

# FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF VIETNAMESE AND INDONESIAN STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** This research delves into the realm of language learning strategies (LLSs) among 116 Vietnamese and Indonesian university students majoring in English and English Language Education. Utilizing Rebecca Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) with a quantitative approach, the study aims to unravel the connections between culture and language learning strategies. With a strong demonstration of internal consistency and high Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .904 and .937 for the two subsamples, the research underscores the reliability of the assessment instrument. Remarkably, the findings highlight a striking similarity in English learning strategies between the two participant groups, with a clear dominance of metacognitive strategies. Equally noteworthy is the observation that no learning strategy is employed at a low level in either subsample. Moreover, this research offers implications for educators involved in international exchange programs and contributes to future investigations into the scope of language education.

**Keywords:** Language Learning Strategies, LLSs, SILL, Vietnamese students, Indonesian students

## 1. Introduction

EFL students employ diverse approaches, techniques, and strategies to enhance their language learning, with language learning strategies (LLSs) recognized as integral to their success. LLSs are defined as “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to a new situation” (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). Proficiency in selecting and effectively employing LLSs, coupled with the capacity to self-monitor throughout the learning process, equips FL learners with self-regulation and enhances their overall success as language learners (Anderson, 2003). However, the utilization of LLSs is influenced by a myriad of factors, with culture emerging as a significant determinant. Extensive research on English language learning strategies has been conducted in various nations, including China, Taiwan, Greece, Singapore, and Hungary (Habók, 2021). Notably, there is a dearth of research on the cultural disparities in LLS employment, despite its potential impact on academic exchange programs between nations. Given the increasing prevalence of international academic integration and Vietnam's engagement in numerous internship exchange initiatives with global universities, investigating LLS disparities and similarities between Vietnamese students and those from diverse cultural backgrounds is imperative.

This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by examining the distinctions and commonalities in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning strategies employed among students hailing from two distinct cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds, Vietnam and Indonesia. Building on the insight from Habók (2021), which underscores the interconnectedness of language learning processes, strategy utilization, and cultural influences within the EFL classroom, this paper will explore LLS utilization in two

subsamples while considering the impact of cultural influences. The ultimate goal is to provide an understanding that may inform the design of exchange internship programs between these two nations, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of effective language learning strategies in culturally diverse educational settings.

**2. Literature review**

**2.1 Language learning strategies**

Foreign Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) have constituted a prominent area of scholarly inquiry for several decades. The genesis of this exploration can be traced back to the late 1970s and early 1980s, a period when scholars embarked on a systematic investigation of the techniques and methodologies employed by language learners in their quest to acquire a second or foreign language. Since that juncture, LLSs have evolved into a central focal point within the realm of language acquisition studies. While diverse definitions of LLSs exist, they collectively encompass the specific tactics, techniques, and cognitive processes individuals consciously employ to enrich their foreign language acquisition endeavors. Rebecca Oxford’s seminal definition from 1990 stands as a cornerstone, characterizing LLSs as “specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students use - often consciously - to improve their progress in apprehending, internalizing, and using the L2.”

Oxford (1990) categorizes language learning strategies into two primary categories: direct and indirect. These are then further segmented into six groups as outlined in Table 1. In Oxford’s framework, metacognitive strategies assist learners in managing their learning process. Affective strategies address emotional aspects, focusing on factors like confidence, while social strategies aim to enhance engagement with the target language. Cognitive strategies involve mental processes employed by learners to comprehend their learning materials. Memory strategies pertain to techniques for information retention, and compensation strategies aid learners in bridging knowledge gaps to sustain effective communication.

