



Investigating the Use of Language Learning Strategies and English Proficiency of University Students

Virginia Gabrella Sengkey*

English Education, Faculty of Education, Universitas Klabat

*Correspondence: virginia.sengkey@unklab.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study used descriptive and correlational research designs to identify the levels of students' language learning strategies use (LLS) and their English proficiency and whether there is a significant correlation between the two variables. The sample of this study consisted of 56 students majoring in English enrolled in Listening and Speaking classes at a private university in North Sulawesi. The instruments used in this study were Oxford's SILL (1990) to measure the students' LLS and students' final test scores to assess their English proficiency. The results showed that the students usually use LLS with metacognitive strategies as the most commonly used strategy. Moreover, the results also showed that the students had good English proficiency. However, the students' LLS use did not significantly correlate with their English proficiency. Hence, further research can be conducted to provide insights into why students have good English proficiency.

Keywords: English Proficiency, Language Learning Strategies, Students

INTRODUCTION

In the learning process, students often face challenges that could hinder their learning or motivate them to do better. Educators have tried to provide the best learning that students can have to be successful in their learning. However, the attempt to help students achieve success is often problematic. This is because teachers cannot do the work themselves. Success can be obtained when students have the motivation and effort to be successful. In addition, students' performance differs from one another, wherein it seems like some students are more successful even when they

are in the same class and are taught by the same teacher and methods. Su (2018) pointed out that even when students are in the same class and are taught by the same teacher and teaching methods, their success in learning differs. Thus, there might be factors that contribute to this difference.

Presently, the trend has changed from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning. This means that students become the learning focus, and teachers often act as facilitators and guides. In addition to that, the focus of many studies conducted in this era is on language learning strategies (LLS). For instance,

Wong and Nunan (2011) found that LLS helps students to learn more effectively in class and thus encourages better development of target language mastery. Additionally, LLS can benefit students as it can equip them in their language learning process. Alfian (2016) suggested that strategies are crucial in learning English as they can help learners acquire the language. Furthermore, Hardan (2013) stated that as the significance of language learning worldwide increases, the importance of LLS also increases. Therefore, LLS seems to significantly contribute to students' learning success.

Implementing LLS can promote students' learning. Bromley (2013) stated that including a learning strategy in the learning process will produce active and skilled students, and it also helps student-centered learning. It is believed that LLS can be used as an indicator of how students deal with problems or tasks in the language learning process (Hismanoglu, 2000). Thus, it is important to identify which LLS is used more frequently by students and which strategies are mostly used by successful students. Previous studies have utilized Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) to investigate university student's foreign language learning strategies (Afshar et al., 2016; Kunasaraphan, 2015; Zhou & Intraprasert, 2016).

Moreover, Del Angel Castillo and Gallardo Córdova (2014) admitted that previous studies showed that motivated and proficient students used various strategies more frequently than

those who were less motivated and proficient. Similarly, Fewell (2010) stated that the similar usage of LLS among proficient learners compared with less proficient learners, which was found to be different, suggests that this is an important element that determines successful or failed language learning. Hence, LLS is a component that can help students become more proficient and motivated in their learning.

In learning a language, teachers are not the only ones responsible for students' learning. Students must also try to improve their learning, and one way to do this is by using strategies. Tanjung (2018) argued that students need to be active in their learning by employing strategies to understand the lesson given by their teacher. However, Aunurrahman et al. (2013) pointed out that Indonesian students who are English as foreign language (EFL) learners are not very acquainted with learning strategies and thus just depend on their teachers. Therefore, it is important to identify Indonesian students' learning strategies.

English has been taught since elementary school in Indonesia. However, even when students in Indonesia have been taught English for some years, their level of proficiency is still low (Imperiani, 2012; Larson, 2014; Oktaviyanti, 2017). Fewell (2010) stated that experts and academicians have acknowledged LLS as a factor contributing to language learning. Furthermore, Fewell added that LLS is a component that can be controlled, and thus this needs to be further considered. Knowing that there has been a

shortage of studies on how LLS use is related to language proficiency, for this reason, it is important to identify the use of LLS among English language learners to understand better whether these LLS significantly relate to English proficiency. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the level of students' LLS use and English proficiency. Moreover, this study also aimed to see whether a significant relationship exists between students' LLS and their English proficiency.

The research questions in this study are formulated as follows:

1. What is the level of students LLS use?
2. What is the level of students' English proficiency?
3. Is there any significant correlation between students LLS use and their English proficiency?

