting the teacher center to learner center approach.

The learner-centered approach aims to fulfill the students' learning needs. Thus the teacher should have more freedom to respond to students' individual needs. As decentralized education system goal, to give more chances to schools, teachers, and stakeholders to make their own decisions based on the needs characterization of their students.

The outcome of the learner-centered approach is the ability of students to be independent in the learning process and be autonomous. Thus, one indicator that shows that the quality of education in an area is qualified. Lengkanawati (2017) points out that being an autonomous learner means that students can choose how they learn and their learning activities.

Learning strategy is one indicator that can show students' abilities as autonomous learners. Autonomous learners have used language learning strategies to overcome their learning difficulties and develop their English skills (Ras, 2018).

The independent learner is considered a higher paradigm than the teaching center, as with the widespread paradigm shift from the teaching center to the autonomous learner. The claim happens because autonomous learners will be more responsible and independent of their activities and learning outcomes. Moreover, this will also result in better learning outcomes and improve students' abilities in learning, especially language learning.

Moreover, the discussions about successful and less successful learners have become an

essential issue in ELT for decades (Altan, 2004). One of the main characteristics of successful learners is using various, sufficient, and adequate learning strategies to help their learning process than those considered less successful (Altan, 2004; Cohen, 2002; Griffiths & Parr, 2001; Yilmaz, 2010). It is also believed that learning strategies can also be learned. Thus, less successful students can learn the strategies by considering their preferences, and teachers can teach how to use the strategies to help them learn best to be successful learners.

However, in the Indonesian context, the time for studying in school is limited. In contrast, there are many English skills the students must master. Moreover, the students can not actively utilize the language as English is an EFL in the Indonesian context. Students generally only contribute a little English inside and outside the classroom because English is not used as instruction in class, nor is English used as a means of daily communication when conducting social interactions. Therefore Indonesian students still have low proficiency levels (Imperiani, 2012; Suryani & Amalia, 2018; Agung, 2019). Thus, the students need to take control of their learning. The students must know the good and suitable learning strategy to improve their English skills. Thus, Experts in the foreign language field state that the most significant factor in acquiring a foreign language is the use of language learning strategies (Gardner, 2007; Ellis, 2008).

To be more specific, language learning strategies are one of the components used in the process of learning and acquisition foreign languages. Language learning strategies need to be sharpened. Thus, the researcher (Oxford, 1990) has proposed that the students have to know and apply the language learning strategy to succeed in learning the language. The teacher should teach the students the utilization of strategy in learning since they do not know how to study

or apply a suitable strategy. The students first have to identify their bad habits in learning as they are usually unaware of their way of learning English. It comes spontaneous and common process for them.

According to Oxford (1990;8), learning strategies are “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations.” These definitions demonstrate that foreign language teaching and learning are shifting from teacher-centered toward learner-centered instruction. Furthermore, this shift has shifted the focus of some teachers’ attention to language learning strategies.

According to (Liang, 2009), each of these arguments describes learning strategies from a different perspective, but they may have helped us gain a general understanding of what learner strategies are. Those learning strategies are: learning strategies are observable or unobservable behaviors; learning strategies can be general methods or specific actions or techniques used to learn the target language; and students usually know what methods or techniques they use in language learning, although some subconscious activities are carried out in some cases.

O’Malley (1985) divided language learning strategies into three subcategories called meta-cognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies. The first refers to the abilities to do operational planning, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. The second one includes logical and mental aspects such as deduction, note-taking, translating, and recombining. Then, the last cover the abilities for cooperation, self-control, and clarifications by posing questions.

Next, Rubin (1987) proposed three language learning strategies: learning, communication, and social strategies. They are quite similar to the previous classifications. Learning strategy refers to mental activities. Then, communication strategy is about answering the

communication difficulties. Last, social strategy is developed through social exchanges.

