

## Gender differences learning strategy at English Language Education Department Students University of Muhammadiyah Malang

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### ABSTRAK

*Perbedaan gender dapat diasumsikan sebagai perbedaan individu yang umumnya ada dan menarik perhatian dalam pembelajaran bahasa asing. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui strategi yang digunakan oleh siswa dalam belajar bahasa Inggris dan perspektif siswa tentang strategi pembelajaran berdasarkan jenis kelamin mereka. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dan wawancara yang diberikan kepada mahasiswa Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris. Studi ini menemukan bahwa siswa laki-laki dan perempuan berbeda dalam strategi pembelajaran, dan siswa perempuan mendapat skor lebih tinggi dalam penggunaan strategi pembelajaran daripada laki-laki. Strategi pembelajaran metakognitif dan sosial banyak digunakan oleh mahasiswi. Di sisi lain, siswa laki-laki menilai strategi pembelajaran kompensasi, metakognitif dan kognitif sebagai upaya mereka untuk belajar bahasa Inggris. Hasilnya juga menemukan bahwa perempuan menggunakan semua strategi lebih sering daripada laki-laki terutama pada strategi metakognitif. Selain itu, ada perbedaan dalam penggunaan strategi lain, tetapi temuannya tidak signifikan.*

**Kata Kunci:** Jenis Kelamin; Perbedaan Gender; Strategi Pembelajaran.

### ABSTRACT

Gender difference can be assumed as an individual difference generally existing and catching attention in the foreign language teaching and learning. This research aims at finding out the strategies used by the students in learning English and students' perspective on the learning strategies based on their gender. The data are gathered through questionnaires and interview which are given to the students of English Language Education Department. This study discovered that male and female students differ in the learning strategy, and the female students score higher in the use of learning strategy than the males. Metacognitive and social learning strategy were highly used by female students. On the other hand, male students score compensation, metacognitive and cognitive learning strategy as their attempts to learn English. The result also found that females use all the strategies more often than males particularly on metacognitive strategy. Moreover, there are differences in the use of other strategies, but the finding is not remarkable.

**Keywords:** Gender Studies; Gender Differences; Learning Strategies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Language learning strategy investigation become an interesting study that have been conducted by a number of researchers. The research on this field began on 1960s (García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015) Language learning strategies are believed as the main factors that define how the students learn a second or foreign language.

Gender difference can be assumed as an individual difference generally existing and catching attention in the foreign language teaching and learning (Gustafsson Sendén, Bäck, & Lindqvist, 2015). Researches on gender-related topic increased rapidly. In the early of 1990s, Manzoor, Sarwar, and Asim (2020) the investigation on foreign language and gender has widely carried out. In addition, gender is considered as an important factor. Several scholars believed that gender plays role as essential factors in second language acquisition.

This study attempts to find out the strategies on learning language based on students' gender. Thus, this study reveals the possible different learning strategies between female and male students.

Language learning strategies refers to the stages taken by students to improve their own learning (Danko & Dečman, 2019; Alhaysony, 2017; Bloemen-Bekx, Voordeckers, Remery, & Schippers, 2019). Moreover, those strategies are considered as the tools for active, self-directed involvement, which lead to improving communicative competence. Further, applying appropriate strategies in language learning will help students to develop their language proficiency (Mulder & Hulstijn, 2011) and improve confidence (Kacetyl & Klímová, 2019). Strategy, which can be related to "tactic", can be used as tools to retrieve the success of strategies". To support this, strategy can be defined as the plan, step or conscious manipulation and movement toward a goal (Adityo, 2020). This concept of strategy was then transformed into "learning strategies", which are outlined as the operations applied by the learners to assist them in the process of "acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information". Learning strategies by Crippen & Antonenko (2018) refers to specific actions used by the learners to make the learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferrable to new situations (García Mayo & Lázaro Ibarrola, 2015).

Language learning strategies are classified into metacognitive, cognitive, and socioaffective. It was found that the most important emphasize was given to the metacognitive strategies (those that have planning, directing or monitoring).

Oxford (2003 as interpreted in Kashiwagi & Tomecsek (2015) proposes six main categories of learning styles, namely: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, memory-related strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies.

