



# The Interrelation of Language Learning Strategies and English Proficiency among Medical Students

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## Abstract

This study investigated language learning strategies used by medical students and its relation to students' English proficiency. The study was conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Lamongan, the participant involved in this study were 74 medical students from three different departments; physiotherapy, midwifery, and pharmacy. The language learning strategies data were obtained from the Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), while the English proficiency level was obtained from the students' EPT scores. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS – descriptive statistics and *Pearson Correlation*. The findings revealed that the participants frequently used strategies were memory strategies by the mean of 3.11, followed by metacognitive strategies at 3.06, cognitive strategies at 2.97, social strategies at 2.95, compensation strategies at 2.94, and affective strategies at 2.91. Meanwhile, the *Pearson Correlation* or  $r$  value was  $.054 \leq 0.05$ , and the sig. (2 tailed) value was  $.064 \geq 0.05$ . It can be concluded that there was no interrelation between the use of language learning strategies and students' English proficiency. Therefore, students' English proficiency does not affect language learning strategies preference. The findings of this current study might be useful as input for English teachers and learners to build an effective classroom environment.

**Keywords:** English Proficiency, SILL, Language Learning Strategies

## **Introduction**

Having good English skills in a non-English speaking country is very challenging. Moreover, in a small village where English is not considered a beneficial tool for them to live and survive. However, nowadays English is demanded to be mastered by many people, especially by educational institutions. Since English is advantageous for them to communicate and compete with other people all over the world (Syafii & Ponorogo, 2021). Moreover, since the pandemic has been spread for nearly two years, many educational institutions desire for all the students able to master English. The fact that English is a challenging subject to be learned even before the pandemic has spread. Covid-19 makes huge changes in many areas, this pandemic has a negative impact, it makes the educational system chaotic (Ahsanah and Utomo 2020) because all of the activities have to be applied by using digital media.

Dealing with the pandemic and the educational system, educators have to put all the effort to facilitate and give the best service to the learners, especially in learning a language (Hamidah et al., 2021). It is a new case for them in which they have to give all the language materials without seeing the students in person, furthermore, the learners need to work harder in learning the language as well. Accordingly, both teachers and also learners have to work hard so that all the English materials still can be learned effectively even though it is done virtually. One way to keep learning English effectively is by discovering the proper strategies, therefore it is very useful for them to know strategies in learning a language to achieve all the goals mentioned before and language learning strategies are very beneficial for them since they can adjust it as necessary.

Language learning strategies can be considered a beneficial tool for language learners. There are many kinds of language learning strategies that can be used to

enhance a learner's English proficiency, such as memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, and metacognitive, affective, and social strategies (Oxford, 1990). Having the amount of knowledge related to this term can assist the students to learn English effectively and efficiently (Ahsanah, 2020). As stated by Oxford language learning strategies are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative proficiency. She added that language 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.

It can be concluded that language learning strategies are a useful instrument for students to learn language during this pandemic era for they can find out the weaknesses as well as the strengths in learning English. Nevertheless, generally, the language learning strategies preference is caused by some factors. These affecting factors can be age, sex, learning style, etc. as stated by Oxford (1990) that the choice of language learning strategies is affected by the characteristics of the learners such as; degree of awareness, stage of learning, task requirements, teacher expectation, age, sex, nationality and ethnicity, general learning style, personality traits, motivation level, and purpose for learning the language.

In addition to all the factors previously mentioned, the proficiency of the students in using English was used to find out the correlation between one of the affecting factors and the use of language learning strategies. English proficiency can be considered as one of the factors that influence language learning strategy preferences. Many scholars have examined the relationship between the use of language learning strategies and various kinds of factors, one of which is the student's English proficiency (Abubakar, 2020; Ahsanah, 2020; Apridayani & Teo, 2021; Aydođan & Akbarov, 2014; Iksan, 2021). One of the scholars investigated the influence of anxiety and language learning strategies on the student's reading proficiency and the result indicated that the anxiety does not affect learning

strategies to improve students' reading comprehension.

Referring to the study above, this current study is aimed to explore the influence of students' English proficiency and language learning strategies preference, whether or not the English proficiency level affects the use of language learning strategies. The findings of this current study are expected to give a contribution to the affective domain studies. Furthermore, for practitioners of classroom interaction especially English teachers and students to create an effective EFL classroom environment.