As learning strategies are an important component in determining success in language learning, in learning English, LLS is also indeed important. According to Boroujeni et al. (2014), the two major purposes of using LLS are to comprehend the language to be learned efficiently and the appropriate practice of LLS can develop students' autonomy in the learning process without the teacher said. Moreover, Chang et al. (2007) pointed out that LLS can support students to acquire, save, and retrieve or use information stored, and it can also improve self-confidence. Being able to use LLS can lead students to success in learning a language. Knowing how to use LLS would

potentially guarantee successful language learning (Kashefian-Naeeni & Maarof, 2010). Thus, LLS considerably contributes to students' language acquisition.

Various studies on LLS use and different variables have been done for the past years. To begin with, Rao (2016) found that LLS are more frequently used by more proficient students, and they overall use more various strategies compared to less proficient students. Similarly, Radwan (2011) found that successful language learners employ more effective and diverse language learning strategies than less successful learners. Further, it was explained that higher proficiency EFL students use cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies more often. Mutar (2018) in his study found that EFL learners have medium level of LLS use. While in Indonesia, a study on the language learning strategies of Indonesian college students done by Aunurrahman, Kurniawati, and Ramadhiyanti in 2013 showed that the students were medium users of language learning strategies. The same results were also obtained by Emanto (2013), Fresiska (2013), and Mistar (2012), which showed that Indonesian students were medium users of language learning strategies.

The idea of proficiency has been defined differently by various researchers with several results. For instance, Charoento (2017) pointed proficiency as self-ratings while Wu (2008) used language proficiency and achievement tests to point to proficiency level. Furthermore, Rao (2016) found that students' language proficiency

significantly affected LLS use. Different research has shown that proficiency level contributes to the use of LLS. Radwan (2011) believed that students' language proficiency can be enhanced by using LLS. As Platsidou and Kantaridou (2014) found, more proficient students use a wider range of learning strategies compared to less proficient students, and this strategy use significantly affects foreign language achievement.

Researchers have investigated LLS and its relationship to English proficiency. Erarslan and Höl (2014) studied LLS use and language proficiency, gender, and age. The study was conducted on 186 elementary and intermediate-level students in the preparatory classes at Pamukkale University. The instrument used was Oxford's SILL (1990). Their study showed that LLS use significantly relates to students' English proficiency.

In addition to that, Tam (2013) also delved into the contribution of students' language proficiency, gender, and socioeconomic status to LLS use. The respondents were fifty new students from the University of Polytechnic in Hong Kong. Oxford's (1990) SILL questionnaire and English test scores were used as the instruments. The result shows a positive correlation between students' language proficiency and LLS use namely compensation, social, and cognitive strategy.

Mutar (2018) investigated the LLS used and how gender and proficiency level could affect LLS use. One of the purposes of his study

was to see how proficiency affect LLS use. There were 210 sixth-grade preparatory students from four different secondary schools in al-Karkh side of Baghdad city for the academic year 2016-2017 who were randomly chosen as the respondents. Oxford's SILL (1990) was used as the instrument. The results showed that students with high proficiency levels used all six categories of LLS more than students with medium or low proficiency levels. Thus, as suggested by Griffiths and Inceçay (2016), LLS must be analyzed together with other factors wherein language proficiency is one component that has a prominent role concerning LLS use.

Moreover, Emanto (2013) explored the LLS used by different English proficiency students of state senior high school 3 Malang. One of the purposes of the study was to identify how English proficiency level relate to LLS use. The study used Oxford's (1990) SILL to identify students' LLS use, while English score was used to find out about students' proficiency. The results showed that high proficient students mostly used metacognitive strategies while intermediate and low proficient students mostly used compensation and affective strategies respectively. Thus, it is suggested that students use more metacognitive strategies and combine them with other strategies to enhance their learning.

Since studies on students LLS use and their English proficiency are still limited in North Sulawesi, this study was intended to provide information on the levels of students LLS use and

their English proficiency. Specifically, this study is expected to give information on the correlation between students LLS use and their English proficiency to see whether their LLS use is significantly related to their English proficiency.