### 1. Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies enable the learner to manipulate the language learner material in direct ways Ender, (2014); Chafe (2010), e.g., through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, reorganizing information to develop stronger schemas (knowledge structures), practicing in naturalistic settings, and

practicing structures and sounds formally, repeating, analyzing, getting the idea quickly and taking notes

## 2. Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies Saputro, Adityo, Wardhany (2017) deal with identifying one's own learning preferences and needs, planning for an L2 task, gathering and organizing materials, arranging a study space and a schedule, monitoring mistakes, and evaluating task success, and evaluating the success of any type of learning strategy (Crippen & Antonenko, 2018). These activities are employed for managing the learning process overall. Metacognitive strategy links new information with already known one, self-monitoring.

In other words, metacognitive strategies involve the actions which go beyond purely cognitive devices, and which provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process. It consists of three strategies in this set, which is centering your learning, arranging and planning your learning and evaluating your learning (Crippen & Antonenko, 2018).

## 3. Memory-Related Strategies

Memory-related strategies help learners link on L2 items or concept with another but do not necessarily involve deep understanding (Macintyre & Legatto, 2011). Various memory-related strategies enable learners to learn and retrieve information in an orderly string (e.g. acronyms), while other techniques create learning and retrieval via sounds (e.g., rhyming), images (e.g., the keyword method), body movement (e.g., total physical response), mechanical means (e.g., flashcards), or location (e.g., on a page or blackboard). Moreover, grouping, and representing sounds in memory are also recommended (Mulder & Hulstijn, 2011 ; Macintyre & Legatto, 2011).

## 4. Compensatory Strategies

Compensatory strategies (e.g., guessing from the context in listening and reading; using synonyms and "talking around" the missing word to aid speaking and writing; and strictly for speaking, using gestures or pause words) help the learner make up for missing knowledge (Livingston, Shah, & Happé, 2019). This strategy enables learners to switch to the mother tongue, and use other clues (Mutlu, Solhi Andarab, & Karacan, 2019).

## 5. Affective Strategies

Affective strategies, such as identifying one's mood and anxiety level, talking about feelings, rewarding oneself for good performance, and using deep breathing or positive self-talk. Affective strategies refer to emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values (Şen, 2013). This strategy should not be ignored because positive emotions and attitudes can make language learning far more effective and enjoyable. On the other hand, negative feelings can stunt progress. Affective strategies consist of three sub-strategies that will help students to achieve it: lowering students' anxiety, encouraging students and taking students' emotional temperature (Chafe, 2010).

Leis, Tohei, & Cooke, (2015) also mention with EFL learners in Thailand, affective strategies showed a negative link with some measures of L2 proficiency. One reason might be that as some students' progress toward proficiency, they no longer need affective strategies as much as before.

6. Social strategies (e.g., asking questions to get verification, asking for clarification of a confusing point, asking for help in doing a language task, talking with a native-speaking conversation partner, and exploring cultural and social norms) help the learner work with others and understand the target culture as well

as the language (Gowthami & Venkatakrishnakumar, 2016). In addition, language is a form of social behavior; it is a communication, and communication occurs between and among people. Learning a language thus involves other people, and appropriate social strategies are very important in this process. There are three strategies to achieve this social strategy, asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others (Snell, 2010). In addition, social strategies (asking for clarification, cooperating with others and developing cultural understanding.

Those six strategies abovementioned are classified into: indirect and direct strategies. Indirect strategies refer to metacognitive, affective and social strategies. It is called indirect since these strategies support and manage language learning without directly involving the target language. Indirect strategies reinforce the business of language learning.

Direct strategies refer to cognitive, memory, and compensation strategies. Moreover, cognitive strategies are the mental strategies learners use to comprehend of their learning, memory strategies are those used for storage of information, and compensation strategies help learners to overcome knowledge gaps to continue the communication.

### **Gender Differences**

Gender differences refers to an individual difference generally existing and catching widespread attention in the foreign language teaching. Several studies indicated that gender significant or not, make a difference in learning language. Leavy, (2018) mentions that there is bias of gender in language computation as well as learning. It found that not only gender effect on reading comprehension and the use of cognitive strategies, but also observed the higher use of metacognitive strategies on male students reported that females use all strategies more frequently than males except for social communication strategy. Moreover, there were differences in the use of strategies, but not significant (Biabani & Izadpanah, 2019).