Oxford (1990) also classified language learning strategies as direct and indirect, and each strategy group can link and support every other strategy group. The Strategies Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) underlined six categories, specifically: memory strategies including categorizing and portraying sounds in memory; cognitive strategies including reiterating, analyzing, grasping the concept quickly, and taking notes; compensation strategies including reverting to the mother tongue and utilizing other hints; metacognitive strategies including connecting new information to previously known information and self-monitoring; affective strategies including reducing anxiety through the use of music, encouraging oneself, and talking about one’s feelings with others; and social strategies including requesting clarification, cooperating with others and fostering cultural understanding.

Due to all the aspects of language learning strategies needed by the learners to be successful learners so they can be independent, they need to develop their self-study (autonomous) learning abilities. One of the components that can help this development is by practicing and honing learning language strategies. Based on research by (Warahmah, Ras & Nababan, 2017), in general, many students in the context of EFL still do not know how to use language-learning strategies correctly in their learning activities.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the readiness of local students to become autonomous learners by measuring and

identifying their language learning strategy using the SILL instrument. This study will specifically describe the trend of strategies that students use for their English learning in the said region. The inventory strategy for language learning (SILL) is used to thoroughly identify language learning strategies used by autonomous learners (Oxford; 1990). SILL is considered systematic, detailed, comprehensive, valid, and reliable across various cultural backgrounds, linking the four skills and relevant (Yilmaz, 2010).

METHODS

Research Design

The survey method is used in this study to investigate the language learning strategy of the students. These surveys took about sixty minutes in total to complete and were completed during class time. The return rate of the questionnaires was 100%.

Research Subject

The target high school is located in Padangsisimpuan, North Sumatera Province. The students in this study’s target high school are normally distributed in terms of grade level. The total number of the participant are one hundred and forty (N=140). The samples were randomly chosen, and those 140 students signed consent forms. The more comprehensive number of participants is in table 1.

Data Collection Tools

The Oxford (1990) strategy inventory of language learning (SILL) questioner sheet

Table 1. The participants of research based on the grade

Grade	Female	Male	Total
12 th	21	28	49
11 th	23	20	43
10 th	32	16	48
Total	76	64	140

translated version was implemented as the research instrument for the participants to decide their learning strategies.

The questionnaire consists of 50 Lickert-type scale questions pointing to six categories: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. To analyze the data, the scores of the participants in answering the questionnaire

were calculated. It will be classified according to the level of SILL profile of the result (Oxford, 1990). The levels are high (usually used) = 3.5 to 5.0, medium (sometimes used) = 2.5 to 3.4, and low (generally not used).

■ RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the descriptive analysis of students learning strategy are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics related to the strategy questionnaire

Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Frequency
3.10	0.39	1	4.76	medium

Data analysis revealed the overall mean score of 3.10 for the Indonesian high school students' strategy use. As the mean score is in the range of 2.5 to 3.4, it shows that students have a medium use of strategies. Thus, it can be concluded that Indonesian high school is medium strategy users. This finding is not congruent with the studies done before for EFL students (Warahmah, Ras & Nababan, 2017; Tanjung, 2018; Lestari & Fatimah, 2020). All the findings in this research state that the use of learning strategies has a high frequency. The difference of the findings from this research to the other research could be due to the level of education. All the subjects of the other research were

university students. It assumes that the ability to use English learning strategies increases with time.

As demonstrated in Table 3, the participants were classified into three strategy groups based on Oxford's (1990) scale for subjects' division into strategy users considering above 3.5 as high, below 2.5 as low, and the scores of 2.5-3.5 as the medium strategy users. In this study, medium strategy users ($n = 83$) are more than half of the high and low strategy users. It is not in line with the research conducted by Warahmah, Ras, and Nababan (2017), which found that many EFL students, in general, still do not understand how to apply language-learning strategies appropriately in their learning processes.

Table 3. Frequency for the scores of high, medium, and low strategy groups

Strategy Groups	Frequency	Percent
High strategy user	33	23.57%
Medium strategy user	83	59.28%
Low strategy user	24	17.14%

The table below displays the most and least frequently used strategies. The mean score for each group of strategies was calculated.

