# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND ENGLISH ENLISH PROFICIENCY OF EFL STUDENTS IN PAPUA

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**Abstract**
*Having plenty evidence about the effect of various factors on Language learning strategies (LLSs) use in hand, the present study aimed at describing strategies students prefer to use in English as a foreign language (EFL) learning and find out whether the strategies have correlation to their English proficiency. 32 EFL sophomores participated in this study. The main instrument was the Oxford's SILL test version 7.0. The data were analyzed using the SPSS statistical software. Significant correlations at the level of 0.05 were found between (0.006 < 0.05), Compensation Strategies (0.021 < 0.05), and Social Strategies (0.021 < 0.05). In contrast, Memory Strategies, Cognitive Strategies, and Affective Strategies were not significantly correlated to English proficiency. This result provides area for future research to seek the effect of LLSs to students' academic performance.*

**Keywords**: Language Learning Strategies, EFL learning, Proficiency, Performance

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language learning strategies (LLSs) have gained great importance in the teaching- learning process of a second or foreign language context. They are among the main factors that help determine how –and how well – students learn the language. Brown (2007) describes strategies as specific methods of approaching a problem task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned design for controlling and manipulating information. Oxford (1990) defines learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (p.8). The strategies include memory, cognitive and compensation strategies which directly involve the target language and require mental processing, and metacognitive, affective, and social strategies which without directly involve the target language. Both direct and indirect strategies are applicable to all four language skills: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Therefore, when language learners encounter language learning tasks such as reading or writing, they can apply the several different strategies to complete the tasks.

Richard (1994) believes that language learners will be successful in the tasks due to use of an appropriate language learning strategy. According to

Ellis (1994) type of learning strategies is related to language learners' achievement. Studies have shown a significant relationship at a general level between learners' age, gender, proficiency, motivation and cultural background and learners' choice of LLSs. In addition, external factors such as teaching approach and environment also influence the development and use of learning strategies of learners from different aspects.

The effect of LLSs to students' English proficiency was analyzed further in this present study. The present study aimed to: (1) detect what LLSs currently used by university students in Papua; (2) examine the relationship between students' English proficiency and LLSs. Previous studies found that LLSs have correlation to English proficiency of EFL learners. So, the research questions in this present study are:

1. What are the current LLSs used by students of English literature class at Cenderawasih University?
2. Is there a relationship between LLSs and English proficiency of Cenderawasih University students?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following are studies related to the present study: first on language learning strategies, and second on language proficiency.

### 2.1. Language Learning Strategies

In ESL/EFL learning, some people can learn English very quickly and well, on the other hand, some people have problems learning. Therefore, many researches try to find whether learning strategies have something to do with learners' successful and effectiveness at learning the language. Language learning strategies refer to techniques used by language learners for the purpose of regulating their own learning (Oxford 1990). Language learning strategies (LLSs) are among the main factors that help determine how –and how well – students learn a second or foreign language. Oxford (1990:14-22) divides LLSs into direct and indirect. Direct strategies involve the target language and require mental processing of the language. These strategies include memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. Memory strategies help students store and retrieve new information while cognitive strategies enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means. Compensation strategies, on the other hand, allow learners to use the language despite their gaps in knowledge. The second LLSs are called indirect strategies as they support language learning without directly involving the target language. Oxford divides indirect strategies into metacognitive, affective, and social. Metacognitive strategies allow learners to control their own cognition; affective strategies help to regulate emotions, motivations and attitudes. Social strategies help students learn through interactions with others (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Functions and example of Strategies**

|  | STRATEGIES | DEFINITION | EXAMPLES |
|---|---|---|---|
| Direct Strategies | Memory | Enable learners to store and retrieve new information of a new language | Grouping, imagery, and rhyming |
|  | Cognitive | Enable learners to understand and produce new language | Reasoning, analyzing, summarizing, and generally practising |
|  | Compensation | Allow learners to use the language despite knowledge gaps | Guessing meaning in context, using synonyms and body gesture |
| Indirect Strategies | Metacognitive | Allow learners to evaluate their own language learning pattern and coordinate the learning process | Paying attention and self evaluation |
|  | Affective | Help learners gain control and regulate personal emotions, attitudes, and | Anxiety reduction, self encouragement, and self-reward |
|  | Social | Allow users to interact with users | Asking questions and cooperating with native speakers |

## 2.2. Research on Language Learning Strategies and Language Proficiency

Research on learning strategies has always been a complex issue, because many factors involve when EFL students are developing and using their learning strategies. Internal factors including learners' age, gender, intelligence, cultural background, motivation, personality and cognitive style and external factors such as teachers' teaching approaches and materials have been found influencing the use of language learning strategies for EFL learners. Since the purpose of investigating language learning strategies is to produce more effective learning the relationship between using language learning strategies and language learning results become the focus on many ESL/EFL research.