**Table 1.** Oxford’s taxonomy of language learning strategies (cited in Hardan, 2013)

<b>DIRECT STRATEGIES</b>	Memory	Creating mental linkages
		Applying images and sounds
		Reviewing well
		Employing action
	Cognitive	Practicing
		Receiving and sending messages strategies
		Analyzing and reasoning
		Creating structure for input and output
	Compensation	Guesing intelligently
		Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing
<b>INDIRECT STRATEGIES</b>	Metacognitive	Centering your learning
		Arranging and planning your learning
		Evaluating your learning
	Affective	Lowering your anxiety
		Encouraging yourself
		Taking your emotional temperature
	Social	Asking questions
		Cooperating with others
		Empathizing with others

One of the most widely recognized and comprehensive taxonomies of LLSs is the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), authored by Rebecca Oxford. This instrument delineates six principal categories of strategies: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social. Within each category, a spectrum of specific strategies is elucidated, encapsulating the array of techniques learners deploy throughout their language learning journey. The SILL's influence extends to the forefront of LLS research, and it remains ubiquitously employed within the field. Other notable inventories designed to gauge LLSs encompass the Language Strategy Use Inventory (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990), the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL Version 5.1) (Oxford, 1990) was a five-point Likert scale consisting of 80 items, which was designed for native English speakers learning a new language.

The significance of research on LLSs extends beyond a mere comprehension of individuals' language learning approaches, reverberating into the domain of language education with tangible ramifications. Such research equips language educators with invaluable insights, permitting the design of pedagogical practices that are more attuned to students' proclivities and requirements. Moreover, research in this field underscores the intricate interplay of individual variances, socio-cultural factors, and learner motivation within the broader language learning framework. Consequently, the field of LLS research remains dynamic and evolving, fostering substantial contributions to foreign language pedagogy and the advancement of learner success.

## **2.2 Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) of Vietnamese and Indonesian students**

Metacognitive strategies appear to be the most preferred strategies by Indonesian college students (Alfarisy, 2022; Tanjung, 2018; Lestari & Wahyudin, 2020; Rianto, 2020). Alfarisy (2022) found that successful Indonesian students predominantly employed metacognitive strategies, such as paying attention and self-monitoring, in their speaking learning. They also highlighted the importance of English and their awareness of learning as reasons for choosing these strategies. In the research of Tanjung (2018) on 122 English majors at a public university in Borneo Island, Indonesia, the results showed that the students usually used metacognitive, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Lestari and Wahyudin (2020) revealed in their study on 76 Indonesian students majoring in English Literature that metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used strategies, followed by social and compensation strategies while affective strategies were the least strategies used by the students. Rianto (2020) researched the LLSs of 329 undergraduate students in their EFL learning. The findings indicated that metacognitive was the strategy category most used by the students and compensation was the least used one. Yet, Mandasari and Oktaviani (2018) investigated the LLSs of 70 Indonesian students majoring in management and engineering who were taking English for Business class. They reported that the participants used affective strategies most frequently, followed by memory strategies.

In Vietnam, studies into LLSs of non-English majors are popular while ones in English majors are few. Nguyen et al. (2012) conducted research with 201 first-year students at Can Tho University to investigate the frequency level and gender difference in using language learning strategies. The findings revealed that although first-year students use strategies at an average level, the majority of them tend to use metacognitive strategies in their foreign language learning process. Nguyen and Ho (2013) compared the use of LLSs by 100 Vietnamese freshmen of non-English majors including 50 female and 50 male students. They found that indirect strategies such as memory and affective strategies are more preferred by female students than their male peers.

Also, both groups reported a medium frequency for the use of LLSs. Nguyen (2016) used questionnaires and interviews to explore information about LLSs of Vietnamese English and non-English majors. The results indicated that both groups used various strategies to learn English. Metacognitive strategies were used the most when compensation ones were used the least.

In the past, Basthomi (2002) conducted research on a Vietnamese student and an Indonesian student studying in Australia to find out their learning styles and strategies in the Australian context. Both students reported a high frequency in the use of cognitive strategies and relatively regular use of metacognitive ones. However, the research was carried out a long time ago and in a favorable context for EFL learners, an English-speaking country. Besides, there were only two participants. Accordingly, the results may be too subjective and unsuitable to be generalized.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research design

Oxford’s (1989) SILL was employed as the measurement tool in this research. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is a well-known instrument in the field of language learning and education. It was developed by Rebecca L. Oxford in 1989. The SILL is a 5-point Likert Scale questionnaire designed to assess language learning strategies used by individuals learning a foreign language. It is used to understand how language learners approach the language learning process. The SILL includes 50 items, categorized into 6 groups in line with 6 different language learning strategies (as in Table 2). The researchers designed the online survey via Google Forms to make it more convenient for both sides to participate in the data-collecting procedure.

