

## TEFL Students' Language Learning Strategies: The Case of One State Islamic Institute in Indonesia

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### Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the language learning strategies of TEFL students at State Islamic Institute of Kerinci. The data were collected through a survey with the Indonesian version Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning and were analyzed through the Rasch Analysis. The results revealed that metacognitive strategy and social strategy were the most and the least frequently used strategy respectively. Considerable differences existed in the second most frequently used strategy across the variable of gender. For male respondents, it was the compensatory strategy, while for female respondents, it was the affective strategy. In addition, cognitive strategy, the third most frequently used strategy by male respondents, is the last for their female counterparts. The first three most frequently used strategies by male respondents were dominated by the direct type of strategies, while for female respondents these were dominated by the indirect ones.

**Keywords:** strategy, Rasch analysis, metacognitive, compensatory, SILL

### Abstrak

Tujuan dari penelitian kuantitatif ini adalah untuk menguji strategi pembelajaran bahasa mahasiswa pendidikan guru Bahasa Inggris di Institut Islam Negeri Kerinci. Data dikumpulkan melalui survei dengan menggunakan *the Indonesian version Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* dan dianalisis melalui Analisis Rasch. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa strategi metakognitif dan strategi sosial adalah strategi yang paling banyak dan paling sering digunakan. Perbedaan yang cukup besar ada pada strategi sosial yang paling sering digunakan. Bagi responden laki-laki, strategi kompensasi yang paling sering digunakan, sedangkan untuk responden perempuan, strategi afektif yang paling sering digunakan. Selain itu, strategi kognitif adalah strategi ketiga yang paling sering digunakan oleh responden laki-laki, namun bagi responden perempuan, strategi tersebut adalah yang terakhir. Tiga strategi yang paling sering digunakan oleh responden laki-laki didominasi oleh jenis strategi langsung, sedangkan untuk responden perempuan didominasi oleh yang tidak langsung.

**Kata kunci:** strategi, analisis Rasch, metakognitif, kompensasi, SILL

## Introduction

Every language learner, consciously or unconsciously, uses one or more language learning strategies (LLS) in learning a language. Research (Green & Oxford, 1995; Goh & Foong, 1997; Griffiths, 2006; Lai, 2009; Rubin, 1975; Naiman et al., 1978; Oxford, 1989, 1983) show a close relationship between language learning strategies used by language learners and their language learning achievement. However, research also indicates that most language learners cannot definitely identify the language learning strategies they are using. This phenomenon highlights the importance of familiarizing the strategies to them for effective language learning. Therefore, data on language learners' learning strategies are not only useful for understanding progress in their language learning but also crucial for syllabus design and for planning necessary remedial measures in a language program. Oxford (1990) defines language learning strategy as "*Specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations*" (p.8). She, furthermore, identifies six language learning strategies, i.e. *memory strategy, cognitive strategy, compensatory strategy, metacognitive strategy, affective strategy, and social strategy.*

Memory Strategy involves simple tasks such as storing and retrieving new information while Cognitive Strategy consists of tasks such as analyzing and summarizing. With this Cognitive Strategy learners manipulate and transform the target language (Hong, 2006; Dansereau, 1985; Rigney, 1978). In Compensatory Strategy learners overcome knowledge and communication problems in the target language by using available knowledge and information. This strategy involves actions such as guessing the meaning of new words and reconstructing the grammar of the target language (Oxford, 1990).

In Metacognitive Strategy learners actively and authoritatively control their own cognitive processes. This includes managing, planning, focusing, and evaluating the language learning process they are experiencing while improving their communicative competency in the target language. The Affective Strategy, in contrast, involves learners' developing confidence and perseverance in learning a language by controlling their own emotion and feeling. Finally, the Social Strategy stresses collaborative initiatives in language learning. This involves asking for repetition and clarification, paraphrasing, slowing down when speaking in order to be better understood by others (Oxford, 1990). Oxford (1990) classifies the six strategies into two types, i.e. *Direct Strategies* and *Indirect Strategies*. Direct Strategies refers to those strategies that are sub-conscious in nature, inherently learned and related directly to the language being learned. Belonging to this type of strategies are the Memory Strategy, the Cognitive Strategy, and the Compensatory Strategy. Indirect Strategies are strategies that are conscious in nature or under the learner's conscious control or acts and seek to organize the language learning process in general. This type of language learning strategies includes the Metacognitive Strategy, the Affective Strategies, and the Social Strategies.

