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## Language Learning Strategies Used by Indonesian Learners in IELTS

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### Abstract

*This study investigated the frequently used language learning strategies (LLS) by Indonesian learners in learning English for a high-stakes exam, IELTS. In addition, differences in the LLS use among participants with different proficiency were examined. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected by using an online survey by utilizing Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) as the instrument. Sixty-one Indonesian adult learners who had taken IELTS were involved in this study. Their IELTS score indicated their proficiency levels. Data analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). It involved a descriptive analysis to find the frequency and an independent samples t-test to see the LLS use based on proficiency. The findings revealed that the participants used various LLS in learning English for IELTS. The most frequently used strategies were metacognitive, followed by cognitive, compensative, social, affective, and memory strategies. Meanwhile, the independent samples t-test showed that the difference in the LLS use among participants with different proficiency was not noticeable. Reflecting on the results, it is proposed that English teachers in Indonesia may start growing their learners' awareness of LLS benefits and teach them to use them properly in their learning English for IELTS.*

**Keywords:** IELTS, Indonesian learners, language learning strategies, SILL, quantitative.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The wake of globalisation has opened access for people around the globe to migrate to different countries, be it for living, working, or studying. In relation to migrating and entering a different country, the ability to speak the language spoken in the country is important. To show that a person can speak the language spoken in the destination country, proof of language proficiency may be required. In many countries where English is spoken, International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is recognised as proof of English language proficiency.

Today there is a trend showing growth in the number of Indonesian students studying abroad. In Australia alone, for instance, there were 8748 Indonesian students (Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of the Republic of Indonesia, 2016). The trend was the result of financial sponsorships available in Indonesia to prepare Indonesia's younger generation to pursue higher education in high-rank universities around the world.

Nonetheless, in some cases, the requirement of a standard language proficiency test can be a challenge for Indonesian prospective applicants. Basically, they have the opportunity to study abroad as a great number of scholarships are available both from the government and from the target country, but meeting the language proficiency requirement, in this case, IELTS can be challenging at one point. There are probably several reasons why IELTS is problematic to Indonesian students. First, they are not prepared for a high-stakes testing system such as IELTS during their studying English at school or university. This reason, Bachman (1988) argued, can cause difficulties in undertaking the test. Second, the status of English in Indonesia is as a foreign language (EFL). This implies that English is not spoken as often as where English functions as the first or the second language.

On the other hand, many of the students were able to successfully achieve a high score. Identifying what strategies these successful learners do in their learning is essential so that they could be taught to other learners who are less successful in their learning (Rivera-Mills & Plonsky, 2007). Nakatani (2005) argued that the awareness of learning strategies is advantageous for learners as it can help them acquire the knowledge better. It resonates with the idea that learning can be enhanced by employing learning strategies (Griffiths, 2018; Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Research on language learning strategies (LLS) has become a great interest in educational research (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998; Griffiths, 2018; Oxford, 1990). It initially sparked from the seminal work of Rubin (1975) by which the term "good language learner" (p. 43) appeared. The idea of a good language learner suggested that using LLS leads learners to successful learning (Rubin, 1975). What is more important is that LLS used by successful language learners can be taught to less successful learners to help them improve (Oxford, 1990). Therefore, many researchers have attempted to study LLS in various contexts (Amerstorfer, 2018; Griffiths, 2018; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Oxford, 1990; Psaltou-Joycey et al., 2018; Wharton, 2000). A shift in the view of students' and teachers' roles in second/foreign language learning has made researchers in educational contexts interested in the study of LLS (Griffiths, 2018). Success in language learning involves collaboration between teachers and learners (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998). From the side of learners, LLS used by learners indicates what actions they can do to improve their own learning (Griffiths, 2018). To

gain maximum outcomes in second or foreign language learning, the roles of teachers are demonstrated in several aspects such as their teaching strategy practice and their perception of learners' LLS use and how they respond to it (Chamot, 2008). Recognising teachers' and learners' roles in second/foreign language learning will enable them to maximize the outcomes in their own learning through collaboration (Psaltou-Joycey et al., 2018). Therefore, the research on LLS keeps on growing.