### **Method**

The study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to discover the frequencies of language learning strategies that often be used by medical students. Furthermore, to know the relationship between language learning strategies and students' English proficiency, *Pearson Correlative Coefficient* was used. Quantitative research design is in line with the research objectives as it enables to explore of the mean, median, and variance of variables, this design was also perfectly used to examine the relationship between two nominal variables, an ordinal and a nominal variable, and two ordinal variables with few categories using correlation coefficient (Muijs, 2011).

The participant in this study was obtained from random sampling and involved 74 vocational medical students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Lamongan who majoring in pharmacy, physiotherapy, and midwifery. The participants who were involved in this study were the students who participated in the Intensive English Class program. Intensive English Class is a program that is provided by the language center of Universitas Muhammadiyah to enhance their English proficiency level.

Furthermore, the English proficiency that was used in this study was obtained from EPT scores. EPT or commonly known as *English Proficiency Test* is a TOEFL-like test that is provided by Language Center Universitas Muhammadiyah Lamongan. This test is conducted to measure students' proficiency level before graduating with their degree and therefore classify their proficiency level.

*Table 1. The participants' information*

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	14	19
	Female	60	81
<b>Major</b>	Physiotherapy	11	14
	Pharmacy	47	66
	Midwifery	16	20
<i>Participant groups based on their latest EPT score</i>			
<b>Proficiency Level</b>	Moderate User (310 - 410)	15	20
	Good User (411 - 531)	57	77
	Advance User (532 - 677)	2	3

Strategy Inventory Language Learning (SILL) was used as the instrument in this study. SILL was adapted from Oxford (1990) and consisted of 50 items divided into six categories and they are *memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social*. The SILL will provide a 5-point Likert from 1 - to 5, the instrument is then translated into Bahasa to avoid the misconception.

*Table 2. SILL Item Sample*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Sample Items</b>
Memory Strategy (9 items)	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them

Cognitive Strategy (14 items)	I watch English language TV shows spoken or go to movies spoken in English
Compensation Strategy (6 items)	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.
Metacognitive Strategy (9 items)	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
Affective Strategy (6 items)	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.
Social Strategy (6 items)	I practice English with other students.

In addition, to find out the successful learners who employed language learning strategies, the researchers utilized Oxford's (1990) rating scheme for strategy use. The range of the rating scheme is 1.0 to 5.0 with the description as follows:

*Table 3. Strategy Used Rating Scheme*

Mean	Category
1.0 - 2.4	Low
2.5 - 3.4	Moderate/Medium
3.5 - 5.0	High

## Results

This part presents the result of the research which focuses on the use of language learning strategies among vocational medical students and the interrelation between language learning strategies and students' English proficiency.

### *Language Learning Strategies Frequently Used among Medical Students.*

The first focus of this current study was to explore the usage of language learning strategies among medical students. Table 4 in the following showed the overall language learning strategies that were frequently used by medical students.

Table 4. *The Mean of Language Learning Strategies*

		Memory Strategy	Cognitive Strategy	Compensation Strategy	Metacognitive Strategy	Affective Strategy	Social Strategy
N	Valid	74	74	74	74	74	74
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.11	2.97	2.94	3.06	2.91	2.95
Median		3.11	2.93	3.00	3.11	3.00	3.00
Mode		3	3	3	3	3	3 <sup>a</sup>
Std. Deviation		.581	.555	.684	.563	.667	.776
Range		3	2	4	3	3	4
Minimum		2	2	1	2	2	1
Maximum		5	5	5	4	5	5
Sum		230	220	218	227	215	219
SU Rating Scheme		Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Table 4 pointed out that among language learning strategy categories, the participants of the study, or in this case the medical students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Lamongan tended to use the memory strategy and metacognitive strategies more than the other strategies. However, the mean of each strategy did not show any big differences. Yet, memory strategy got 3.11 and metacognitive strategy 3.06. Furthermore, the least strategy that tended to be less employed was the affective strategy. Accordingly, the following part was the detailed data on the most and least strategies employed by the participants. Furthermore, as shown above, the strategy usage of the rating scheme was at a moderate level since the mean of all language learning strategies was 2.5 – 3.4.