Before being sent to participants, questionnaires were piloted on 10 EFL students who would not participate in the main research. After finishing collecting data, the problematic responses were filtered. Data analysis was implemented by the SPSS statistical package. We based on Cronbach’s alpha coefficients and descriptive statistics to evaluate students’ responses.

**Table 2.** Questionnaire’s structure

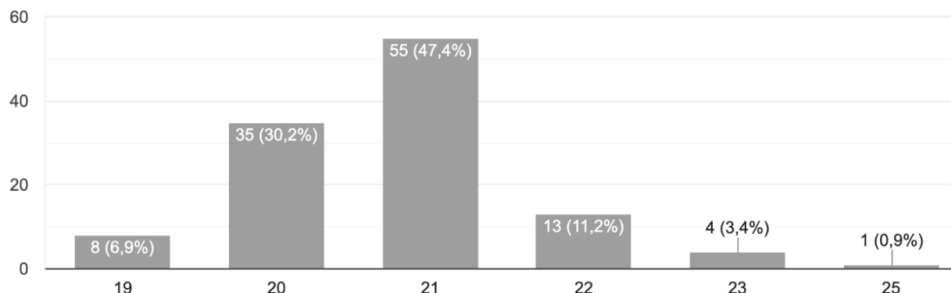
<b>Part 1:</b> Participants' information	Email
	University
<b>Part 2:</b> SILL	Age
	Gender
	A: Memory (1-9)
	B: Cognitive (10-23)
	C: Compensation (24-29)
	D: Metacognitive (30-38)
E: Affective (39-44)	
	F: Social (45-50)

#### 3.2 Participants

The participants of the research are 116 Vietnamese and Indonesian students majoring in the English language and English Language Education from the University of Foreign Languages and International Studies, Hue University (HUFLIS), and Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII). 46.3% of the sample is Indonesian and 51.7% is Vietnamese (*Table 2*). Also, the age of participants ranges from 19 to 25 with 47.4% of them at the age of 21 (*Chart 1*).

**Table 3.** Participants' Description

	<b>Vietnamese</b>	<b>Indonesian</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	11	17	28
Female	49	39	88
Total	60	56	116



**Chart 1.** Participants' age description

#### 4. Findings

The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the SILL questionnaire were examined to analyze internal consistency reliability for each subsample. *Table 3* shows that the highest reliabilities for the cognitive fields (Cronbach's alpha = .855 – .888) as well as the social field in the Indonesian subsample (Cronbach's alpha = .900). The lowest reliability values were registered in the memory (Cronbach's alpha = .640) and compensation fields (Cronbach's alpha = .639) in the Vietnamese subsample. Plus, the results show that the reliability coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha is high (.904 > .600 & .937 > .600). The Cronbach alphas in findings of this study are quite comparable to that of the original SILL whose Cronbach's alphas were reported to range from .850 to .950 (Oxford and Burry-Stock 1995) and all observed variables have a Corrected Item - Total Correlation greater than .300. Thus, the scale is reliable and the observed variables have good explanatory meaning.

**Table 4.** Reliability

<b>Fields</b>	<b>Vietnamese</b>	<b>Indonesian</b>
Memory	.640	.750
Cognitive	.855	.888
Compensation	.639	.735
Metacognitive	.831	.876
Affective	.753	.757
Social	.729	.900
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	.904	.937

As can be seen from *Table 4*, Vietnamese students and Indonesian students share similar language learning strategies. There is no significant gap in any specific strategy between Vietnamese students and Indonesian peers. The result indicated that metacognitive are the strategies preferred by both subsamples (3.70 - 3.81).

**Table 5.** Overall strategy use and strategy use for the fields on SILL

Strategies	Vietnamese M(SD)	Indonesian M(SD)
Memory	3.40 (.62)	3.35 (.67)
Cognitive	3.46 (.63)	3.50 (.67)
Compensation	3.54 (.62)	3.54 (.61)
Metacognitive	3.70 (.60)	3.81 (.71)
Affective	3.41 (.74)	3.27 (.79)
Social	3.56 (.60)	3.49 (.86)

To make the numbers easier to comprehend, Table 5 provides the interpretation of the figures that need to be presented in terms of the level of the strategies used. While cognitive, compensation, social, and metacognitive strategies are usually used, affective, and memory strategies are used at medium frequency by both subsamples. No strategy is used at low frequency (Table 6).