In multiple contexts, there have been a plethora of studies in LLS. Researchers investigated the relationship between LLS use with variables, such as proficiency gender, and nationality (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006), proficiency, age, and self-efficacy (Magogwe & Oliver, 2007), gender, and proficiency (Green & Oxford, 1995). In Indonesia, a number of studies in the LLS area have been conducted, for example, the relationship between LLS use and proficiency (Alfian, 2018), with gender (Mahmud & Nur, 2018), and LLS used by Indonesian high school students in speaking English (Syafryadin, 2020). To my knowledge, studies about LLS in Indonesia focusing on LLS use in IELTS is scarce. Indeed, Yunianika (2018) explored LLS used in Indonesian learners preparing for IELTS with the SILL. However, in Yunianika's (2018) study, the participants were limited to affirmation scholarship awardees of a scholarship scheme in Indonesia which demanded lower scores to pass compared to other similar scholarship schemes, and the instrument reliability in the context was not informed. Besides, the relevance of the LLS used to learning IELTS was not deeply discussed.

Therefore, this study aims at investigating LLS used by adult Indonesian learners in learning English for IELTS and examining whether there is any difference in the LLS use based on the learners' proficiency. This study is expected to be significant for teaching practitioners and learners of English for IELTS, and English for any purpose in general in the Indonesian context by demonstrating how the strategies are relevant to learning English for IELTS. Further, this study is expected to enrich the research of LLS use, especially in Indonesia.

This study was driven by these research questions:

1. What LLS are frequently used by Indonesian learners learning English for IELTS?
2. Is there any significant difference in the use of LLS use among learners with different proficiency levels in IELTS?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Language Learning Strategies (LLS) and Theoretical Underpinning**

Despite abundant studies and the popularity of LLS, the field of LLS has been known as vague (Griffiths, 2018). There has not been any common foundation in terms of its definition and theoretical underpinnings despite great interest in the field. While defining a concept is essential as the foundation to understand the concept, LLS definition is diverse according to previous researchers. Bialystok (1978) defined LLS as tools to exploit linguistic information to increase learners' competence in a target language. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) conceptualised LLS as steps in language learning which enable learners to acquire, retrieve, and use linguistic information. Meanwhile, according to Oxford (1990), LLS is "specific actions taken by the learner

to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to a new situation” (p. 8).

Despite scholars’ varying definitions of LLS, there is a commonality in the aforementioned definitions. It seems that scholars agree with the idea that LLS facilitates learners to gain success in their language learning. This study draws on [Oxford’s \(1990\)](#) definition of LLS. This study investigates LLS which Indonesian learners use in learning English for IELTS. As a high-stakes exam, IELTS requires learners or test-takers in the context to prepare well if they aim for a high score. In this case, the definition by [Oxford \(1990\)](#) proposes an idea that LLS can decrease the pressure of learning, especially if the task to be completed is uninteresting or challenging. In addition, as LLS can lead to self-directed learning, the concept of LLS by Oxford might be beneficial for learners in the context of this study. Thus, with LLS, learners can improve their independence in learning to reach their goals.

Besides the various definitions of LLS proposed by scholars, LLS research is known to be controversial in terms of underpinning theories. According to [Griffiths \(2018\)](#), LLS can be theorised from several theoretical positions in many ways, including behaviourism, structuralism, information processing theory under cognitivism, and socio-culturalism. She viewed, in the behaviourism paradigm, learning a language can be done through repeating learning behaviours until learners succeed. The learning behaviours are expressed by drilling, repeating, and practicing. On the other hand, structuralists believe that learning a language can be enhanced by learning the target language patterns and system ([Griffiths, 2018](#)). From the perspective of information processing theory, learning strategies are crucial for cognition development. Meanwhile, the socio-cultural theory argues for the importance of social interaction as strategies to improve learning ([Vygotsky, 1978](#)). This study draws on the last two theoretical concepts as they are useful to help understand the use of LLS in language learning.