METHODS

The population of this study was 61 students who were students majoring in English education enrolled in the Listening and Speaking (Parallel A) classes. The researcher used the convenience sampling method in choosing the respondents of this study. Dörnyei (2007) explained that convenience sampling refers to a nonrandom sampling method within which individuals from the target population who fulfill specific practical requirements, like being available at a particular time or showing willingness to participate, are selected for the study. This means that in convenience sampling, only the students who are available at the time of data gathering and are willing to participate are selected as the respondents of the study. Thus, since during the data gathering there were 56 students present and willing to participate, only these 56 students became the sample of this study.

The instruments used in this study were a questionnaire adapted from Oxford's SILL (1990) and students' final test scores. Students' responses of the questionnaire were used to identify their language learning strategies use. The statements are oriented on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5

(strongly agree). Furthermore, the students' final test scores in Listening and Speaking classes were taken to determine their English proficiency.

In order to check the validity of the questionnaire, the researcher asked several English teachers to validate it. The questionnaire was piloted to students who were taking Listening and Speaking (Parallel B) classes. The questionnaire was tested for its validity and the results showed that out of the 59 items, there was only one invalid item which is item number 43. Furthermore, the reliability of the questionnaire was also calculated using Cronbach's Alpha which shows that the questionnaire possessed an acceptable internal consistency because it has a Cronbach's Alpha of $\alpha = 0.95$.

Descriptive statistics, namely mean score, was used to address the first and second research questions. Furthermore, to answer research question number three, Pthe earson Product moment correlation coefficient was employed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Level of Students LLS use

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
LLS Use	56	2.52	4.60	3.69	.46354
Valid N (Listwise)					

The result as shown in Table 1 shows that the level of the students' LLS use is 3.69. This finding indicates that the students highly used LLS. This result is consistent with that of previous studies which revealed a high frequency use of the six

types of language learning strategies (Anugakul & Yordchim, 2014; Magnal et al., 2023). The reasons why students highly use LLS could be attributed to their status as university students majoring in English. Alrashidi (2022) acknowledged that unlike individuals who may enroll in English courses for personal enrichment or enjoyment, these students are pursuing English studies to fulfill program requirements and enhance their academic and professional competencies. Thus, the apprehension of failing could serve as a substantial incentive for employing these strategies, intensifying their endeavors to master the English language.

Furthermore, Table 2 shows that among the six strategies, the strategy with the highest mean score is metacognitive strategy, with a mean score of 3.97. This indicates that among the six strategies, the students mostly used the metacognitive strategy.

Table 2. Most Used Strategies

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Memory	56	1.86	4.43	3.39	.46354
Cognitive	56	2.35	4.82	3.55	.49919
Compensation	56	2.56	4.89	3.81	.57635
Metacognitive	56	2.67	5.00	3.97	.52447
Affective	56	2.75	4.88	3.84	.54550
Social	56	1.25	4.88	3.73	.58377
Valid N (Listwise)					

This result is similar to the result found by Tanjung (2018), Alfian (2016), Wulandari (2018), and Rustam, Hamra, and Weda (2015). The results indicated that the students were aware of these strategies and that they tended to apply these LLS in learning English. Among the six different strategies, it was found that the

students mostly used metacognitive strategies. Tanjung explained that when students use metacognitive strategies, it shows that students are able to plan what they are going to do and then evaluate it. Furthermore, she added that as university students, they also have had various experiences in using LLS in improving their performance. Thus, this same reason wherein university students have numerous experiences in learning and that they have the ability to plan and evaluate what they are going to do might explain why students in this study were found to use these strategies, more specifically the metacognitive strategies.

Table 3 shows the level of students English proficiency. The mean score of 81.02 shows that students had good English proficiency. The reason why the students were found to have good English proficiency could be because of their attitude toward English, the classroom activities, teacher motivation, and the classroom environment. Makewa, Role, and Tuguta (2013) found that these were the factors that significantly correlate with students' perceptions of their English proficiency. Moreover, Husnawati (2017) found that motivation to speak and language competence are some of the factors that affect students' speaking performance. Thus, it could be that students are motivated to speak and have good language competence that their English proficiency, which in this case refers to their listening and speaking performance, was good.

Table 3. Level of Students English Proficiency

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Final Test Score	56	60	96	81.02	8.849
Valid N (listwise)	56				

As shown in Table 4, the result shows that the $p = .967$. This indicates that there is no significant correlation between students LLS use and their English proficiency. Thus, the hypothesis which states “There is significant correlation between students LLS use and their English proficiency” is rejected.

