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A Comparative Study of Language Learning Strategies among English Department Students at IAIN Kediri

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ABSTRACT

Utilizing appropriate language learning strategy may influence student's learning process. In fact, many students do not employ the right learning strategy. This study aims to investigate students' learning strategy used by students of English Department of IAIN Kediri. The design used in this research is a quantitative descriptive design with comparative study method and the research involved 120 students, from 4th and 6th semester of English Department IAIN Kediri. The data were collected using the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire, Version 7.0 by Rebecca L. Oxford, which includes 50 items. The findings reveal that both 4th and 6th semester students most commonly used metacognitive strategies, while compensation strategies were the least used. Overall, 4th semester students were high users of learning strategies (M = 3.53), while 6th semester students were moderate users (M = 3.48). Further analysis by major showed variations: in tourism and translation majors, metacognitive strategies were most used and compensation strategies least used. In literature majors, metacognitive strategies remained the most used, but the least used strategies differed—memory strategies for 4th semester students and social strategies for 6th semester students. These results indicate significant differences in strategy use across majors, leading to the conclusion that the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted—there are differences in language learning strategies among tourism, translation, and literature students at IAIN Kediri.

Keywords: language learning strategy, English department students, comparative study.

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Introduction

Language learning has become an essential and significant aspect in the field of education, given the fact that language is one of the predominant tools of communication—verbal and nonverbal. The linguistic terminologies applied in daily communication are also the outcome of educational outcomes, which are influenced by environmental factors and the natural adaptability of humans. Humans, through the medium of language, are enabled to adapt to their respective worlds or the surrounding environment (Anwar, 2019).

However, not everyone is born with the ability to speak fluently. It takes time to learn a language and is based on several variables like cognitive, psychological, and sociological factors, motivation, aptitude, and learning styles (Aslan, 2009; Ellis, 1997). These variables lead to individuals' differing language learning capacities. Different studies have been conducted to examine these variables, especially in schools.

Besides these determinants, various research studies have also determined the role of language learning strategies—most significantly in English learning—as main determinants of the learning process and the effectiveness of language learning. Learning strategies have been shown to play a crucial role in facilitating learners' language acquisition. Various researchers have concluded that strategic learning leads to improved language performance, and effective learning strategies largely determine learning outcomes.

Learning strategies used by learners have a direct impact on their language learning success. University students, as foreign language learners, need to know and use proper strategies to learn the target language more effectively and efficiently, as language learning is a conscious and strategic process (Chamot & O'Malley, 1990). Further, the identification of techniques used by students is paramount because it empowers learners to take ownership of their learning path, improve self-knowledge, and continue beyond the classroom enhancing their language abilities (Oxford, 1990, p. 42).

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classify language learning strategies into three subcategories: first, metacognitive strategies, which mean strategies applied to plan and think about the learning process; monitor production and understanding; and evaluation after completing the exercise. Furthermore, in the meta-cognitive strategy, it is expected to become an advanced regulator, directed attention, special attention, self- control, functional planning, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. Second, cognitive strategies are more limited to specific learning tasks and involve more direct influence from the learning material itself.

These strategies include repetition, resources, understanding, grouping, recording, deduction, recombination, imaging, auditory representation, keywords, contextualization, elaboration, transfer, and inference.

Current studies also highlight the issue. Lestari and Fatimah (2020) confirmed that even though the majority of EFL students used metacognitive strategies frequently, they underutilized other useful strategies such as compensation and memory. Along the same lines, Azizi (2020) showed that students were often unaware of the range of strategic choices open to them and often depended on a limited range of approaches. This highlights the importance of not only presenting students with different strategies but also creating environments where they can identify and use the most optimal ones.

Hence, educators undertake a crucial role of sensitizing learners to strategic learning and directing them to contexts that facilitate their individual learning requirements. Based on the above problems and issues, the researcher conducted a study titled "Comparative Study in Language Learning Strategies Used by English Department Students" to investigate how students from different semesters and majors utilize language learning strategies and the implications for teaching and curriculum design.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design with a comparative approach. Quantitative descriptive research aims to describe phenomena as they exist by collecting numerical data and analyzing them using statistical procedures (Creswell, 2012). The comparative approach in this study was used to examine similarities and differences in language learning strategies between student groups based on their academic semester and chosen major. No treatment or intervention was given during the research process, as the goal was purely observational and explanatory. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) developed by Oxford (1990) served as the primary research tool to gather structured data on students' strategy use and quantify the frequency of strategy use among EFL learners (Lestari & Fatimah, 2020).

Population and Sample

The population of this study included all fourth- and sixth-semester students of the English Department at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) of Kediri. At the time of the study,

there were 126 students enrolled in the fourth semester and 150 students in the sixth semester. Following Arikunto's sampling guidelines (2010), 25% of the population was considered sufficient for a representative sample. Therefore, the sample consisted of 60 students from each semester. A cluster sampling technique was applied, selecting students from classes A, B, and D in the fourth semester, and classes B, D, and E in the sixth semester. Additionally, students were grouped by their academic majors—tourism, translation, and literature—to allow comparison across disciplines. The final valid dataset included responses from 120 students.