## **2.2 Categorisation of LLS**

[Oxford \(1990\)](#) categorised LLS into direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are strategies in which mental processing of linguistic information is involved. Indirect strategies are those used to support and manage learning in accomplishing language tasks and argued that they can be applied in all learning tasks. She said that direct strategies cover memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. [Oxford](#) further added, on the other hand, indirect strategies are comprised of metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. They are explained as the following:

### **1. Memory strategies**

Memory strategies are used to remember a language being learned ([Oxford, 1990](#)). In other words, memory strategies are specific strategies to help learners to store and retrieve new information. Overall, the memory strategies are related to learners’ endeavours to master elements of English such as vocabulary and grammar. This is important for learners studying English for IELTS as the strategies help develop and retain learners’ vocabulary and grammar.

### **2. Cognitive strategies**

Cognitive strategies help learners think of how they can enhance their learning, for example how they understand and create a product such as a text in a target

language (Oxford, 1990). Besides, the cognitive strategy helps language learners to manipulate and transform the language they are learning to comprehend it better.

### 3. Compensative strategies

Compensative strategies indicate how learners compensate for the lack of their knowledge and competence in a target language so that they can reflect and make use of their limitations in the target language to succeed in using the language (Oxford, 1990).

### 4. Metacognitive strategies

The metacognitive strategy helps learners manage how they learn (Oxford, 1990). The focus is on the process of their learning. Zhang (2010) corroborated that when learners are aware of their learning process and strategies, they are most likely to achieve success in their learning. Learners gain from using metacognitive strategies because they help learners plan, monitor, evaluate their learning, and modify their learning strategies when necessary (Oxford, 1990; Zhang, 2010). Zhang (2010) suggested that the use of metacognitive strategies could be one factor that distinguished successful learners from less successful ones. He explains the former group gains from monitoring their learning and modifying their learning strategy when found ineffective while the latter group does not perform similar behaviours.

### 5. Affective strategies

Affective strategy is beneficial for learners to be able to regulate their affective state in their own learning process. Affective state in learning refers to learners' attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and motivation (Oxford, 1990). Referring to the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), a negative affective state will result in difficulty in learning. Employing affective strategies enables learners to maintain and improve positive attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and motivation in learning. Shawer (2016) found that affective strategies are beneficial in language learners' development particularly in receptive skills (reading and listening).

### 6. Social strategies

Social strategies help learners learn with other people through social interaction (Oxford, 1990). She argued for the importance of social strategies in language learning. The strategies lead to increasing interactions between learners and other people in terms of learning and using the language being learned.

Among all the strategies mentioned, there is not any strategy which is more important than the others (Oxford, 1990). In other words, all strategies complete the others. They even work more effectively when combined, not in isolation (Anderson, 2008). The types of strategies are presented in Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL).

## 2.3 IELTS and LLS in Indonesia

IELTS is a high-stakes exam whose purpose is to show test-takers' proficiency level in English and to measure their communicative competence (Uysal, 2010). Currently, it has been recognised in approximately 135 countries as proof of English language proficiency when people manage to migrate overseas for academic, professional, and other migration purposes (Hoang & Hamid, 2017). Countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and Canada recognise the IELTS as an entry requirement for universities and immigration (Uysal, 2010). She explained that, as a high-stakes

language test, IELTS plays an important role in their admission to their target university or country. The other thing to be concerned about is the registration fee for the IELTS which keeps increasing (Hoang & Hamid, 2017). Therefore, passing the targeted IELTS score is crucial for test-takers.

IELTS is mainly administered by highly reputable organisations, namely the British Council, IDP IELTS Australia, and the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations or usually known as Cambridge ESOL. IELTS is categorised into 2 types: academic and general modules. The IELTS itself consists of four sections: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. They are all assessed in score ranges from 0 to 9, with an interval of 0.5. A test taker's overall band score results from the mean of the scores for the four sections (Hoang & Hamid, 2017). Given the nature of the IELTS as a high-stakes exam, test takers tend to put much effort to obtain their target score. In Indonesia, an adequate IELTS score is not only important for targeting a university admission or immigration, but also for attaining sponsorship to study abroad or in a local university. Based on a report of IELTS™ (2019), the average score in Indonesia was 6.5. The score indicates the skill level of a competent user who can use the language effectively, but inaccuracies and inappropriate use of language, and possible misunderstanding may still present (IELTS™, n.d.).