Language proficiency has been defined by various researchers. Oxford & Nyikos (1989) define it as ways of determining proficiency include: self-ratings; Phillips (1991) and Mullins (1992) identify language proficiency similar to language achievement tests, entrance and placement examinations, and language course grades. The following shows several main studies based on language proficiency.

Rubin (1975) observed successful second language learners. He found that the characteristics of good language learners are to be a willing and accurate guesser, to have a strong drive to communicate, to learn from communication, to be uninhibited and willing to make mistakes, paying attention to form by looking for patterns, taking advantage of every opportunity to practice, monitoring the speech of themselves and others, and focusing on meaning. Therefore, Rubin suggested that language teachers could help less successful learners to promote their language proficiency by paying more attention to productive language learning strategies. Bialystok (1979) examined the effects of using learning strategies on ESL learners'

performance and found that all strategies used in second language learning had positive effects on language learners' achievement. Oxford and Nyikos (1989) explored the relationship between language learners' proficiency and their use of strategy use as well. They used Oxford's SILL test to investigate 1200 students of university who studied five different foreign languages, and found that different linguistic background affected use of language learning strategies. The study also found that students who considered themselves proficient in speaking, listening or reading tended to use more language learning strategies.

Vann & Abraham (1987, 1990) investigated successful and unsuccessful language learners. The findings revealed that unsuccessful learners who use strategies generally considered as useful, and often they employed the same strategies as successful learners. However, the difference is that successful learners used strategies more appropriate in different situations than unsuccessful learners, and used a larger range of strategies in language learning more frequently and appropriately. Ehrman and Oxford (1995) found that only cognitive strategies had a significant relationship with language proficiency in the SILL category. Memory, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies had no significant relationship with proficiency. Since significant relationships between language learning strategies and language proficiency have been found on studies mentioned above, it can be concluded that language learners who use language learning strategies more than others generally achieve greater language proficiency.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out by using the descriptive research model. The participants of this study were 32 students, 4 males and 28 females, of English Language Education program at Cenderawasih University, Jayapura. All participants were on the second year studying. To obtain the score indicating students' English proficiency, the researcher collected the result of a TOEFL ITP-like test which was required in the TOEFL Preparation course, a compulsory subject of the program.

After collecting scores of performance and proficiency, the researcher deployed a Strategy Inventory Language Learning (SILL) test, version 7.0 developed by Rebecca L. Oxford (1990). It was the main instrument of data collection designed to obtaining information on the language learning strategies. Since it is the most frequently used questionnaire, its reliability and validity has been acknowledged by language researchers worldwide. The questionnaire consisted of fifty items which were distributed into six parts as follows:

1) Part A consisted of 9 questions related to Memory Strategies;
2) Part B involved 14 questions on Cognitive Strategies;
3) Part C included 6 questions about Compensation Strategies;
4) Part D contained 9 questions about Metacognitive Strategies;
5) Part E involved 6 questions on Affective Strategies; and
6) Part F consisted of 6 questions on Social Strategies.

Each participant had to answer all items, based on his or her personal response, on a 5- point Likert scale ranged from 1–Never or almost true of me to 5-Always or almost true of me. The answers were scored as follows:

1 point - Never or almost never true of me
2 points - Usually not true of me
3 points - Somewhat true of me
4 points - Usually true of me
5 points - Always or almost always true of me

After collecting all data, for the purpose of research use, proficiency scores were tabulated the same as the 5-scale grade ranged from the poor, 1 point, to the best, 5 points. So, all data had the same value, range from 1 point to 5 points. This uniformity was intentional. Finally, the data were analyzed using the SPSS statistical software version 16.0. for Windows. To show the general LLS preferences of the participants, a descriptive analysis was run, and to find the relationship between strategies variables and English proficiency, a correlation analysis was used.

## IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Data Presentation and Interpretation

To interpreting the findings which based on the SILL test, Oxford (1990) explains what averages Mean indicates as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| High | Always or almost always used | 4.5 to 5.0 |
| | Generally used | 3.5 to 4.4 |
| Medium | Sometimes used | 2.5 to 3.4 |
| Low | Generally not used | 1.5 to 2.4 |
| | Never or almost never used | 1.0 to 1.4 |

The results of statistical analysis to show a relationship between LLSs and scores on English proficiency are as follows:

### 4.1.1 Current LLSs Used by the Participants

To answer the first research question, what LLSs participants currently used, a descriptive analysis was used as shown on Table 2 to Table 8. From the result of the SILL questionnaire it can be understood that the participants reported on using all six strategies. The table below shows the mean of the overall strategy use of the participants.