Most studies on the relationship between language learning strategies use by language learners and their language learning achievement show a strong positive correlation between the two variables. Research by Rubin (1975) Naiman et al. (1978) and Oxford (1989, 1983), Green and Oxford (1995) Goh and Foong (1997) Griffiths (2006) Lai (2009) show that successful language learners tend to use more and varied language learning strategies than the less successful ones. In fact, Chamot et al. (1999) concludes that "*differences between more effective learners and less effective learners were found in the number and range of strategies used*" (p. 2638). Researchers have also identified a strong association between gender,

language proficiency and use of language learning strategies. Alhaisoni's (2012) study on Saudi Arabian EFL learners indicates that the female learners use Social Strategy more than their male counterparts. In addition, female learners were also found to use more language learning strategies than the male ones. Furthermore, Alhaisoni identifies that proficient language learners in the study employed the six language learning strategies simultaneously more often than less proficient learners. This finding concurs with Wu's (2008) study on Taiwanese EFL learners, where highly proficient learners were found to use cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies often. Earlier research by Khalil (2005) on Palestinian EFL learners shows that female learners use Memory and Metacognitive Strategies more than their male counterparts. Similar phenomenon was also observed by Green and Oxford (1995) in their study on Puerto Rican EFL learners.

Since its establishment in 2004, there has not been any study in the English Department, State Islamic Institute of Kerinci on the language learning strategies of its students. Thus, drawing on this absence, this study sought to, first, identify language learning strategies of the students and second, to find out whether or not there are difference their language learning strategies across the independent variable of gender.

## Methodology

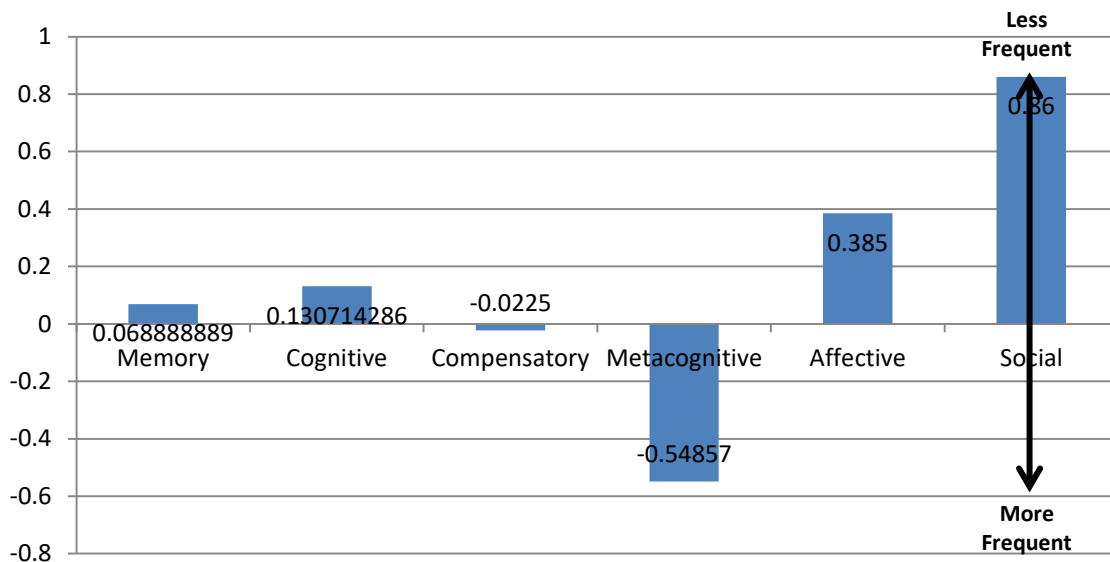
Respondents of this quantitative study were all semester VI students of English Department, State Islamic Institute of Kerinci,  $N=51$ . 16 of them were male and 35 were female. Data were collected through the administration of the Indonesian version of the 50-item "Strategy Inventory for Language Learning" (Oxford, 1990) that assesses the respondents' use of the six language strategies. The items come with five alternative responses, i.e. 1. *Never*, 2. *Seldom*, 3. *Sometime*, 4. *Often*, and 5. *Always*.

This study employed *Rasch analysis* (Rasch, 1980; Bond & Fox, 2001) for data analysis. This approach was suited to the purposes of the study, i.e. to identify the respondents' language learning strategies and whether or not there are differences in the use of the strategies across the independent variables of gender. *Rasch analysis* was conducted using *Winsteps* software (Linacre, 2006). Previous studies (e.g., Hair et al., 1998; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993; Wharton, 2000) show that the original version of the instrument had a high validity and reliability as also shown by the Korean and Japanese translations (Park, 1997; Robson & Midorikawa, 2001) and the Arabic translation (Khalil, 2005). In this study, evaluation of the validity and reliability of the Indonesian translation of the instrument was conducted in the initial part of data analysis using Rasch analysis approach (Rasch, 1980; Bond & Fox, 2001). The results show that the instrument possesses psychometric properties adequate for a meaningful measurement of language learning strategies.

## Findings

### *The respondents' language learning strategies*

To map the respondents' learning strategies, the *means* of the respondents' responses to the questionnaire, after being transformed into interval scale through Rasch analysis processes, were compared. The results are presented in the following figure.