In regard to IELTS, Yunianika (2018) conducted a study on Indonesian learners' LLS use. The participants were awardees of a scholarship scheme in Indonesia. She found that the participants used metacognitive strategies most frequently ( $M=4.18$ ) and memory strategy as the least frequently used strategy ( $M=3.29$ ). In addition, it was also found that female participants used LLS more frequently than male participants. Further, in terms of LLS use based on proficiency, she categorised the participants into four proficiency levels: "Very good (score  $\geq 7$ ), Good ( $6 \leq$  scores  $< 7$ ), Moderate ( $5 \leq$  scores  $< 6$ ) and Low ( $4 \leq$  scores  $< 5$ )". The study revealed that participants, who had the highest proficiency level used social strategy most frequently. She argued that the high use of social strategy indicated that the learners in the category were active and benefitted from peer collaboration in their own learning. On the other hand, the participants with the lowest proficiency employed affective strategy the most.

### **3. METHOD**

#### **3.1 Participants' Demography**

There were 61 participants in this study. They were adult Indonesian learners who had taken IELTS. The link to the questionnaire was advertised to several online platforms whose members are Indonesian who study, work, and stay abroad because they might have taken IELTS prior to their departure to their destination country. Their latest score was used as the indicator of their proficiency.

The background questions also informed that all participants' first language was not English. They perceived that scoring high in IELTS was considered important ( $N=20$ ) and very important ( $N=41$ ). Based on the participants' latest IELTS score, the indicator of their proficiency level, Table 1 informs about the groups of the participants. They were good users (IELTS score = 6.5-9) ( $N=46$ ) and moderate users (IELTS score = 3.5-6) ( $N=15$ ).

In language learning, adult learners are known to have specific characteristics. Due to their experience in life, it has been argued that adult learners have a wide range of learning strategy repertoire (Knowles, 1984). Knowles also identified adult learners as self-directed learners who can direct their own learning. In their language learning, adults tend to be motivated to learn when they already have a clear objective of learning (Cozma, 2015). In learning English for IELTS, participants in this study expressed the importance of reaching a higher score in IELTS as ‘important’ and ‘very important’. It could become their sound motivation in their language learning as they realised that scoring high in IELTS had a high level of importance.

**Table 1.** Participant groups based on their latest IELTS score.

Proficiency level	Frequency	Percentage
Moderate User (IELTS Score =3.5-6)	15	24.6
Good User (IELTS Score = 6.5-9)	46	75.4
Total	61	100.0

### 3.2 Research Design

This quantitative study was conducted by using an online survey in collecting data. A survey is one of many methods scholars have opted for in LLS research (Oxford & Crookall, 1989; Wharton, 2000). Online surveys enable researchers to reach their participants easily despite geographical issues which lead to quick response (Bryman, 2016). The data obtained then was analysed statistically using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28. It resulted in mean scores which were interpreted as the level of frequency. There are three levels of frequency (Oxford, 1990): low (means between 1.0-2.4), medium (means between 2.5-3.4), and high (means between 3.5-5.00). Additionally, to see the differences in LLS use due to different proficiency levels, an independent sample t-test was performed.

As for the instrument, the SILL developed by Oxford (1990) was employed in this study, along with a few background questions covering their latest IELTS score and their perceptions of IELTS. The SILL used was version 7.0 which is targeted at those whose first language is not English. It consists of 50 items which are divided into 6 parts based on Oxford’s LLS taxonomy, namely memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective, social, and compensative strategies. The measurement of the instrument is in a five-point Likert type, ranging from 1 for ‘never or almost never true of me’, 2 for ‘usually not true of me’, 3 for ‘somewhat true of me’. 4 for ‘usually true of me’, and 5 for ‘always or almost always true of me’ (Oxford, 1990, p. 293).