**Table 6.** SILL’s results interpretation

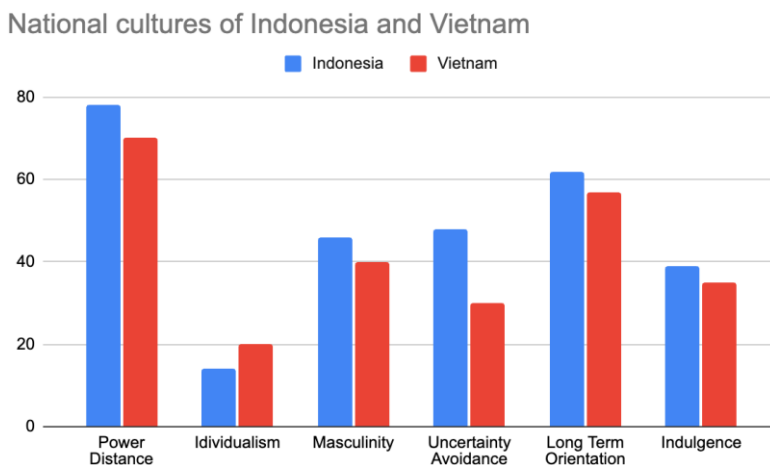
<b>High</b> (3.5 - 5.0)	Always or almost always used	(4.5 - 5.0)
	Usually used	(3.5 - 4.4)
<b>Medium</b> (2.5 - 3.4)	Sometimes used	
<b>Low</b> (1.0 - 2.4)	Generally not used	(1.5 - 2.4)
	Never or almost never used	(1.0 - 1.4)

**Table 7.** Overall level and ranking of strategies on SILL

Strategies	Vietnamese M(SD)	Ranking	Indonesian M(SD)	Ranking
Memory	Medium	6	Medium	5
Cognitive	High	4	High	3
Compensation	High	3	High	2
Metacognitive	High	1	High	1
Affective	Medium	5	Medium	6
Social	High	2	High	4

## 5. Discussion

According to Oxford (1996), LLS use is shaped by the different cultural and educational backgrounds of the learners. Chart 2 illustrates the national cultures of Vietnam and Indonesia according to Geert Hofstede’s Culture Dimension. As can be seen, the 2 nations share similar cultural features with comparable indexes. This may explain why the LLSs of 2 subsamples have a lot in common. Besides, the regular use of metacognitive and social strategies is a characteristic of more proficient university students (Wu, 2008, as cited in Habók et al., 2021). However, while social strategies rank second in Vietnamese students’ frequency of strategies use, it is only in fourth place in Indonesian counterparts’ (as in Table 6). This can be explained by the higher index of uncertainty avoidance in Indonesian culture (as in Chart 2), which makes it harder for them to be comfortable with the features of this type of strategies.



**Chart 2.** National cultures of Indonesia and Vietnam

Some experts have proven that metacognitive strategies are substantial in EFL (Basthomi, 2002). The fact that all participants are English-majored students means that they are trained to learn the language more effectively. This can explain why metacognitive strategies are their most preferred ones.

Regarding LLSs of the Vietnamese subsample, the learning strategies that were used most frequently are metacognitive strategies, which is similar to the findings of many other studies (Nguyen et al., 2012; Nguyen, 2016). Additionally, the Indonesian subsample’s LLSs in this research had a lot in common with other research (Alfarisy, 2022; Lestari and Wahyudin, 2020; Tanjung, 2018). However, this is not the case for some other findings. For example, participants in the research of Basthomi (2002) reported that cognitive strategies were preferred the most instead of metacognitive ones. The two participants in the research were non-English majors, and they were living in Australia, so they might have learned the language more naturally instead of setting a clear learning goal. Also, as mentioned before, the time gap between the two studies may lead to differences in findings.