According to Table 4, affective strategy is the most frequently used strategy ($M = 3.60$), while social strategy is the least frequently used

strategy ($M = 2.48$), memory, compensation, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies were between the most and least frequently used strategies, respectively. Moreover, the table also shows that Indonesian high school students used memory, compensation, cognitive, and strategies

Table 4. Rank order of the favoured strategies

Strategies	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Rank	Frequency
Affective	3.60	0.73	1	5	1	High
Memory	3.38	0.72	1	4.88	2	Medium
Compensation	3.19	0.75	1	4.66	3	Medium
Cognitive	3.09	0.76	1	4.85	4	Medium
Metacognitive	2.86	0.70	1	4.66	5	Medium
Social	2.48	0.58	1	4.5	6	Low

at a medium frequency level, while affective is at high frequency and social strategy is at low frequency.

In other words, the most frequent learning strategy is affective. Compared with the lower results of metacognitive and cognitive strategy use, the high score of affective scope indicates that Indonesian high school students in the said region are more feeling-oriented rather than thinking-oriented. According to Oxford (1990), a feeling-focused student is concerned with social and emotional factors but does not make decisions based on logic and analysis.

This finding is not congruent with most studies on language learning strategy that the result of the high strategy is a metacognitive strategy (Warahmah, Ras & Nababan, 2017; Lestari & Fatimah, 2020). It indicated that the students are not familiar with managing the learning process. It signifies that the students are not independent in their learning.

Table 5 shows the frequency of participants' responses regarding the memory strategies they used. Item number 7 gains 4.06 or as the most utilized strategy. They like applying images and sounds. This strategy benefits the

Table 5. The frequency of language learning of memory strategy

No.	Memory Strategy	Mean	SD	Strategy
1	Item 1	3.32	1.01	Medium
2	Item 2	3.57	0.95	High
3	Item 3	3.37	0.74	Medium
4	Item 4	3.65	0.74	High
5	Item 5	3.25	0.84	Medium
6	Item 6	2.47	0.87	Low
7	Item 7	4.06	0.92	High
8	Item 8	3.7	1.00	High
9	Item 9	3.05	0.79	Medium

students who rely on kinesthetic learning. Item number 6 gains 2.47. the strategy in this score range is considered as a low strategy used. The students are rarely using the flashcard to help them to memorize words.

The high strategy used in items numbers 2,4,7 and 8 indicates that the students create mental linkages, apply images and sounds, review

well, and employ action to memorize words.

The students relatively can do grouping and representing sounds in memory (Oxford, 1990) to help them learn English. However, the overall results indicating that the students apply memory strategy categorized as a medium, means that they still do not master this strategy well to help them. This result is in line with the research conducted

by Warahma, Ras, and Nababan (2017). However, it contradicts the study's findings conducted by Lestari and Fatimah (2020), which found that the students highly use memory strategy.

Table 6 shows the frequency of participants' responses regarding the cognitive strategies they used. Item number 10 gains 3.86 or as the most utilized strategy. They like to note-taking words. However, the high result contrasts

Table 6. The frequency of language learning of cognitive strategy

No.	Cognitive Strategy	Mean	SD	Strategy
1	Item 10	3.86	0.90	High
2	Item 11	2.71	0.97	Medium
3	Item 12	3.7	0.79	High
4	Item 13	2.99	0.91	Medium
5	Item 14	2.87	0.75	Medium
6	Item 15	3.31	1.04	Medium
7	Item 16	2.99	0.93	Medium
8	Item 17	2.57	0.95	Medium
9	Item 18	3.63	0.77	High
10	Item 19	2.6	0.93	Medium
11	Item 20	3.11	0.79	Medium
12	Item 21	3.15	0.80	Medium
13	Item 22	3.15	0.81	Medium
14	Item 23	2.67	0.96	Medium

the least utilized strategy in the cognitive category, item number 17 that gains 2.57. this strategy also is about note-taking but in a broader scope. The students do not prefer to write messages and reports as their strategy.