The SILL validity and reliability are argued to be high and consistent (Ardasheva & Tretter, 2013; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993). The SILL is reported to be highly reliable (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). Referring to Cronbach’s alpha as one commonly used measurement to determine an instrument’s internal reliability (Bryman, 2016), the SILL reliability is reported to be above the acceptable value of the Cronbach’s alpha. Most of the studies using the SILL as their instrument have shown a value above 0.80 (Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993; Wharton, 2000). In this study, the SILL’s reliability is high with the Cronbach’s alpha of 0.89 (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** The SILL reliability test.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's alpha	N of items
.897	50

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 LLS Frequently Used by Indonesian Learners in Learning English for IELTS

In Table 3, the result of a descriptive analysis of LLS used by the participants is presented. The participants used all six strategies in their learning: memory, cognitive, compensative, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

**Table 3.** Indonesian learners' use of LLS in learning English for IELTS based on the six categories in the instrument (SILL).

Strategies	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Memory	61	3.06	.56
Cognitive	60	3.77	.48
Compensative	60	3.66	.56
Metacognitive	58	3.89	.59
Affective	58	3.13	.64
Social	56	3.62	.58
Average		3.52	.57
Valid N (listwise)	56		

Referring to the LLS user profile mentioned before, the analysis showed a high mean score of overall strategies used (M=3.52), ranging between 3.06 and 3.89. The overall mean score could be interpreted as 'usually used' (Oxford, 1990, p. 300). Metacognitive strategies were used most frequently (M=3.89), followed by cognitive (M=3.77), compensative (M=3.65), social (M=3.62), affective (M=3.13), and memory strategies (M=3.06).

From Table 3, it could be seen that the number of valid cases was different because several participants did not complete all the items to the last part. Social strategies (N=56) were put in the last part of the instrument, and it could be the reason for the declining number of valid cases. Overall, the average mean score of LLS used by Indonesian learners in IELTS was considered high (M=3.52).

The following sub-sections explain the LLS used by the participants starting from the most frequently used strategies to the least frequently used strategies.

#### 4.1.1 Metacognitive strategies

The findings showed that metacognitive strategies were at the top of the six strategy categories. This finding is similar to what Alfian (2018) and Yunianika (2018) found in their study in the same context. Apparently, the participants in this study seemed to be aware of ways to plan, manage, and assess their own learning. In connection to their purpose of learning English, which was to do well in IELTS, they probably realised that their way of learning should be different from when they learn English for general purposes considering the nature of IELTS as a high-stakes exam.



They already had a clear goal in their language learning by which their motivation in learning could be improved as well (Zhang, 2010). For those who learn English for a specific purpose which is crucial for their further progress or plan, having a goal to reach and fear to fail the goal could encourage them to manage and control their own learning (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). Managing and controlling their learning can be done by using metacognitive strategies.

In the metacognitive category, item number 32 ('I pay attention when someone is speaking English') was on the first list (M=4.27). This item is echoing the sociocultural theory which suggests the importance of interaction with other people to learn. Amerstorfer (2018) suggested that paying attention to someone speaking English was beneficial for learning English. It could be possible that English language learners may not comprehend all the things their interlocutors say in English communication. To avoid missing the message delivered through the communication, this strategy is effective (Amerstorfer, 2018). Besides, this strategy could help learners improve their listening skills as well.

In IELTS, test-takers can apply this strategy in the listening and speaking sections. In the sections, they must respond to English speeches. If they are aware and used to employing the strategy, they should be able to understand the instructions or questions given. Consequently, they would be able to give responses to the questions accordingly.

Meanwhile, item number 34 ('I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English') was the least frequently used in the category (M=3.09). However, it should be noted that the item was still used in a medium frequency. Planning the learning is useful for more maximum outcomes (Oxford, 1990). Planning a schedule, for example, can be useful as learners can allocate their time for learning. As the participants were all adults who might have other activities to do, they may need to plan when to learn, work, relax, and do other activities. Thus, this strategy is helpful to manage learning.