Another study, Bloemen-Bekx, Voordeckers, Remery, & Schippers, (2019) finds out that females use various language learning strategies more often than males. Likewise, there are significant differences between genders in the use of affective and metacognitive strategies. It can be seen that gender is one of the factors that can influence language learning strategies (Biabani & Izadpanah, 2019).

### **METHOD**

This study employs questionnaire surveys combined with interviews. This study involves 37 students (25 females and 12 males) of English Language Education Department. Seventh-semester students and above become the research participants. Questionnaire and interview are employed to gather the data. The questionnaire is taken form Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Danko & Dečman, 2019) as the questionnaires measure students' language learning strategy. Tsukamoto, (2012) also Inayati (2015) mentions that questionnaires are able explore a population's characteristics, attitudes, behaviours, and opinions of the participants in helping a complete and thorough analysis.

The questionnaire consists of 50 items in the SILL, which comprise 6 categories: Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, Metacognitive, Affective, and Social strategies. The SILL uses a 5-point Likert scale for which the learners are directed to respond to a strategy description. The criteria used for evaluating the degree of strategy use frequency are: low frequency use (1.0-2.49), moderate

frequency use (2.5-3.49), and high frequency use (3.5- 5.0). The questionnaires were given out during students’ regular English in July – October 2019. The interview covers the questions such as: students’ language learning strategy, the way they cope with difficulty, and their favorable language skills. It is possible if the question is developed.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were gathered from the questionnaires distributed to twenty-one students of ELED UMM during July- August 2019. Seven male students and fourteen female students were participated in this study. In this case, the process of gathering the data is as follow. The data were presented in the following table 2.

**Table 1. Result of Students’ Learning Strategy**

	Language Learning Strategy			
	Female		Male	
	M	SD	M	SD
Memory	3.1	0.6	3	0.89
Cognitive	3.6	0.6	3.4	0.37
Compensation	3.6	0.47	3.6	0.63
Metacognitive	4	0.52	3.4	0.47
Affective	3.1	0.78	2.9	0.81
Social	3.8	0.71	3.2	0.77
Average	3.5		3.3	

Table 1 showed that male used less strategy compared to female students. Male students were categorized into “medium users” of all language learning strategies. It could be seen on the score, as they showed between 2.5 and 3.4. Female students show “high users” of language learning strategies (between 3.5 and 4). Still, compensation strategy was “highly used” by male students (M = 3.6). They also employed metacognitive and cognitive strategies. Memory and affective strategies were the least used strategies for the male students (M = 3 and M = 2.9 respectively).

An effective English learning strategy may be implemented to train the students to study and grasp enhance the learning efficiency and lighten the learning load. It becomes an important consideration for the English teachers to study and train English learning strategy. English teaching should support the students to understand the importance of learning strategy.

However, slightly higher, female students were “highly used” according to Danko & Dečman, (2019) Metacognitive strategy (M = 4) was the most-frequently used strategy applied by the female students. Female students also used social, cognitive and compensation language learning strategies (M = 3.8, M= 3.6, and M = 3.6 respectively). The next strategies used were memory (M=3.1) and affective learning strategy (M= 3.1).

This sub chapter dealt with the description of each learning strategy used, which was described in the following parts.

### *Memory-related Strategy*

Memory-related strategy deals with remembering more effectively. The result showed that this strategy was the least strategy used by the female students (M=

3.1). Similarly, male students show the similar result (M= 3). Some students said that he did not use Memory Strategy since he is not good at memorizing (MRF, a male student). Another student, MKA, said that he did not use the strategy frequently. It contradicted to Mulder & Hulstijn, (2011), who found out that memory strategy was the highest-used strategy applied by the students in China. According to her findings, the use of memory strategy was associated with their dependence more on reading and writing to reinforce English. In addition, the students were rarely exposed to real English communication [Sauro \(2012\)](#).

The different result in this study might be caused by students' preferences in learning those four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Based on several interviews conducted, none of them prefer reading as their favorite skill.

*Cognitive Strategy*

This strategy copes with using all one's mental processes that helps learners to comprehend their learning. The strategy also refers to the step and method a student adopts in order to complete the specific learning. In this case, female students use this strategy more often than that of male students (M= 3.6 and M= 3.4 respectively).

The result indicated that both males and females learn English by watching English language program such as TV show, movie or news, read for pleasure, practice the sound in English, try to speak like native speaker and say or write in English.