Table 4. Correlation Between Students LLS use and Their English Proficiency

		Score
LLS	Pearson Correlation	-.006
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.967
	N	56

The result indicates that the students LLS use does not have any significant correlation to their English proficiency. In this study, proficiency level refers to the grade they get in their Listening and Speaking II class. This means that students LLS use is not a significant factor that contributes to their English proficiency. In other words, there are other factors that significantly correlate with students’ English proficiency. Some of the factors might include self-concept, achievement motivation, and socioeconomic status. As found by Hajriah (2015), these three factors were found to significantly correlate with English learning achievement. Moreover, Lestari (2018) found that affective and linguistic factors affect most English major students ' speaking fluency. Thus, these might be the factors that

correlate significantly with students’ English proficiency.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

Based on the results obtained in this study, it is concluded that students are aware of LLS and that they usually use these strategies in their learning. Moreover, it is found that the students in general had good English proficiency. Finally, it is concluded that LLS use is not a significant factor that can help improve students’ English proficiency. Thus, there are other factors that significantly correlate with students’ English proficiency.

Recommendations

It is recommended that students continue using the LLS as it can help them in their studies. Moreover, students can maximize their English proficiency, which in this case their listening and speaking skills, by practicing more and by boosting their self-confidence, language competence, and motivation to learn. Additionally, teachers might want to consider affective factors that can help improve students English proficiency.

REFERENCES

Afshar, H. S., Tofighi, S., & Hamazavi, R. (2016). Iranian EFL learner’s emotional intelligence, learning styles, strategy use, and their L2 achievement. *Issues in Educational Research*, 26(4), 635-652.

Alfian. (2016). The application of language learning strategies of high school students in Indonesia. *IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education)*, 3(2), 140-157.

- doi:10.15408/ijee.v3i2.5509
- Alrashidi, O. (2022). Assessing language learning strategies employed by university English major students in Saudi Arabia. *Cogent Education*, 9(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2022.2074935>
- Anugkakul, G., & Yordchim, S. (2014). Language learning strategies of Chinese students at Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University in Thailand. *International Scholarly and Scientific Research & Innovation*, 8(8), 2519–2522.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1094287>
- Anurrahman, Kurniawati, T., & Ramadhiyanti, Y. (2013). Exploring Indonesian college students strategies in learning English language. *Arab World English Journal*, 4(3), 317-330.
- Boroujeni, A. J., Roohani, A., & Sharifi, M. (2014). Language learning strategy use and prediction of foreign language proficiency among Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, 5(1), 44-61.
- Bromley, P. (2013). Active learning strategies for diverse learning styles: Simulations are only one method. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 46(4), 818-822.
doi:10.1017/S1049096513001145
- Chang, C. Y., Liu, S. C. and Lee, Y. N. (2007). A study of language learning strategies used by college EFL learners in Taiwan. *Mingdao Journal of General Education*, 3, 235-261.
- Charoento, M. (2017). Individual learner differences and language learning strategies. *Contemporary Educational Researches Journal*, 7(2), 57–72.
<https://doi.org/10.18844/cerj.v7i2.875>
- Del Ángel Castillo, M., & Gallardo Córdova, K. E. (2014). Language learning strategies and academic success: A Mexican perspective. *Universitas Psychologica*, 13(2), 703-713.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Emanto, Y. (2013). *Language learning strategies used by different English proficiency students of state senior high school 3 Malang* [Bachelor's thesis, Universitas Brawijaya].
- Erarslan, A., & Höl, D. (2014). A study on language learning strategies of Turkish EFL learners at a state university. *Journal of Second and Multiple Language Acquisition*, 2(2), 1-10.
- Fewell, N. (2010). Language learning strategies and English language proficiency: An investigation of Japanese EFL university students. *TESOL Journal*, 2, 159-174.
- Fresiska, F. (2013). *The application of language learning strategies and their relationship with English proficiency of the Islamic Junior High School students at Raden Paku modern Islamic boarding school Trenggalek* [Bachelor's thesis, Universitas Brawijaya].
- Griffiths, C., Inceçay, G. (2016). New Directions in Language Learning Strategy Research: Engaging with the Complexity of Strategy Use. In: Gkonou, C., Tatzl, D., Mercer, S. (eds) *New Directions in Language Learning Psychology*. Second Language Learning and Teaching. Springer, Cham.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23491-5_3
- Hajriah, R. (2015). *A study of the correlation between achievement motivation, self-concept, socioeconomic status and English learning achievement of the second year students of SMP Negeri 3 Bulukumba* [Master's thesis, State University of Makassar].
- Hardan, A. A. (2013). Language learning strategies: A general overview. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 106, 1712-