#### 4.1.2 Cognitive strategies

In this study, the participants used cognitive strategies at a high level of frequency (M=3.77). Among the SILL items, item number 15 ('I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English'), which is one of the cognitive strategies, was in the top position. The mean score (M=4.38) showed that the participants used it at a high frequency.

In the previous part, the characteristics of adult learners have been explained. One of them is their ability to use various types of resources to learn, including media such as movies (Albiladi et al., 2018). Albiladi et al. (2018) conducted a study in the US to investigate adult English language learners' perspectives on learning English through watching movies spoken in English. They concluded that the learners found watching movies spoken in English as an effective and interesting way to learn English. They said that watching movies in English facilitates learners' development in speaking, listening, writing, reading, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Besides, it can make learning English interesting and enjoyable since movies as 'authentic sources' of language learning offer 'natural and real' English language use from which cultural awareness could be learned as well (Albiladi et al., 2018, p. 1571). This finding is interesting considering Indonesia as an EFL context. In other words, there are limited

opportunities for learners to experience the real use of English. Therefore, by watching movies, learners can experience more exposure to natural English use. Exposure to English language use has been argued to be useful for improving language acquisition (Ardasheva & Tretter, 2013). Thus, learning English by watching movies or TV shows spoken in English may improve learners' proficiency.

#### *4.1.3 Compensative strategies*

Compensative strategies are important when learners have difficulties in using the language, they learned due to their limited knowledge of the language (Oxford, 1990). In this category, item number 29 ('If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing') was on the top of the items in the category (M=4.20). The mean score means that the participants always or almost always use it. As English is not the participants' first language, there could be possibilities to face difficulties in any English communication they encounter in terms of vocabulary or grammar. For example, they had to deliver their ideas in the speaking and writing sections of IELTS according to the given instructions. Being aware of the strategy would be helpful for them when they experience problems finding the correct words. Using another word or phrase with a similar meaning would help them to deliver their answer instead of losing points due to a lack of fluency when they paused to think about the unfamiliar or difficult words.

On the other hand, item number 26 ('make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English') (M=3.22) showed the lowest means score in the category. Nonetheless, the mean score still showed that the participants used it in a medium frequency. It is interesting to relate this finding to Amerstorfer's (2018) study in which the participant suggested that making up new words in English would not be considered wise as those words might be wrong in terms of their meaning. Speaking of the possibility of the wrong meaning of the made-up words, IELTS test-takers may lose points for lexical resources if it occurs. Therefore, this strategy should be carefully taught to learners, particularly when their purpose of learning English is for taking a language exam.

#### *4.1.4 Social strategies*

Social strategies are useful for learning through interactions that learners experience with their peers or more capable others such as their English language teachers or instructors (Oxford, 1990). As the purpose of IELTS is to measure its test takers' communicative competence, interactions with others could be useful to improve competence. It is because the interactions allow learners to use the language they learn (Griffiths, 2018).

Despite being in the fourth position after metacognitive, cognitive, and compensative strategies, this study found that the participants used social strategies at the range of high frequency (M=3.62). On the top of the social strategy items, there was item number 45 ('If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again') (M=3.98). This strategy may be helpful to clarify meaning. This strategy is essential to aid learners to be involved in a conversation in English so that they could provide correct responses. In addition, learners could gain from asking questions since their interlocutors' responses could be indirect feedback

to determine whether learners' speech was understandable or not (Oxford, 1990). Meanwhile, item number 46 ('I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk') showed the lowest mean score among the social strategies (M=3.18). Basically, this corrective strategy has been argued as an effective strategy to improve learners' speaking (Oxford, 1990). In other words, learners were aware that they could take advantage and learn through feedback provided by an English speaker or the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). Nonetheless, the participants might find it uneasy to find English speakers considering the context of Indonesia as an EFL context. This could be one reason for the lower mean of this strategy compared to the other items in social strategies.

In learning English for IELTS or in the test itself, the strategy of asking questions is useful, especially in the speaking section. The participants had to answer questions from their interviewer accordingly. The strategy could prevent learners from giving wrong responses when they do not understand the question which might lead to losing points. Considering the importance of social strategies, learners should be trained to use them properly.