**6. Implications**

The relative similarity in foreign language learning strategies can bring many benefits and advantages to short-term exchange programs between students of the University of Foreign Languages and International Studies, Hue University and Universitas Islam Indonesia particularly, as well as Vietnamese students and Indonesian students generally. For instance, designing academic programs to suit students from these two countries will probably take less effort.

While Wu (2008) indicated that the regular use of metacognitive and social strategies is a characteristic of more proficient university students, other types of strategies should be used too as they go hand in hand with the criteria for a good language learner (Stern, 1975). In other words, the dominance in the frequency of metacognitive strategies and the fact that there is no group of strategies that is used at the low level are good signs for both subsamples. Habók (2002) recommended that although not all strategies may be utilized simultaneously and some research indicates that competent learners employ a limited set of strategies based on the task at hand, it is

crucial that students study and apply all sorts of strategies, particularly in the early stages of language learning.

In addition, the curriculums for students from these two countries should also be built based on an overview of the language learning strategies chosen by students to awaken their positive thinking in the learning process. From there, individualizing the learning process will be aimed to fully develop each individual's potential (Roy-Singh, 1991).

Compared to the Vietnamese subsample, the lower figure in the frequency of use of social strategies reported by the Indonesian subsample is possibly due to the nature of culture but may also be due to the fact that many students view English as a subject instead of a tool for effective communication (Bπερτού, 2011). If so, their language learning will not be effective in the long run because the primary purpose of language is to communicate. Thus, English teachers should support and provide many opportunities for learners to be exposed to real-world English and to use the language to communicate so that they enjoy learning foreign languages and can use them more effectively. As a result, their language competencies can be elevated to a new degree.

## 7. Conclusions

Research results show that these two study groups have similar LLSs. They utilized all strategies and no strategy was reported to be used very little or never by the 2 groups. The research results are generally consistent with previous studies with metacognitive being the strategy most used by both groups of subjects. Besides, memory and affective strategies are used less than the 4 remaining strategies. Teachers can consider these characteristics to create favorable conditions for developing children's foreign language abilities. The similar characteristics of the LLSs of these two groups should also be considered in promoting short-term academic exchange programs between the two universities.

When it comes to the limitations, there are two main problems that the authors would like to address. First, the number of participants is still too low to generalize the findings. Second, we did not investigate deeper into the individual level. Therefore, other research concerning similar issues with this paper should consider conducting surveys on a larger group of participants and exploring on language learning strategies of individuals through interviews. Moreover, future studies can also discover the influence of educational policies on students' foreign language learning strategies.

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## **CHIẾN LƯỢC HỌC NGOẠI NGỮ CỦA SINH VIÊN VIỆT NAM VÀ SINH VIÊN INDONESIA**

**Tóm tắt:** Nghiên cứu này đi sâu vào tìm hiểu chiến lược học ngôn ngữ (LLSs) của 116 sinh viên Đại học Việt Nam và Indonesia chuyên ngành Tiếng Anh và Sư phạm Tiếng Anh. Bằng cách sử dụng Bộ công cụ đo chiến lược học tập ngôn ngữ (SILL) với phương pháp thuận định lượng, nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích làm sáng tỏ mối liên hệ giữa văn hoá và chiến lược học ngôn ngữ. Với chỉ số đồng nhất cao và hệ số Cronbach's alpha của 2 nhóm mẫu phụ ở mức 0,904 và 0,937; thang đo thể hiện độ tin cậy và phù hợp cao đối với khách thể nghiên cứu. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy sự tương đồng nổi bật trong chiến lược học Tiếng Anh giữa 2 nhóm sinh viên Việt Nam và Indonesia. Trong đó, chiến lược siêu nhận thức được sử dụng thường xuyên nhất và không có loại chiến lược nào được sử dụng ở mức rất thấp hay không được sử dụng. Nghiên cứu khép lại với những những đề xuất góp phần vào việc thúc đẩy và xây dựng các chương trình trao đổi học thuật giữa hai quốc gia và mở ra cánh cửa cho những nghiên cứu sau này trong lĩnh vực Giáo dục ngôn ngữ.

**Từ khoá:** Chiến lược học ngoại ngữ, LLSs, SILL, Sinh viên Việt Nam, Sinh viên Indonesia