Table 5. The Most Strategy Used: Memory Strategies

**Table 5.1 Memory Strategies Used by Physiotherapy Students**

		MS01	MS02	MS03	MS04	MS05	MS06	MS07	MS08	MS09
N	Valid	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.36	3.18	3.18	3.36	2.45	2.09	2.45	3.27	3.45
Median		3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Mode		3	3	3	3	1 <sup>a</sup>	1	3	3	3
Std. Deviation		1.027	1.079	1.079	1.027	1.293	1.221	1.214	1.272	1.128
Range		4	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	4
Minimum		1	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum		5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5
Sum		37	35	35	37	27	23	27	36	38

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

**Table 5.2 Memory Strategies Used by Midwifery Students**

		MS01	MS02	MS03	MS04	MS05	MS06	MS07	MS08	MS09
N	Valid	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.31	3.38	3.25	3.50	3.25	2.88	3.00	3.44	3.25
Median		3.00	3.00	3.00	3.50	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Mode		3	3	3	3 <sup>a</sup>	3	3	4	3	3
Std. Deviation		.793	.719	.775	1.033	.775	1.088	1.155	.892	.775
Range		3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3
Minimum		2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2
Maximum		5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5

Sum	53	54	52	56	52	46	48	55	52
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a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

**Table 5.3 Memory Strategies Used by Pharmacy Students**

		MS01	MS02	MS03	MS04	MS05	MS06	MS07	MS08	MS09
N	Valid	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.28	3.36	3.30	3.15	3.04	2.60	2.62	3.38	3.15
Median		3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
Mode		3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Std. Deviation		.800	.735	.832	1.021	.859	1.014	.898	.768	.908
Range		4	3	3	4	3	4	3	3	4
Minimum		1	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	1
Maximum		5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	5
Sum		154	158	155	148	143	122	123	159	148

Table 5 showed the memory strategies that were mostly employed by the participants of the study. Memory strategy included 9 items and each of the medical departments were was involved in this study showed a different preference item. Table 5.1 was the memory strategy used by physiotherapy students and it was indicated that the most item they tended to use when learning English was item 9 with a sum of 38 and a mean of 3.45. In table 5.2 the midwifery tended to use item 4 of memory strategies by the mean of 3.50 and sum of 56. Afterward, the pharmacy students showed their interest in using items 2 and 8 by the mean of 3.36 and 3.38. It can be concluded, that even though all of the medical departments involved in this

study had the same interest in using memory strategies more yet they use memory strategy items differently.

*6. The Least Strategy Used: Affective Strategies*

**6.1 Affective Strategy Used by Physiotherapy Students**

		AFS39	AFS40	AFS41	AFS42	AFS43	AFS44
N	Valid	11	11	11	11	11	11
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.18	3.00	3.27	3.45	2.36	3.00
Median		3.00	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	3.00
Mode		3	4	4	4	3	2
Std. Deviation		1.328	1.183	1.191	1.214	.809	1.342
Range		4	3	4	4	2	4
Minimum		1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum		5	4	5	5	3	5
Sum		35	33	36	38	26	33

**6.2 Affective Strategies Used by Midwifery Students**

		AFS39	AFS40	AFS41	AFS42	AFS43	AFS44
N	Valid	16	16	16	16	16	16
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3.56	3.13	3.44	3.38	2.94	2.56
Median		3.50	3.00	3.50	3.00	3.00	3.00
Mode		3	3	4	3	4	3
Std. Deviation		.814	.885	.629	.885	1.181	1.094
Range		3	3	2	3	3	4
Minimum		2	2	2	2	1	1
Maximum		5	5	4	5	4	5
Sum		57	50	55	54	47	41

**5.3 Affective Strategy Used by Pharmacy Students**

		AFS39	AFS40	AFS41	AFS42	AFS43	AFS44
N	Valid	47	47	47	47	47	47
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.94	2.96	2.81	3.02	2.47	2.51
Median		3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.00
Mode		3	3	3	3	3	2
Std. Deviation		.791	.859	1.096	.872	1.039	1.101
Range		3	3	4	4	3	4
Minimum		1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum		4	4	5	5	4	5
Sum		138	139	132	142	116	118

This part was the description of the strategy that was least used by the participants of the study. Affective strategies have 6 items, it starts with the number 39 up to 44. The overall mean of every item showed by the tables and it clearly found out the least items less used by the medical students was item number 43. All of the three medical departments who joined the study indicated that they were not familiar to use the affective strategy number 43. It showed by the mean of 2.36 for physiotherapy students, 2.94 for midwifery students, and 2.47 for pharmacy students.