- 1726.
- Hismanoglu, M. (2000). Language learning strategies in foreign language learning and teaching. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 6(8).
- Husnawati. (2017). *Students' speaking performance: Some challenging factors* [Bachelor's thesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Darussalam, Banda Aceh].
- Imperiani, E. (2012). English language teaching in Indonesia and its relation to the role of English as an international language. *Passage*, 1(1), 1-12.
- Kashefian-Naeeni, S., & Maarof, N. (2010). A study of the use of language learning strategies among students in Iran. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 6(1). Retrieved from http://www.melta.org.my/modules/tinycontent/Dos/Kashefian_Noreiny.pdf
- Kunasaraphan, K. (2015). English learning strategy and proficiency level of the first year students. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 197, 1853-1858.
- Larson, K. R. (2014). Critical pedagogy(ies) for EFL in Indonesia. *TEFLIN Journal*, 25(1), 122-138. <https://doi.org/10.15639/teflinjournal.v25i1/122-138>
- Lestari, S. (2018). *Exploring the factors affecting students' English speaking fluency*. [Bachelor's thesis, Ar-raniry State Islamic University, Banda Aceh].
- Magnal, M. P., Arpa, A. M., Oda, H. S. P., & Abule, M. G. S. (2023). Strategies and proficiency in language learning among college students in the new normal. *Conference on English Language Teaching*, 769-783.
- Makewa, L. N., Role, E., & Tuguta, E. (2013). Students' Perceived Level of English Proficiency in Secondary School in Dodoma, Tanzania. *International Journal of Instruction*, 6(2), 35-52.
- Mistar, J. (2012). Learning strategies by Indonesian senior high school EFL learners. *Korea TESOL Journal*, 10(1), 52-74.
- Mutar, Q. M. (2018). Language learning strategy use and English proficiency of Iraqi upper secondary school students. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 9(4), 59-67. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aialc.all.v9n.4p.59>
- Oktaviyanti, E. (2017). A critical review: Language learning strategy and teachers' characteristics in Indonesian English language teaching. *ELLITE: Journal of English Language, Literature, and Teaching*, 2(1), 1-6.
- Oxford, R. (1990). *Language learning strategies, what every teacher should know*. New York: Newbury House Publishers
- Platsidou, M., & Kantaridou, Z. (2014). The role of attitudes and learning strategy in predicting perceived competence in school-aged Foreign Language Learners. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 5(3), 253-260. doi: 10.7813/jll.2014/5-3/43
- Radwan, A. A. (2011). Effects of L2 proficiency and gender on choice of language learning strategies by university students majoring in English. *Asian EFL Journal*, 13(1), 115-163.
- Rao, Z. (2016). Language learning strategies and English proficiency: interpretations from information-processing theory. *Language Learning Journal*, 44(1), 90-106. doi: 10.1080/09571736.2012.733886
- Rustam, N. S., Hamra, A., & Weda, S. (2015). The language learning strategies used by students of merchant marine studies polytechnics Makassar. *ELT Worldwide: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 2(2), 77-94.

- Su, Y. (2018). A review of language learning strategy research. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 8(5), 522-527. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0805.10>
- Tam, K. C. -H. (2013). A study on language learning strategies (LLSs) of university students in Hong Kong. *Taiwan Journal of Linguistics*, 11(2), 1-42.
- Tanjung, F. Z. (2018). Language learning strategies in English as a foreign language classroom in Indonesian higher education context. *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, 21, 50-68.
- Wong, L. L. C., & Nunan, D. (2011). The learning styles and strategies of effective language learners. *System*, 39(2), 144–163. doi: 10.1016/j.system.2011.05.004
- Wu, Y. L. (2008). Language learning strategies used by students at different proficiency levels. *The Asian EFL Journal*, 10(4), 75–95.
- Wulandari, B. A. (2018). An evaluation of language learning strategies used by English students. *IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education)*, 5(1), 16-25. doi:10.15408/ijee.v5i1.8460
- Zhou, C., & Intaraprasert, C. (2016). English-major pre-service teachers' language learning strategy use in terms of enjoyment of English learning. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 7(6), 1103-1110. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0706.06>