



## EVIDENCE-BASED LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES ACROSS NATIONALITIES: A COMPARISON OF INDONESIAN AND JAPANESE STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** The study is intended to examine (1) how language learning strategies are employed by Indonesian students compared to those employed by Japanese students, (2) what features of language learning strategies are employed by Indonesian and Japanese students, and (3) whether there are any different features of language learning strategies employed by Indonesian and Japanese students, when classified based on gender. The study is descriptive and correlational in nature. Oxford's SILL instrument was used to elicit language learning strategies. The survey was distributed online to Indonesian and Japanese university students learning English. The findings reveal that there is no significant difference in the use of direct, indirect, as well as overall language learning strategies employed by both Indonesian and Japanese students. Furthermore, Japanese and English students used richer direct language learning strategies compared to Indonesian students. In contrast, Indonesian students used richer indirect language learning strategies, even though these differences are not statistically significant. Finally, when classified based on gender, female students prefer employing direct strategies compared to male students.

**Keywords:** *language learning strategies, good learners, ESL, EFL, internal factors*

### INTRODUCTION

Research findings in the area of second language acquisition have repeatedly verified the significant role that learners can play in the process of language learning. The research has also gone through deliberate changes from teachers and teaching methods towards learners and learning techniques to show its correspondence with these fundamental moves during the past decade (Chamot, 2005; Lee, 2003). While learners received more attention and a more prominent place in research studies on second language learning, so did the engaged strategies and techniques they employed to learn the language and overcome its barriers. From among these techniques, language learning strategies have received a particular attention since the late 1970s (Zare, 2010; Brown, 2007; Oxford, 2003).

It is not surprising that students can use a wide variety of strategies in the learning process. Presumably, there may be as many strategies as the number of students. It is because each student selects and employs a different strategy depending upon instructional variables such as individual differences, types of domains, teaching methods, amount of time, learning technologies, kinds of feedback, required level of mastery, ways of measurement, etc. Needless to say that these variables are also important from the point of designing effective, engaging, and efficient instruction (Milano & Ullius, 1998).

The overall results of the studies are highly encouraging. Generally, successful students employ more and better learning strategies than unsuccessful students (Cho & Ahn, 2003). Learning strategies interact with personal characteristics of students. In fact, there is no ideal strategy which generates success in all learning situations. Students should be trained to develop an understanding and skills for using appropriate strategies that satisfy their needs. Constructivist learning approaches are usually more effective and engaging than behaviorist approaches to accommodate individual strategies of learners. Interactive technologies provide increased opportunities for the use of learning strategies generating better academic achievement and attitudes (Eshel & Kohawi, 2003).

It is evident that learners of a second language who achieve satisfactory levels of proficiency and who are successful in language learning have their own special ways of doing it. These good learners can probably help us with both understanding more about the nature of language learning and facilitating language learning for our less successful learners. About three decades ago this was seriously brought up by two prominent scholars of the field of SLA: Stern (1975) and Rubin (1975). They tried to show us how good language learners could teach us with the strategies, which they employed for language learning. That was the beginning of the tradition of research dealing with second language learning strategies. Since then, Cohen (1998) believes most of the research in the area of foreign language learning strategies has focused on the identification, description, and classification of useful learning strategies. Such research has identified valuable collections and classifications of good strategies for language learning.

It is inevitable to say that learners use different language learning strategies in performing the tasks and processing the new input they face. According to Fedderholdt (1997, p.1), the language learner capable of using a wide variety of language learning strategies appropriately can improve his language skills in a better way. Metacognitive strategies improve organization of learning time, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation. Cognitive strategies include the use of previous knowledge to help solve new language problems. Socioaffective strategies include asking native speakers to correct their pronunciation, or asking a classmate to work together on a particular language problem. In short, developing skills in these areas—metacognitive, cognitive, and socioaffective—can help the language learners build up learners' independence and autonomy whereby he can take control of their own learning.

Oxford (1990, p. 1) states that language learning strategies "...are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed movement, which is essential for developing communicative competence." Teachers who train students to use language learning strategies can help them become better language learners. Helping students understand good language learning strategies and training them to develop and use such good language learning strategies can be considered to be the appreciated characteristics of a good language teacher (Lessard-Clouston, 1996, p. 3).