**The Interrelation of Language Learning Strategies and Students' English Proficiency.**

The previous part showed the results of strategies that were most and less used by the medical students who participated in this study. Afterward, this section represented the correlation between the use of language learning strategies and students' English competencies. In the background of the study, clearly stated that language learning strategy preferences are influenced by some factors. It means the learners who have different ages or gender for the example may employ different strategies. The factor that was used in this current study was the English proficiency of the students. The researchers tried to explore whether students' English proficiency take a significant role in language learning strategies preferences. The correlational data in the following was obtained by using *Pearson Correlation - SPSS 26*.

Table 6. The Correlation between Language Learning Strategies and Students' English Proficiency.

**Correlations**

		English Competency	Language Learning Strategy
English Competency	Pearson Correlation	1	.054
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.647
	N	74	74
Language Learning Strategy	Pearson Correlation	.054	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.647	
	N	74	74

The data in table 6 showed that the *Pearson Correlation* or  $r$  value was .054 in correlating language learning strategies and students' English proficiency. The  $r$  value of the data should bigger than the  $r$  value of the total participants of the study. Due to the fact that the participant of the study was 74, therefore the  $r$  value for that

sum was 0.227 (it can be seen from the r product moment table). The  $r$  value of the data was  $0.054 \leq 0.227$ , it means that there was no strong interrelation between the language learning strategies used and students' English proficiency. Moreover, *Sig. (2 tailed)* was .647 which was bigger than 0.05. To conclude that a variable X is correlated with variable Y, the significant value of the variable should be smaller than 0.05. The data indicated that *Sig. (2 tailed)* was  $.647 \geq 0.05$ , it means that there was no significant correlation between the use of language learning strategies and students' English proficiency. It can be concluded that the  $r$  value and *sig.* value of the data were in line, did not imply any correlation between the two variables.

## Discussion

Conducting research about language learning strategies used is not a novel thing in language teaching and learning area. Hence, due to the fact that language learning strategies are a very broad theory, it makes many scholars keep exploring these issues. Just like this current study who explores the use of language learning strategies among medical students and in relation to the students' English proficiency. There are two point of views that will be discussed in this section, the first is the frequency of using each category of language learning strategies and the second one is the whether students' English proficiency correlate the use of language learning strategies in general.

### ***Language Learning Strategies and the Medical Students***

Language learning strategies have six different categories or taxonomies which divided into two parts (Oxford, 1990). *Memory strategy, cognitive strategy, compensation strategy* these three strategies belong to the direct strategies. Furthermore, *metacognitive strategy, affective strategy, and social strategy* belong to indirect strategies.

In 2021, a scholar investigated the use of language learning strategies used by Islamic learners in IAIN Palopo and the finding found out that the most strategies used by the learners was metacognitive (29%), followed by the affective strategies (20.9%) and then the least strategy employed by the learners was compensation strategies (8%) (Iksan, 2021). On the other hand, the data of the result in this current study found out that the medical students in Universitas Muhammadiyah Lamongan employed all language learning strategies in the same respective way. However, they used memory strategy more than the other strategies. Memory strategy itself is a strategy used to remember a language being learned (Oxford, 1990) or in other words, memory strategies are used to help the learners store and retrieve new information. Memory strategies consist of 9 item statements and it starts from number 1 to number 9. When the researcher obtained the data and analysed it, it showed that among the three different medical department students who involved in this study preferred the different memory strategies items.