Instruments

Two instruments were used in this research: a personal information questionnaire and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) version 7.0. The personal questionnaire collected basic demographic and academic information such as name, student ID, semester, and major. The SILL questionnaire, adapted from Oxford (1989), is a validated tool consisting of 50 items categorized into six strategy groups: memory (9 items), cognitive (14 items), compensation (6 items), metacognitive (9 items), affective (6 items), and social (6 items). Respondents answered each item using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

The SILL instrument is globally recognized and has demonstrated high reliability and validity in assessing students' use of language learning strategies. The internal consistency and established categorization make it a suitable tool for measuring both frequency and type of strategy use across diverse learning contexts.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection process began with the distribution of the SILL questionnaire via Google Forms. Links were shared with the selected student groups through their class WhatsApp groups. Participants were instructed to respond honestly and thoughtfully to each item. Once all responses were collected, the data were screened to ensure completeness and consistency. Invalid or incomplete responses were excluded from the final analysis.

Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated using Microsoft Excel 2016. Scores were interpreted based on Oxford's (1990) rating system, which classifies the average scores as follows: 4.5–5.0 (always or almost always used – high use), 3.5–4.49 (usually used – high use), 2.5–3.49 (sometimes used – medium use), 1.5–2.49 (seldom

used), and 1.0–1.49 (never used – low use). Comparison tables were then developed to identify patterns between the fourth and sixth semesters as well as across the three academic majors.

Result and Discussion

This section presents the results of the analysis of data collected from 120 students in the fourth and sixth semesters of the English Department at IAIN Kediri. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire was used to determine the frequency and type of strategies applied by the participants. Results are discussed in two parts: overall strategy use by semester and comparative strategy use by academic major (tourism, translation, and literature).

Overall Use of Language Learning Strategies

Table 1 displays the mean scores for the six categories of learning strategies. According to Oxford's (1990) scale, students in the fourth semester showed high use (M = 3.53), while students in the sixth semester demonstrated moderate use (M = 3.47).

Table 1

Overall Use of Language Learning Strategies by Semester

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
4th semester	60	2.55	4.38	3.53 (high use)	1.04
6th semester	60	2.65	4.28	3.47 (medium use)	0.99
All students	120	2.6	4.33	3.50 (high use)	1.04

These results indicate that students in earlier semesters tend to be more active in applying a variety of strategies compared to those in later semesters. A possible interpretation is that younger students may be more enthusiastic or experimental in trying different learning techniques.

Use of Strategies by Category

Table 2 shows the average use of each strategy category across all participants. The most frequently used strategies were **metacognitive** (M = 3.84) and **social** (M = 3.52), while **compensation** strategies were the least used (M = 3.26).

Table 2

Mean Scores by Learning Strategy Category (All Participants)

Strategy Category	Mean	Standard Deviation	Use Category
Metacognitive	3.84	0.96	High
Social	3.52	1.06	High
Affective	3.49	1.13	Medium
Cognitive	3.47	0.97	Medium
Memory	3.34	1.03	Medium
Compensation	3.26	1.08	Medium

These results align with earlier research (Lestari, 2015; Oxford, 1990), confirming that learners tend to rely more on organizational and self-regulatory strategies (metacognitive) rather than memory-based or compensatory strategies.

Comparison of Strategies by Major and Semester

To examine differences in strategy used between academic majors, participants were grouped into tourism, translation, and literature majors. Table 3 summarizes the mean scores of each group.

Table 3

Mean Use of Language Learning Strategies by Major and Semester

Major	Semester	Mean	Use Category
Tourism	4th	3.96	High
	6th	3.39	Medium
Translation	4th	3.45	Medium
	6th	3.61	High
Literature	4th	3.47	Medium
	6th	3.11	Medium

Among the majors, 4th semester tourism students reported the highest mean strategy use (M = 3.96), suggesting an active engagement with diverse learning methods. Interestingly, 6th semester translation students also showed a high mean use (M = 3.61), suggesting they may rely on strategy use due to the technical nature of their major.

In contrast, 6th semester literature students had the lowest strategy use (M = 3.11). This may reflect a more interpretative or intuitive learning style that relies less on structured strategies.

The result of this study indicates that the fourth and sixth semester students of the English Department of IAIN Kediri employ all six language learning strategy categories offered by Oxford (1990), though with differing intensity. The most employed category was the metacognitive strategies, while the least employed was the compensation strategies. Findings in the current research align solidly with theoretical orientation postulated by Oxford (1990), which highlighted the importance that metacognitive skills (involving the planning, structuring, and judging learning activities) are being routinely practiced by more autonomous learners and indicating considerable compatibility with success at language acquisition.

The heavy inclination towards metacognitive approaches indicates that students are more and more aware of the necessity to manage their own learning activities. This agrees with the theory proposed by O'Malley and Chamot (1990), which stipulates that students realize the greatest gains when they are involved in self-regulated learning activity. Students who regularly exercise planning and reflective routines stand to reap more rewards from learning activities, especially in the area of foreign language learning, where continuous reinforcement and self-management are key.