#### **ESL/EFL Setting**

It is evident that EFL setting is the most suffering compared to the other setting such as ESL. There are some advantages of EFL setting. The first disadvantage is that a second language has more significance for the learner since it can be used immediately outside the classroom. The next advantage is



that second language can be learned more quickly because as the native language of the country there is constant and abundant exposure to its physical manifestations. And the last advantage is the extrinsic motivations to learn the language are ever-present and urgent ones.

By contrast, a foreign language context is almost exclusively dependent on the foreign language teacher; reinforcement and revision will not be incidental, nor will they take place at all unless the teacher plans for them, tests will focus necessarily on the aspect of "correctness" rather than a wider communicative competence. And it is the teacher's responsibility to motivate the students. And this is the most striking reason for the less success of English instruction in EFL setting—among several other causes. Therefore, finding out whether there a significant difference in the use of language learning strategy between Indonesian and Japanese students is of paramount importance since Indonesia is a developing country while Japan is a developed country. That is to say, comparing EFL setting in two distinct countries (developed and developing) is worth examining.

#### **Language Learning Strategy Defined**

A number of definitions of LLS within ESL/EFL have been suggested. To verify the point, five definitions of learning strategies collected by and quoted in Ellis (1994) are mentioned below. The list of definitions is not necessarily exclusive and it represents the fact that second language learning strategies have not been uniformly defined so far: (1) Strategy use is defined as general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach that language learner employ, and these particular forms of observable learning behavior is appeared in form of techniques (Stern, 1992); (2) "Learner is involved in behaviors and thoughts during learning which is called learning strategies and encoding process are affected by learning strategies" (Weinstein and Mayer, 1986); (3) "Techniques, approaches, or deliberate actions that are employed by students to facilitate the learning, retrieving of both" linguistic and content area information" are called learning strategies (Chamot, 2004); (4) "Strategies and techniques that promote the development of the language system and have direct effect on language learning are referred to learning strategies" (Rubin, 1987); and (5) "Behaviors or actions which are taken by learners to make language learning more successful, self-directed, and enjoyable are defined as language learning strategies" (Oxford, 1990).

#### **Language Learning Strategy Classified**

In most of the research studies done on language learning strategies, identifying what good learners do to learn a second or foreign language has been the main issue. In 1971 Rubin conducted a study in which the main focus was on the strategies of successful language learners. In her study she argues that, once identified, such strategies could be offered to less successful learners. Rubin (1975) classifies learning strategies according to processes which contribute either directly or indirectly to language learning. It is believed (Wenden & Rubin, 1987) that reading and discussing the strategies of good language learners is a constructive preliminary activity which can help students to get aware of the concept of learner's strategies. Learning strategies that language learners employ in the process of learning a new language have been identified and described by the researchers. Consequently, these

strategies have been classified by many professionals in the area of language learning (Oxford, 1990; Ellis, 1994). This progress not only helped categorize strategies and link them to a variety of cognitive processing phases during language learning, but also assisted in creating instructional frameworks.

Nonetheless, most of these attempts to categorize language learning strategies reflect relatively the same categorizations of language learning strategies without any fundamental changes. They developed their own taxonomies of strategies according to their research findings by applying different methods of data collection. For that reason, it might not be appropriate to compare them and assess their influence on teaching and learning process. But, studying them possibly will help both language teachers and language learners to understand language learning strategies and different methods which are involved in strategy use.

### **Language Learning Strategy Researched**

There are many research studies that have been conducted by teachers as well as educational observers on language learning strategies. Abraham and Vann (1987) conducted a research on strategies used by two language learners; one successful learner and the other is unsuccessful. They identified any strategies used by the successful learner and ones used by the unsuccessful one. The study indicated that the unsuccessful learners are similar to successful learners in their repertoire of strategies. The unsuccessful learners still appear to be active strategy users, but they often failed to apply strategies appropriately to the task at hand. Apparently, they lacked of certain necessary higher-order processes, what are often called metacognitive strategies or self-regulatory skills, which would enable them to assess the task and bring to bear the necessary strategies for its completion.