The physiotherapy students preferred to use item number 9 the most and followed by item number 1 and 8. The item 9 of memory strategy is "I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location in page, on the board, or on a street" and the total sum of this item was 38 then followed with the item number 1 with the total sum 37. While in using memory strategies, midwifery students preferred to use item 4 the most and followed by 8. The total sum of item number 4 and 8. Item 4 is about trying to remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used and the total sum of this item was 56. Then, the next memory strategies item that midwifery preferred to employ was also number 8 just like the physiotherapy. Pharmacy students showed their interest of employing the item 8 more than any other items, it can be seen from the total sum that obtained by them.

Connecting the discussion about memory strategies that most employed by the participants, pharmacy students tended to use the memory strategy number 8.

Item number 8 is dealing with reviewing the English lesson that has been learned. It is showed from the total sum 159. Besides memory strategy number 8, they also preferred to use the item number 2 which is “I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them” the total sum 158 or it can be said that pharmacy students like to put a new English into sentences so that it easier for them to remember it.

This current study also reveals that affective strategies was the least strategies employed by the medical students. Affective strategies deals with the effort to regulate their affective state in their own learning process, in learning a language affective state means the attitudes, beliefs, emotions and motivations (Oxford, 1990). By looking at the mean and total sum of the affective strategy in every item, it can be concluded that the learners didn't show huge interest in employing this strategy. The physiotherapy and pharmacy students showed the same responses related to the affective strategy item 43. Item 43 is “I write down my feelings in a language learning diary” and the mean for this item was 2.36 with the total sum 26 for physiotherapy students and 2.47 with the total sum 116 for pharmacy students. It can be said that the learners tend not to write down the diary to record their progress in learning language. If physiotherapy and pharmacy students had the same preference of the affective strategies item, yet midwifery students least item of affective strategies to be employed was number 44. Item 44 is “I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English” by the mean of 2.56 and total sum 41.

### ***Language Learning Strategies and Student's English Proficiency.***

English proficiency is frequently used by many researchers to be one of the affecting factors in relation to many different approaches. This current study



investigated the correlation between the student's English proficiency and the use of language learning strategies. The result of the study showed that there was no strong interrelation between the use of language learning strategies and student's English proficiency. This current result was in line with the study conducted by Abubakar (2020). He conducted research on the interplay of anxiety, learning strategies and student's reading comprehension. The study involved 30 students aged from 13 to 14 years old, the finding indicated that learning strategies did not mediate the correlation between anxiety and reading comprehension. Hence, the anxiety did not affect learning strategies to improve students' reading comprehension.

Table 1 revealed the English proficiency level mostly was in good user level with 57 participants, moderate user 15 participants, and advance user 2 participants. Furthermore, table 4 showed the rating scheme of strategy usage and it was clearly showed that for all language learning strategies categories, *memory strategies*, *cognitive strategies*, *compensation strategies*, *metacognitive strategies*, *affective strategies*, and *social strategies*, indicated the moderate strategy usage. In other words, it is in line with the findings of the study which stated that there was no significant relationship between language learning strategies used and students' English proficiency.

## **Conclusion**

This current research examined the interrelation of language learning strategies and student's English proficiency among medical students. There were several conclusions that can be drawn: First, the most strategy used by the research participants was memory strategies. They like to retrieve a new word in English by putting it into sentences or drawing it into its situation. Second, the least strategy used by the medical students as research participants was the affective strategies. They did not have any intention to keep their learning progress in a note or dairy,

and also they prefer not to share their English learning with others. The last deals with the correlation between the use of language learning strategies and student's English proficiency, the finding indicated that language learning strategies uncorrelated with student's English proficiency or in other words the student's English proficiency has no relation to how many language learning strategies they employed.

Based on the conclusion that have been drawn some suggestions are proposed. For the English educators, the finding of this study is expected to be able to improve the knowledge about the types of language learning strategies that were employed by medical students. Therefore, it is suggested that the English educators need to introduce all language learning strategies categories to the students, therefore the students know how to deal with the problems that they face in learning English. For the students, the result of this study is expected to contribute valuable information to other English students. The information that had been obtained from this study is expected giving good input for many language learners related to the use of language learning strategies so that they learn English effectively and efficient. For the future researchers, this study had explored how language learning strategies employed by medical students and its relation to their English proficiency. Therefore, it would be interesting to conduct the further study by investigating the strategy training. In this case, how to train the students using the language learning strategies in order to make the students be a good language learner.

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