Besides, Metacognitive strategies help students in managing their education by engaging in activities such as focusing, organization, self-assessment, and overseeing their mistakes or progress, can help students become effective learners in learning the language. A possible explanation for why metacognitive strategies has become the most preferred is because they allow the learners to overview the lesson, pay attention in the classroom, and self- monitoring and self-evaluating their language learning (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

While the productive use of memory and compensation strategies is worth noting. Rubin (1987) finds that memory strategies—while central to information storage and retrieval—tend to be underused as learners progress towards more communicative or analytical proficiency. Compensation strategies, such as devices like guessing meaning from context or synonyms, are employed to cover up linguistic deficiencies. Their lower frequency

could either imply a lack of awareness or discomfort with spontaneous language production, particularly for those learners who may prioritize accuracy over fluency.

It is noteworthy that cognitive strategies, although not the most prevalent, were utilized to a moderate degree among all groups. Such strategies encompass activities like summarization, note-taking, and translation, which are crucial for both comprehension and language production. This observation aligns with the research conducted by Wenden (1991), who underscored the importance of cognitive strategies as fundamental for the internalization of linguistic rules and structures.

The use of social and affective strategies marks learners' attempts to interact with others and manage their feelings throughout the language learning process. Oxford (1990) highlighted the importance of these indirect strategies, especially in contexts where learners may feel anxious or lack confidence. That students reported moderate to high use of these strategies is a positive sign, suggesting some degree of emotional intelligence and a willingness to seek out social interaction—both desirable traits for the language learning process.

The variation discovered among semesters is of pedagogical interest. The greater mean use of strategies on the part of students in the fourth semester might imply their recent exposure to elementary language learning classes, which place a greater emphasis on strategy use and language awareness. Students in the sixth semester, who are presumably more concerned with addressing academic or practical needs such as thesis writing or fieldwork, may use previously acquired strategies more than actively striving to discover new ones. This is consonant with Oxford and Nyikos' (1989) note that the use of strategy can plateau or decrease over time without being reinforced continuously through instruction.

Additionally, the variation among subjects (tourism, translation, literature) points to learning strategies' context-boundedness as emphasized by Chamot (2004). That tourism students used social and metacognitive strategies extensively suggests that the communicative sophistication of their field pushes them to interact and plan more intensively.

On the other hand, literature students—who often engage in analysis and evaluation—may rely less on structured approaches and more on intuitive or reflective methods. By comparison, translation students showed a more balanced use of strategies, probably due to

the technical nature of their tasks, which call for both accuracy of language and mental flexibility (Nurkholida, 2016).

These findings underscore the importance of strategy training in all areas of language learning. Teachers cannot assume that students will develop good strategies on their own but provide constant support and explicit instruction. As suggested by Cohen (1998), the integration of strategy instruction into language curricula can significantly enhance learner autonomy and long-term success. In addition, while Oxford's taxonomy offers a solid foundation for understanding language learning strategies, findings point to the need to tailor strategy training to meet the needs of each discipline and the nature of the learners. This personalized approach can ensure that students in different programs not only understand the use of strategies but also apply them effectively throughout their studies.

Conclusion

This research was intended to explore the comparative use of language learning strategies by English Department students at IAIN Kediri based on differences between fourth- and sixth-semester students and across three academic majors: tourism, translation, and literature. Adopting Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of learning strategies and implementing the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), the research uncovered enlightening patterns of students' strategic behavior in learning English as a foreign language.

The results indicate that all categories of students employed a range of language acquisition strategies, with metacognitive strategies consistently identified as the most prevalently utilized, whereas compensation strategies were noted as the least employed. Students in their fourth semester exhibited a greater overall engagement with strategies than those in their sixth semester, implying that less experienced students might still be navigating an exploratory phase of their learning, actively experimenting with diverse methods. Simultaneously, differences between academic majors show that the nature and requirements specific to each field influence the particular strategies employed and their frequency of use.

The results of this study corroborate earlier theoretical models by Oxford (1990), Chamot & O'Malley (1994), and Rubin (1987), but with a focus on the significance of metacognitive awareness, self-regulation, and contextually adaptive learning habits in language instruction. Moreover, the research highlights the necessity of continuous strategy

instruction at every level of academics, as opposed to expecting students to autonomously sustain or develop their strategies throughout.

Among the important limitations of this research is the exclusive dependence on quantitative survey data. Although the SILL yields reliable measurement, it fails to reflect the intricate experience or internal driving forces of students. Future studies would be improved through the use of qualitative approaches, such as interviewing or classroom observation, to enable a deeper appreciation of the motivations behind students' utilization of particular strategies.

In addition, the present study was confined to a single institution and two academic levels. Extending the research to accommodate several universities or including more academic years might give a broader understanding of strategy implementation in higher education.

Given these findings, teachers are recommended to incorporate specific strategy training into their instruction and modify learning support based on students' academic orientation and level of development. By raising strategic awareness and assisting students in refining their approach to learning languages, schools can play a key role in fostering more independent, self-assured, and competent language learners.

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