**Table 2. LLSs Used by the Participants**

| | STRATEGIES | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MEMORY | COGNITIVE | COMPEN SATION | META COGNITIV | AFFECTIVE | SOCIAL |
| MEAN | 3.2913 | 3.7838 | 3.7544 | 3.8044 | 3.2131 | 3.3400 |
| STD. DEVIATION | .52736 | .64521 | .65962 | .71497 | .57514 | .64829 |

The findings indicated the participants reported on using all the six categories of language learning strategies. The most frequently used strategy was the Metacognitive Strategies (Mean=3.80) and the least frequently used strategy was the Affective Strategies (Mean=3.21). According to Oxford's index for interpretation of the LLS, Metacognitive, Cognitive Strategies and Compensation Strategies were *generally used*. The result of the questionnaires revealed that the participants *sometimes* used social, affective, and memory strategies. The results support O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) observation that not all strategies are equally used by the learners. The averages of all 50 items included the SILL test of the results were listed below from the most frequently preferred strategies to the least frequently preferred ones in each group as shown on Table 3.

**Table 3. The Ranking of Frequency level of 50 SILL items (N=50)**

| RANK | ITEM | MEAN | S.D | RANK | ITEM | MEAN | S. |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1 | 32 | 4.06 | 0.8 | 26 | 28 | 3.63 | 0.83 |
| 2 | 38 | 4.03 | 0.74 | 27 | 14 | 3.59 | 0.95 |
| 3 | 3 | 4 | 0.72 | 28 | 19 | 3.59 | 1.01 |
| 4 | 12 | 4 | 0.98 | 29 | 21 | 3.59 | 0.84 |
| 5 | 15 | 3.94 | 0.98 | 30 | 35 | 3.59 | 0.8 |
| 6 | 31 | 3.94 | 0.91 | 31 | 42 | 3.56 | 1.05 |
| 7 | 13 | 3.91 | 0.89 | 32 | 2 | 3.44 | 0.8 |
| 8 | 33 | 3.91 | 1.03 | 33 | 7 | 3.53 | 0.88 |
| 9 | 17 | 3.88 | 0.79 | 34 | 40 | 3.53 | 0.95 |
| 10 | 18 | 3.88 | 1.01 | 35 | 45 | 3.53 | 0.95 |
| 11 | 22 | 3.88 | 0.91 | 36 | 50 | 3.53 | 1.02 |
| 12 | 29 | 3.88 | 0.75 | 37 | 36 | 3.47 | 0.84 |
| 13 | 26 | 3.84 | 0.95 | 38 | 27 | 3.44 | 1.01 |
| 14 | 30 | 3.84 | 0.95 | 39 | 48 | 3.44 | 1.13 |
| 15 | 10 | 3.81 | 0.86 | 40 | 20 | 3.38 | 0.94 |
| 16 | 11 | 3.81 | 0.82 | 41 | 8 | 3.19 | 1.06 |
| 17 | 25 | 3.81 | 0.86 | 42 | 9 | 3.19 | 1.15 |
| 18 | 23 | 3.78 | 1.18 | 43 | 4 | 3.13 | 0.94 |
| 19 | 47 | 3.78 | 1.04 | 44 | 46 | 3.06 | 1.08 |
| 20 | 37 | 3.75 | 0.8 | 45 | 41 | 3.03 | 1.28 |
| 21 | 1 | 3.72 | 0.96 | 46 | 44 | 3.03 | 1.43 |
| 22 | 16 | 3.69 | 0.78 | 47 | 5 | 2.97 | 1.28 |
| 23 | 24 | 3.66 | 1 | 48 | 49 | 2.88 | 1.04 |
| 24 | 34 | 3.66 | 0.87 | 49 | 6 | 2.63 | 1.13 |
| 25 | 39 | 3.66 | 1.12 | 50 | 43 | 2.28 | 1.37 |

The top four strategies were item 32 "*I pay attention when someone is speaking*", item 38 "*English I think about my progress in learning English*", item 3 "*I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word*", and item 12 "*I practice the sounds of English*", while item number Item number 43 of SILL questionnaire, "*I write down my feelings in a language learning diary*", was the only item that had a

mean score lower than 2.5, indicating little of use of strategies. The item involved Affective Strategies. The data also showed that 62% of the items had mean scores 3.5 to 4.4 signifying the students used all Strategies very often. The study found that one third of the total 50 items had mean scores between 2.5 to 3.4 suggesting medium of use of strategies.