*Compensation Strategy.*

Compensation related to compensating for missing knowledge. The result of the study showed that compensation strategy seemed to be favorable strategy for both male and female students to learn language (both M= 3.6). Male students score the highest point compared to other five strategies. In this case, compensatory strategies (e.g., guessing from the context in listening and reading; using synonyms and "talking around" the missing word to aid speaking and writing; and strictly for speaking, using gestures or pause words) help the learner make up for missing knowledge. Using this compensation strategy, students might think about what was missing when they found insufficient language. The participants (CAS) used gesture when she could not find exact words she needed to say. Other student, (SFN) said that he tried to find the synonyms, or used other terms to cope with the difficulty.

"I guess the new words, not directly find the meaning or translate it," said AWS, a female student. Both male and female students have a proper use of compensation strategy, like word guessing body language or use synonym. In this case, the compensation strategy can overcome the insufficiency in English proficiency.

*Metacognitive Strategy*

Metacognitive strategy deals with organizing and evaluating students' learning, which involves planning, implementing, reflecting, appraising and adjusting students' learning ([Saputro, Teguh Hadi;Adityo; Wardhany, 2017; Ghaith & El-Sanyoura, 2019](#)). This strategy was the most-frequent used strategy by female students and it scored the highest point (M=4). This result indicated that the females are better at determining, adjusting their study goal, selecting suitable study method and skill, appraising and reflecting the study result. The interview showed that the females paid more attention to the choice and instruction of their attention compared to the males. The result was also in line with those of [Manzoor et al., \(2020\)](#).

*Affective Strategy*

This strategy deals with managing students' emotions. Making themselves relaxed, talking to someone about their feeling when learning English, and giving reward when they were doing good at English showed the positive attitude to survive with the learning process. Hirschberg & Manning (2015) as shown in Table 4.1, there was a difference in the affective aspect between female and male students. female scored higher mark in affective strategy. Among those six strategies, males scored the lowest mark in this category.

This result was consistent with Manzoor et al., (2020) and Jeong, Feng, Krämer, Miller, & Marsella (2017) which revealed the similar finding. It might because the gender tendency in terms of social gender anticipation and the occupation tendency. In addition, most of people believe that work concerning language are more suitable for females. Correspondingly, Leavy, (2018); Mutlu et al., (2019) and Hedges, Borgerhoff Mulder, James, & Lawson, (2016) once remarked that one of the main reasons why the females attain greater success in foreign language learning is that they generally have stronger positive emotion, and this emotion reflects their anticipation of employment seeking. It relates to the belief for girls that a foreign language has a more important professional value to them, while boys do not think in similar ways.

#### *Social Strategy*

This strategy refers to learning with other. It refers to several strategies a student implements in order to endeavor for more opportunities, to keep human relations as well as to develop communication effect. Asking to others was one of the strategies when the students have problems in their learning.

Compared to males, female students use this strategy more than male students. Females score high point on this strategy (M= 3.8) while male significantly lower (M= 3.2).

"I prefer to work and learn with my friends. If I got difficulties, they will help me," said CAS, a female student. Moreover, the female students tended to learn together with their peers. This might explain why they used social strategy. In this case the role of peers did help them to cope with the problem in learning English.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study discovered that male and female students differ in the learning strategy, and the female students score higher in the use of learning strategy than the males. Metacognitive and social learning strategy were highly used by female students. On the other hand, male students score compensation, metacognitive and cognitive learning strategy as their attempts to learn English. The result also found that females use all the strategies more often than males particularly on metacognitive strategy. Moreover, there are differences in the use of other strategies, but not so significant.

In terms of gender differences, which included sex, individuality, age, study style, manner, motive on language learning strategy and the like, teacher should face and respect gender differences in the use of learning strategy. In this case, female-male students' preferences and need should be well-organized. It is important to encourage students to apply some new strategies properly considering their actual condition. For example, teacher/ lecturer could train male students to use social or metacognitive or social more in their learning process. Also, teacher/ lecturer could encourage both male and female students to use memory-related

strategy. At the same time, teacher do not have to enforce one type of learning strategy on the students, but she/ he should provide completely, the effective learning strategy for them. Teachers/ lecturers should also select the use for their students and promote the students full scale development

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