The high strategy used in item number 12 showed that the students like to practice the language. It indicates that the students tend to do repetition as one of the strategies which are

effective, easier, and hopefully enjoyable (Oxford, 1990). However, the overall results show that the students use a medium-level memory strategy, implying that they have not yet mastered this strategy to aid them. This finding contradicts studies by Warahma, Ras, and Nababan (2017) and Lestari and Fatimah (2020), which revealed that students employ cognitive strategies frequently.

Table 7. The frequency of language learning of compensation strategy

No.	Compensation Strategy	Mean	SD	Strategy
1	Item 24	3.46	1.06	Medium
2	Item 25	3.99	0.96	High
3	Item 26	4.05	0.98	High
4	Item 27	2.75	0.82	Medium
5	Item 28	2.52	0.79	Medium
6	Item 29	2.38	0.81	Low

Table 7 shows the frequency of participants' responses regarding the compensation strategies they used. Item number 26 gains 4.05 or as the most utilized strategy. The students are overcoming language difficulties, notably in speaking, by making up new words. The least utilized strategy in the compensation category is item number 29 that gains 2.38. the low-level strategy shows that the students do not prefer making up phrases when overcoming difficulties in English.

The high strategy used in items number 25 and 26 showed that students overcame language difficulties by making new words and gestures.

As Oxford (1990) explained that using other clues could help students in learning English. However, the recent study's overall results indicate that the students are not using the compensation strategy frequently. That is not in line with the studies conducted by Lestari and Fatimah (2020) and Warahma, Ras, and Nababan (2017), which found that most students using the strategy highly.

Table 8 shows the frequency of participants' responses regarding the metacognitive strategies they used. The high strategy used of item numbers 33 and 34 indicates that the students plan and set their study goals.

Table 8. The frequency of language learning of metacognitive strategy

No.	Metacognitive Strategy	Mean	SD	Strategy
1	Item 30	2.83	0.91	Medium
2	Item 31	2.25	0.88	Medium
3	Item 32	2.9	0.74	Medium
4	Item 33	3.60	0.78	High
5	Item 34	3.5	0.83	High
6	Item 35	1.9	1.01	Low
7	Item 36	2.84	0.73	Medium
8	Item 37	2.52	0.99	Medium
9	Item 38	3.37	0.94	Medium

The low strategy used of item number 38 indicates that there are factors making students not seek opportunities in learning English. It means that the students seem to entail thinking about and analyzing their learning process by having self-monitoring (Oxford, 1990), even though they are not really interested in giving their best efforts to create more spaces or occasions to learn English,

for example by seeking additional materials to enrich their learning process. In addition, contradicting the research done by Lestari and Fatimah (2020) and Warahma, Ras, and Nababan (2017), the recent study only found that the students use the metacognitive strategy in a medium-level instead of high-level.

Table 9 shows the frequency of

Table 9. The frequency of language learning of affective strategy

No.	Affective Strategy	Mean	SD	Strategy
1	Item 39	4.32	0.75	High
2	Item 40	3.37	1.22	Medium
3	Item 41	2.85	1.06	Medium
4	Item 42	4.82	0.47	High
5	Item 43	1.97	0.93	Low
6	Item 44	4.26	0.80	High

participants' responses regarding the affective strategies they used. The students have high strategy used of the item numbers 39, 42, and 44, indicating that the students cope with emotions related to learning well. The students mostly try to relax when they notice their anxiety and talk to someone to ease their feeling when learning English.

As the most frequently used by the students, the affective strategy is the most

effective, easier, and enjoyable for them when they find difficulties in their learning. This can help the students to lower their anxiety by encouraging themselves and discussing their feelings with others (Oxford, 1990). This finding is consistent with the study's findings done by Lestari and Fatimah (2020). However, it does not support the result from the research conducted by Warahma, Ras, and Nababan (2017), which only found affective strategy as a medium-level.