#### 4.1.5 *Affective strategies*

Affective strategies function to maintain and improve learners' positive emotions, motivation, and attitudes in learning a language as they are important to improve language learning outcomes (Oxford, 1990). The findings of this study showed that affective strategies were the strategies with the second lowest mean seen from the six categories (M=3.13). From the individual strategy analysis, item number 40 ('I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake') (M=3.93) was in the first position in the affective category. This strategy is interesting to the extent in which learners could grow their encouragement towards themselves to speak English rather than waiting for encouragement from other people. The encouragement enables them to practise more through an interaction or communication in English which could lead to oral proficiency improvement (Oxford, 1990).

On the other hand, item number 43 ('I write down my feelings in a language learning diary') (M=2.14) was the least frequently used in the category. Regarding item number 43, a study conducted by Amerstorfer (2018) suggested a similar result. It was suggested that adult learners were not in favour of writing their feelings in a diary. Instead, they might write problems or difficulties they found when learning some topics so that they could ask other people or learn more about the problems (Amerstorfer, 2018).

As the nature of the task in this study is scoring in IELTS as a high-stakes exam, it is worth noting that it might be possible for the participants to suffer from anxiety which is a negative emotion. Therefore, using affective strategies could be helpful in that case, both in their learning process and in the test to perform well.

#### 4.1.6 *Memory strategies*

Memory strategies were identified as the least frequently used by participants (M=3.06). Even an analysis on the mean of each item shows that item number 6 ('I used flashcards to remember words') (M=1.98) was on the bottom of the 50 items. It

could be influenced by the participants' proficiency level. Oxford (1990) said that learners whose proficiency is intermediate or advanced might not use the memory strategies as frequently as those at the beginning level. As the participants' proficiency level was beyond the beginning level and most of them were good users (N= 75.4%), this explanation could be plausible.

In learning a second or foreign language, mastering vocabulary is essential to support the development of reading, listening, speaking, and writing. This is to say that great mastery of target language vocabulary may enable learners to communicate in the target language (Oxford, 1990). This strategy is one of the items in memory strategies whose purpose is to learn vocabulary in a target language. However, there is a tendency for lower use of memory strategies (Oxford, 1990). It could be because using flashcards was not significant for them and preparing flashcards would take time and effort (Amerstorfer, 2018).

Among all items in the memory strategies, item number 1 ('I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English') was the most frequently used item (M=3.84). This strategy is one example of memory strategies which can be done by creating mental linkages (Oxford, 1990). In other words, learners could gain from the strategy by associating available linguistic information they already have with new inputs. Oxford (1990) contended that the linkage between the old and the new linguistic inputs helps learners understand and remember the new inputs more easily which finally enables learners to retrieve the inputs when needed.

#### **4.2 Differences in the LLS Use among Learners with Different Proficiency Levels in IELTS**

To study the differences in the LLS use among learners with different proficiency levels in IELTS, an independent samples t-test was conducted. Table 4 presents the results of the independent samples t-test based on the proficiency levels shown by the participants' IELTS score group.

**Table 4.** LLS use based on participants' proficiency level.

Strategy categories	Proficiency group	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Memory	Moderate	15	3.01	.46	.678
	Good	46	3.08	.60	
Cognitive	Moderate	15	3.58	.59	.071
	Good	45	3.84	.43	
Compensative	Moderate	15	3.49	.53	.183
	Good	45	3.71	.56	
Metacognitive	Moderate	14	3.62	.68	.056
	Good	44	3.97	.54	
Affective	Moderate	14	3.12	.56	.915
	Good	44	3.14	.66	
Social	Moderate	12	3.35	.53	.062
	Good	44	3.70	.57	

From Table 4, it can be seen that different groups of participants showed different mean scores in using each category of the LLS. The mean score of the participants with higher proficiency was higher than those of the participants with

lower proficiency. However, from the result of the independent samples t-test, the differences were not significant.