It is apparent that there are many things that we do not know about individual students, yet there are things that we know about them. In relation to this, Oxford and Crookall (1989) list eight points on what we know about our students: (1) language learners at all level use strategies; (2) the learner is an active and involved participant in the language learning process; (3) some/most learners are relatively unaware of the strategies they use and do not take advantage of the full range of available strategies; (4) more proficient learners appear to use a wider range of strategies in a greater number of situations, but the relationship between strategy use and proficiency is complex; (5) students at higher course levels tend to use strategies somewhat different from students at lower course levels; (6) different kinds of strategies often work together for optimal results; (7) it is possible and generally advisable to teach learning strategies through completely informed training, in which learners are taught how and why to use, transfer and evaluate strategies; and (8) LLS training typically is the most effective when integrated into regular class activities.

From the findings of this research and other related researches as well the review of the related literature, it is obvious that the reason for identifying existing learner strategies is to capitalize on those strategies which the learner already uses. He has undoubtedly spent a considerable number of years practicing them, and probably become competent in using them. This holds true even if the particular strategy could not be considered to be the most potentially efficient one. Understanding existing strategies is equally important for suggesting refinements or extensions. In any case, the development of learning



strategies should be based on whatever resources the learner brings to the learning situation. Awareness of this existing foundation is of course as important to the learner as it is to the teacher. Learner strategy development is the training, which needs to be provided to encourage learning autonomy.

### **The Good Language Learner**

Many of the initial studies on language learning strategies were aimed at defining the "Good" language learner. As the knowledge of second language acquisition increased during the 1970s, teachers and researchers concluded that no single method of language teaching and research findings would mark the start of universal success in teaching a second language (Brown, 2007). It was realized that certain learners seemed to be successful regardless of methods or teaching techniques. Observations and research studies led researchers (Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Rubin & Thompson, 1994) to describe "good" language learners in terms of personal characteristics, styles, and strategies. They believe that good language learners: (1) find their own way, taking responsibility for their own learning; (2) organize information about language; (3) are creative, and try to feel the language by experimenting its grammar and words; (4) create opportunities for practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom, (5) learn to live with uncertainty by not getting confused and by continuing to talk or listen without understanding every word; (6) use memory strategies to bring back what has been learned; (7) make errors work for them and not against them; (8) use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of the first language, in learning a second language, (9) use contextual cues to help them in comprehension; (10) learn to make intelligent guesses; (11) learn chunks of language as wholes and formalized routines to help them perform "beyond their competence"; (12) learn to use certain tricks to keep conversations going; (13) learn certain production strategies to fill in gaps in their own competence; (14) learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language regarding the formality of the situation.

### **METHOD**

The study is descriptive in nature. In addition, it is also comparative in the sense that it tries to find examine the similarities and differences between English as used as a second and a foreign language. The study asks questions about the nature, incidence, or distribution of variables. It gathers information from groups of individuals. It is intended to summarize the characteristics of different groups or to measure their attitudes and opinions toward some issue. The comparison is of many aspects of language learning strategies employed by Indonesian and Japanese students.

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL version 7.0 for ESL/EFL learners, 50 items), a self-report questionnaire, was used to assess the frequency of use of language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990). The SILL has been employed as a key instrument in numerous studies. Studies have reported reliability coefficients for the SILL ranging from .85 to .98 making it a trusted measure for gauging students' reported language learning strategy use (Wharton, 2000). In the SILL, language learning strategies are grouped into six categories for assessment: Memory strategies for storing and retrieving information, Cognitive strategies for understanding and producing the language, Compensation strategies for overcoming limitations in language learning, Metacognitive strategies for planning and monitoring

learning, Affective strategies for controlling emotions, motivation, and Social strategies for cooperating with others in language learning.

Eighty four English department students altogether participated in the study from two relatively distinct countries: Indonesia and Japan. 37 English department students were from of the State College for Islamic Studies (STAIN) Kediri and 47 were Japanese English department students studying at Waseda University Tokyo. These two groups of students are learning English as a foreign language. They were intentionally selected since they are from two distinct countries: Japan as a developed country and Indonesia as a developing country, in addition to the fact that they learn English as a foreign language.

Data analyses included the computation of descriptive statistics (means, standard deviation, and frequencies) to compile, to calculate and to compare the overall strategy use. In order to determine any variation in strategy use, each sub-category of language learning strategies was compared to determine any significant differences through analysis of ANOVA. The data are analyzed using SPSS software. The analysis is guided by the previously mentioned research question.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data analysis based on descriptive statistics and inferential statistics are as follows.

### Descriptive Statistics

The analysis and classification of the language learning strategies employed by the respondents would follow the following guidelines.