Table 10. The frequency of language learning of social strategy

No.	Social Strategy	Mean	SD	Strategy
1	Item 45	4.15	0.60	High
2	Item 46	1.5	0.78	Low
3	Item 47	2.99	0.86	Medium
4	Item 48	1.33	0.74	Low
5	Item 49	2.37	0.89	Low
6	Item 50	2.56	0.89	Medium

Table 10 shows the frequency of participants' responses regarding the social strategies they used. The students have low strategy used of most items of this category, indicating that the students are not exposed to English. Some factors are the environment. As the school is located in the region, the students cannot experience and interact well with English speakers.

Social strategy in this study is found to be the low strategy used by the students. The school's location in the region lacks English speakers and facilities to expose to English culture become one of the main factor. From another study (Ras, 2018) that the autonomous learner used a high social strategy. It indicates that the sample are not autonomous in their learning.

Table 11. The Frequency of the Scores of Language Learning Strategy Groups Per Grade

Grade	N	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
X	48	3.06	2.75	2.84	2.54	3.35	2.21
Frequency		medium	medium	medium	medium	medium	low
Rank		2	4	3	5	1	6
XI	43	3.33	3.05	3.16	2.81	3.55	2.50
Frequency		medium	medium	medium	medium	high	medium
Rank		2	4	3	5	1	6
XII	49	3.73	3.47	3.57	3.21	3.88	2.73
Frequency		high	medium	high	medium	high	medium
Rank		2	4	3	5	1	6

Table 11 shows The frequency of the scores of language learning strategy groups per grade. The table shows that the higher the grade, the six strategies that are also higher. This means that the students seem to know how to deal with the learning process throughout the years. However, their learning proficiency which is considered low, indicates that they still have difficulties cope the problems they have in their learning process.

Furthermore, according to Lestari & Fatimah (2020) study on language learning strategy for EFL student teachers at English Language Education Program, the high result in metacognitive strategies is that the classes typically have a strong English proficiency. Furthermore, (Mega, Santihastuti, & Wahjuningsih, 2019) stated that metacognitive became the most frequently used learning strategy by successful students on a scale of high use in their studies. Furthermore, they claim that successful learners used all six categories of strategies more frequently than unsuccessful learners.

The other studies implied that the students in this study were still low in proficiency, and the data from their English score performance adding up the claim. As (Mega, Santihastuti, & Wahjuningsih, 2019) stated that the high use of metacognitive strategy assumes that successful students are able to set clear goals, control, review, and evaluate their learning rather than unsuccessful students who concentrate on how they think, memorize, summarize, and repeat what they have learned. As this occurred in this study, the students employ the memory strategy more than the metacognitive strategy.

These circumstances also indicate that the high school students are not autonomous in their learning as they still lack metacognitive strategy. According to Oxford (1990), metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process and evaluating the learning.

Metacognitive strategies deal with efficient planning and self-monitoring.

The school in the said region is still teacher-centered based on the students' low proficiency, the medium use of metacognitive strategy, and the high use of memorized strategies. The teacher is the person who lectures, presents, and instructs the learning materials. The students only listen and take notes and memorize what the teacher instructs in the classroom. Khoshshima & Tiyar (2015) declare that self-regulation reflects on the students' academy and that knowing and making language learners aware of the best strategy would be beneficial in helping learners improve their autonomy and learning.

Concerning problems encountered by the students in this study, It indicates that the students in Padangsidempuan, North Sumatera, are not autonomous in their learning. Thus, the teacher assists the students in identifying and employ appropriate language learning strategies in order to develop autonomy in learners who conceptualize and employ those strategies in the foreign language.

■ CONCLUSIONS

The study showed that high school students in the north Sumatra province mostly use affective strategies and rarely use social strategies in their language learning process. It means that the strategies that students use for their English learning in the said region are medium strategy users. The less desirable strategy that indicating to be the strategy of learner autonomy showed the students still not familiar with the learning strategy. Thus, the teacher must train the students in this learning strategy.

Due to time limitations, the author did not investigate the direct impacts and challenges that the students get from using the strategies during the learning process outside

the classroom. As a result, language learning can be better understood, and students can share their insights to overcome difficulties in the learning process. This research is expected to be used as a benchmark for students' readiness as independent learners amid this COVID-19 situation. The readiness of students to manage their learning when online classes are essential.

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