**Figure 1.** Means of the language learning strategies use

Figure 1 shows that the respondents employed all the six strategies in learning English. However, Metacognitive Strategy ( $M= -0,54857$ ) is the most frequently used strategy, while the Social Strategy is the least used one. The figure also shows that the respondents use of the Memory Strategy ( $M=0,06888889$ ) and the Cognitive Strategy ( $M=0,130714286$ ) almost equally frequent. The list orders the strategies based on their frequency of use are Metacognitive ( $M= -0,54857$ ), Compensatory ( $M= -0,0225$ ), Memory ( $M=0,06888889$ ), Cognitive ( $M=0,130714286$ ), Affective ( $M=0,385$ ), and Social ( $M=0,86$ ).

**Comparisons of the respondents' language learning strategies across genders**

Results of data analysis show that Metacognitive Strategy is the most frequently used strategy by both male and female respondents ( $M=-0,75778$  and  $M=-0,68889$  respectively). However, considerable differences exist in the second most frequently used strategy. For male respondents it is the Compensatory Strategy, while for female respondents it is the Affective Strategy. Another considerable difference is in the use of Cognitive Strategy which is the third most frequently used strategy by male respondents but the last for their female counterparts. Details of the comparisons are presented in the following tables.

**Table 1.** Means of strategies use by male and female respondents

Strategies	Male	Female
Memory	0,108889	0,032222
Cognitive	-0,01857	3,666429
Compensatory	-0,02167	-0,11667
Metacognitive	-0,75778	-0,68889
Affective	0,508333	-0,17
Social	0,698333	0,98333

**Tabel 2.** Order of strategy use of male and female respondents

Rank	Male	Type of Strategy	Frequency of strategy use compared to female	Female	Type of Strategy	Frequency of strategy use compared to female
1	Metacognitive	I	= >	Metacognitive	I	= <
2	Compensatory	D	<	Affective	I	>*
3	Cognitive	D	>*	Compensatory	D	<
4	Memory	D	= <	Memory	D	= >
5	Affective	I	<*	Social	I	= <
6	Social	I	= >	Cognitive	D	<*

Legends: D: Direct I: Indirect >: more than <: less than = <: slightly less than = >: slightly more than \*: large difference

Tabel 2 shows that the first three most frequently used strategies by male respondents are dominated by the direct type of strategies, while for female respondents these are dominated by the indirect ones.

## Discussion

This study found that Metacognitive Strategy was the most frequently used strategy by the respondents. This finding concurs with that of Khalil (2005) on Palestinian EFL students, Alhaisoni (2014) on Saudi Arabian EFL student, Shu (2008) on Taiwanese ESL students, and Samad, Sing, and Gill (2010) Malaysian ESL learners. This phenomenon may further confirm the hypothesis that the strategy is the one most frequently used by adult language learners. Yet, whether or not this phenomenon is related to the ability of most adult learners to manage their own process of learning still needs confirmation. However, the finding that the Social Strategy was the least used strategy is inconsistent with Shu (2008) and Alhaisoni (2012) who found that the least used strategy in their study was the Affective Strategy, and in contrast with Samad et al. (2010) who found that Social Strategy was, in fact, the most frequently used strategy in their study. Hence, there is a question on whether or not learners' preference for a particular strategy is positively correlated to the extent to which the foreign language are practiced in their society and to the availability of access to native speakers of the foreign language as measured some items of the SILL.

Variations of strategy use across the independent variable of gender identified in this study seem to support the finding of other studies that this variable do influence strategy choices, in addition to the level of learner's proficiency in the foreign language (Khalil, 2005; Green & Oxford, 1995; Goh & Foong, 1997; Griffiths, 2006; Lai, 2009). Nonetheless, this study found that first three most frequently used strategies by male respondents are dominated by the direct type of strategies, while for female respondents these are dominated by the indirect ones. However whether or not such phenomena are random or systematic; and if they are systematic, whether or not they are related to the variable of gender are beyond the scope of this study.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study that shows the Metacognitive Strategy as the most frequently used strategy is consistent with that of other similar studies in other contexts. The finding that shows that the Social Strategy was the least frequently used strategy in this study adds even more variations to the issue as such inconsistency was also showed by other similar studies. The findings of this study support the theory of the relationship between the independent variable of gender and preferences for particular language learning strategies.

Last but not least, the researchers are pleased to suggest the followings: As learners' language learning strategy has been repeatedly identified to contribute to their language learning achievement, foreign language teachers should pay attention to this issue. Foreign language learners should also familiarize themselves to language learning strategy in order to be able to better self-manage their language learning. Further studies are needed in order to find out: whether or not adult language learners' strong tendency to use the Metacognitive Strategy is related to their ability to manage their own process of learning. whether or not variations in learners' use of the Social Strategy is positively correlated to the extent to which the foreign language are practiced in their society and the availability of access to directly communicate with the native speakers of the foreign language. Whether or not preferences and tendency for using the direct or indirect types of language learning strategies are random or systematic; and if they are systematic, whether or not they are related to the variable of gender.

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