- High usage (always or almost always used with a mean of 4.5—5.0; or usually used with a mean of 3.5—4.4),
- Medium usage (sometimes used with a mean of 2.5—3.4),
- Low usage (generally not used with a means of 1.5—2.4; or never or almost never used with a mean of 1.0—1.40). (Oxford, 1990, p. 336).

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics (Indonesian Students)

		Mem.	Cog.	Comp.	Meta.	Aff.	Social	Overall
N	Valid	37	37	37	37	37	37	37
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.9970	3.2278	3.5000	3.7628	2.7568	3.0811	3.2924
Std. Error of Mean		.09526	.09710	.11389	.10713	.12499	.11123	.08493
Std. Deviation		.57942	.59066	.69278	.65166	.76031	.67657	.51662
Range		2.67	2.07	2.83	2.56	3.00	3.33	2.10
Minimum		2.11	2.21	2.00	2.22	1.00	1.67	2.18
Maximum		4.78	4.29	4.83	4.78	4.00	5.00	4.28
Sum		110.89	119.43	129.50	139.22	102.00	114.00	121.82



Table 1 summarizes the answers of Indonesian students towards the questionnaire. The most frequently used strategies for Indonesian students were metacognitive strategies ( $M = 3.7628$ ), followed by compensation and cognitive strategies ( $M = 3.5$  and  $M = 3.2278$ , respectively). The least preferred categories for them were social, memory and affective strategies ( $M = 3.0811$ ,  $M = 2.9970$ , and  $M = 2.7568$ , respectively). In addition, metacognitive and compensation strategies are of high use of language learning strategies. On the other hand, cognitive, affective, memory, and social strategies are of medium use of strategies employed by Indonesian students.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics (Japanese Students)

		Mem.	Cog.	Comp.	Meta.	Aff.	Social	Overall
N	Valid	47	47	47	47	47	47	47
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.0165	3.34195	3.73050	3.3593	2.9291	3.0638	3.26532
Std. Error of Mean		.08773	.085612	.080559	.10768	.14496	.12423	.069603
Std. Deviation		.60147	.586928	.552282	.73820	.99379	.85171	.477174
Range		2.78	2.571	2.333	2.78	6.67	3.80	2.240
Minimum		1.44	1.643	2.500	1.78	1.67	1.00	2.040
Maximum		4.22	4.214	4.833	4.56	8.33	4.80	4.280
Sum		141.78	157.071	175.333	157.89	137.67	144.00	153.470

Table 2 indicates and summarizes the usage of language learning strategies employed by Japanese students. The most frequently used strategies for Japanese students were compensation strategies ( $M = 3.73050$ ), metacognitive strategies ( $M = 3.3593$ ), and cognitive strategies ( $M = 3.34195$ ). The least preferred categories for them were social, memory and affective strategies ( $M = 3.0638$ ,  $M = 3.0165$ , and  $M = 2.9291$ , respectively). Only compensation strategies are of high use with a mean of 3.73, while the other strategies (memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective, social) could be classified into medium use of language learning strategies.

**Table 3.** Group Statistics

	JPN INDO	N	Mean	Std. Mean	Error Std. Deviation
Cognitive	1	47	3.3419	.08561	.58692
	2	37	3.2278	.09710	.59066
Compensation	1	47	3.7305	.08055	.55228
	2	37	3.5000	.11389	.69278
Metacognitive	1	47	3.3593	.10768	.73820
	2	37	3.7628	.10713	.65166
Memory	1	47	3.0165	.08773	.60147

	2	37	2.9970	.09526	.57942
Affective	1	47	2.9291	.14496	.99379
	2	37	2.7568	.12499	.76031
Social	1	47	3.0638	.12423	.85171
	2	37	3.0811	.11123	.67657
Overall	1	47	3.2653	.06960	.47717
	2	37	3.2924	.08493	.51662

Table 3 simplifies the means difference as well as standard deviation of the two groups of respondents. Looking at glance at the table, it seems the two means of each sub-category of learning strategies are of the same, not much difference. Therefore, further analysis is of paramount importance. Overall, compared to Indonesian students' use of learning strategies in which two strategies (metacognitive and compensation strategies) are of high use, among Japanese students, only compensation is found to be of high use of learning strategies. The order of preference is also slightly different. The order of preference for Indonesian students metacognitive, compensation, cognitive, social, memory and affective strategies. For Japanese students, on the other hand, the order is compensation, metacognitive, cognitive, social, memory, and affective strategies. The last three has got the same order for both groups. The difference is also at the frequency.