The significance (2-tailed) value was referred to determine whether the differences in the LLS use were significant or not. In all strategy categories, the statistical analysis showed  $p > 0.05$ . The strategies with the highest value of  $p$  were affective strategies and memory strategies ( $p = .915$  and  $p = .678$ ). In other words, the good use and the moderate user groups showed a slight difference in the use of those strategies. Metacognitive strategies, on the other hand, showed the lowest  $p$ -value among all strategies. Despite  $p > 0.05$ , metacognitive strategies showed the biggest gap between proficiency levels in this study ( $M = 3.97$  for the good user group, and  $M = 3.62$  for the moderate user group).

This finding is slightly similar to Alfian's (2018) finding which suggested similar LLS use among the participants regardless of their proficiency levels difference. Meanwhile, Yunianika (2018) found that learners in the category with the highest proficiency, very good users, employed social strategy the most ( $M = 4.5$ ) compared to the other three categories whose mean scores were below 4. However, the use of metacognitive strategy was also noticeably high in good and moderate user categories with  $M = 4.19$  and  $M = 4.24$ , respectively (Yunianika, 2018). According to several scholars (Alfian, 2018; Green & Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2018; Hong-Nam & Leavel, 2006; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Zhang, 2010), higher use of metacognitive strategies has been associated with highly proficient learners. Therefore, they argued for the importance of applying a higher use of metacognitive strategies while using the other strategies in learning a language.

According to several scholars in the LLS area, there are several speculations why insignificant differences in the LLS use among learners with different levels of language proficiency could be found (Cohen, 1998; Lai, 2009). First, it could be due to the ability of more successful learners to complete tasks by selecting fewer appropriate LLS instead of using all strategies while less successful learners show a tendency in trying different LLS which leads to higher use of various types of LLS (Cohen, 1998). Second, how LLS improves learners' language proficiency does not always depend on the total number and the frequency of LLS use (Lai, 2009). Effective use of LLS could work better for language learners (Lai, 2009). In addition, this study merely had two proficiency levels whose intervals were short. They were moderate users whose scores ranged from 3.5-6, and good users whose scores ranged from 6.5-9. For example, some participants who fell into the first group might score 6 while some of the second group might score 6.5. It means that their proficiency level was not significantly distinct, therefore, their LLS use could be insignificantly different as well.

In brief, the LLS used by Indonesian learners in IELTS has been identified in this study. The discussion on the use of the LLS category and several specific items in each category and how they are relevant to enhance learning English for IELTS has been presented as well. Participants' LLS preference based on their proficiency has been shown. Compared to the similar previous study, similarities and differences can be seen. It is interesting to learn that investigating the difference in LLS use with the variable of participants' proficiency level may be influenced by the proficiency categories created in the study. In the proficiency categories, there is an IELTS score interval that must be considered. Through this study, the reliability of the instrument was tested and proven statistically high.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This study has investigated Indonesian learners' LLS use in learning for IELTS and differences in the LLS used based on their proficiency. Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn. Firstly, the participants used all categories of LLS. Metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used strategies among all six categories, followed by cognitive, compensative, social, affective, and memory strategies. High use of metacognitive strategies suggested that the participants had the awareness that it is important to manage their learning. Secondly, it was found that the participants with higher proficiency used LLS more frequently than those with lower proficiency although the difference was not significant. Both groups used the LLS at a high range of frequency with a minor gap in their overall mean scores.

There were several limitations found in this study. First, the size of this study sample was small compared to other quantitative studies in the LLS research area. Besides, having only two groups of proficiency level restricted possible various responses. Thus, using a bigger sample and determining more categories would probably provide more various proficiency levels as well which could result in more varied responses. As for the short interval between categories, for example, scores 6 and 6.5, it can be controlled by having a distinct difference in intervals and starting each category with the score in the border. Second, the author was given feedback that there were too many items in the instruments which could make participants hesitate to finish all the items. This feedback was relevant as there were several responses which were not completed to the end part of the instrument. This situation should be considered by other researchers who intend to conduct a study using the SILL through an online survey. As for future research in LLS, studying the LLS use based on other variables such as social-economic status (SES), educational background, and purpose of learning would be worth investigating to gain richer findings in LLS literature. Further, an investigation on relationships among strategy categories would be interesting as well.

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