### Inferential Statistics

**Table 4. ANOVA**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Memory	Between Groups	.008	1	.008	.023	.881
	Within Groups	28.728	82	.350		
	Total	28.735	83			
Cognitive	Between Groups	.270	1	.270	.779	.380
	Within Groups	28.406	82	.346		
	Total	28.676	83			
Compensation	Between Groups	1.100	1	1.100	2.881	.093
	Within Groups	31.309	82	.382		
	Total	32.408	83			
Metacognitive	Between Groups	3.369	1	3.369	6.846	.011
	Within Groups	40.355	82	.492		
	Total	43.724	83			
Affective	Between Groups	1.353	1	1.353	1.799	.183
	Within Groups	61.640	82	.752		





		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Total	62.993	83			
Social	Between Groups	.001	1	.001	.002	.967
	Within Groups	50.279	82	.613		
	Total	50.280	83			
Overall	Between Groups	.015	1	.015	.062	.804
	Within Groups	20.082	82	.245		
	Total	20.097	83			

Table 4 indicates that there is no significant difference in the use of memory strategies between Indonesian students and Japanese English students. The significance value of the test (.881) is greater than 0.05. No significant differences also true for cognitive strategies. The significance value of the test (.380) is greater than 0.05. Furthermore, compensation strategies are significant at 0.093 (90.7%), while metacognitive strategies employed by the two groups of students are significant at (.05). Insignificant difference can be found in affective and social learning strategies. Overall, there is no significant difference in the use of LLS between Japanese and Indonesian students learning English.

The findings show that both the Japanese students and Indonesian students use the strategies from medium to high frequency which explains that they are moderate to high users of the language learning strategy. However, it is found that metacognitive and compensation strategies are found to be of high use among Indonesian students, while only compensation strategies are found to be of high use among Japanese students.

Moreover, there is significant difference in the use of metacognitive strategies between Indonesian and Japanese students. It is significant at .05. Another strategy which could be considered to be significant is compensation strategies. It is significant at .093. Finally, other sub-categories of learning strategies are not significant. These insignificant differences could be traced to the fact that English is used as a foreign language in these two countries. English is used only in classroom.

It is evident that all learners engaged in active use of strategies in language learning regardless of their nationalities (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). In addition, they found significant difference in the use of metacognitive strategies for Japanese over nationalities. These inconsistent findings or variations in the use of language learning strategies can be attributed cultural background which is related to language strategy use (Wharton, 2000). However, culture as a construct is incredibly complex. As Oxford (1990) has stressed, it would be impossible (and undesirable) to try to attribute one particular language learning approach to a specific cultural group. Therefore, teachers should be mindful that there are individual differences among students regardless of socio-cultural, educational, and other aspects of individual backgrounds.

Moreover, findings of research studies in the area of language learning strategies provide a greater understanding of strategy use among EFL/ESL learners and support language instructors and curriculum developers to improve their approaches toward teaching and learning goals. These findings

also strengthen the fact that strategy use is a complex phenomenon that interacts with a number of variables. These variables have influences on the use of overall strategies, strategy categories, and individual strategies in different ways. So, to obtain a clear idea of learners' patterns of strategy use, it is important to take all these aspects into consideration (Rahimi et al., 2008).

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Although the research improvements cited earlier are necessary, there are some important implications for EFL/ESL instruction based on existing findings. In EFL setting, the language learning strategies employed by EFL students are more or less the same. That is to say, whether English is used as a foreign language in developed countries or developing countries, the language learning strategies are about the same. Therefore, EFL teachers can help their students recognize the power of consciously using language learning strategies to make learning quicker, easier, more effective, and more fun. To help all students become more aware of their strategy choices. EFL teachers can assist students in identifying their own current learning strategies by means of diaries surveys or interviews.

EFL teachers should tailor strategy training to the real, communicative needs of learners in the particular situation. Strategy training can help students make effective use of multiple strategies. Metacognitive strategies help students keep themselves on track; cognitive, memory, and compensation strategies provide the necessary intellectual tools; and affective and social strategies offer continuous emotional and interpersonal support. Teachers' action research on language learning strategies or on strategy training should cover this wide array of strategies and should not be limited to just one or two types of techniques.

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