The averages of the results of the 6 strategies are shown in the following tables (Table 4 to Table 9) listed from the most frequently preferred strategies to the least frequently preferred ones in each group:

**Table 4: Part A- Memory Strategies**

| Item No. | Strategies | Freq. |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word. | 4 |
| 1 | I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English. | 3.72 |
| 7 | I physically act out new English words. | 3.53 |
| 2 | I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them. | 3.44 |
| 8 | I review English lessons often. | 3.19 |
| 9 | I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign. | 3.19 |
| 4 | I remember an English word by making a mental picture in which the word can be used. | 3.13 |
| 5 | I use rhymes to remember new English words. | 2.97 |
| 6 | I use flashcards to remember new English words. | 2.63 |

In Part A, the data showed that the participants apply all the strategies at different levels of frequency to remember the language more effectively. They usually make use of mental pictures and locations of the new words to remember them, connect the new information to what they already know, and express physically the new words. Strategies in items 5 and 6 were the least frequently preferred strategies; the students seldom prefer to use rhymes and flashcards to remember new English words.

**Table 5: Part B- Cognitive Strategies**

| Item No. | Strategies | Freq. |
|---|---|---|
| 12 | I practice the sounds of English. | 4 |
| 15 | I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English. | 3.94 |
| 13 | I use the English words I know in different ways. | 3.91 |

| 17 | I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English. | 3.88 |
|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 18 | I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully. | 3.88 |
| 22 | I try not to translate word-for-word. | 3.88 |
| 10 | I say or write new English words several times. | 3.81 |
| 11 | I try to talk like native English speakers. | 3.81 |
| 23 | I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English. | 3.78 |
| 16 | I read for pleasure in English. | 3.69 |
| 14 | I start conversations in English. | 3.59 |
| 19 | I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English. | 3.59 |
| 21 | I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand. | 3.59 |
| 20 | I try to find patterns in English. | 3.38 |

In Part B, the findings indicated that strategies in most of items are the most preferred used by the participants. They practice English pronunciation, watch TV shows or movies spoken in English, and use the language in various ways, etc. The only difference was the strategy in item 20; while they are learning English, sometimes the participants find patterns in English.

**Table 6: Part C- Compensation Strategies**

| Item No. | Strategies | Freq. |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 29 | If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing. | 3.88 |
| 26 | I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English. | 3.84 |
| 25 | When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures. | 3.81 |
| 24 | To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses. | 3.66 |
| 28 | I try to guess what the other person will say next in English. | 3.63 |
| 27 | I read English without looking up every new word. | 3.44 |

The answers to Part C signify that the participants use each strategy to compensate for missing knowledge almost at the same frequency level. They generally use synonyms of the words and gestures when they cannot think of

the word, make guesses to understand unfamiliar English words and try to guess what the other person will say next in English, as well as read English without looking up every new word.

**Table 7: Part D- Metacognitive Strategies**

| Item No. | Strategies | Freq. |
|---|---|---|
| 32 | I pay attention when someone is speaking English. | 4.06 |
| 38 | I think about my progress in learning English. | 4.03 |
| 31 | I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better. | 3.94 |
| 33 | I try to find out how to be a better learner of English. | 3.91 |
| 30 | I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English. | 3.84 |
| 37 | I have clear goals for improving my English skills. | 3.75 |
| 34 | I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English. | 3.66 |
| 35 | I look for people I can talk to in English. | 3.59 |
| 36 | I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English. | 3.47 |

The answers of the participants for the questions in Part D reveal that they apply all the strategies to organize and evaluate their learning frequently. For example Strategies in items 32 and 38 show that the participants usually pay attention when someone is speaking English, and think about their progress in English.

**Table 8: Part E- Affective Strategies**

| Item No. | Strategies | Freq. |
|---|---|---|
| 39 | I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English. | 3.66 |
| 42 | I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English. | 3.56 |
| 40 | I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake. | 3.53 |
| 41 | I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English. | 3.03 |
| 44 | I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English. | 3.03 |
| 43 | I write down my feelings in a language learning diary. | 2.28 |

In Part E, the results suggest that strategies in item 39, 42, and 40 are the most frequently preferred strategies to manage emotions: The participants try to relax, notice, and encourage themselves when they are afraid of using

English. The other strategies in the group are applied moderately. The participants less frequently write down their feelings in a language learning diary.

**Table 9: Part F- Social Strategies**

| Item No. | Strategies | Freq. |
|---|---|---|
| 47 | I practice English with other students. | 3.78 |
| 45 | If I do not understand something in English, I ask the speaker to slow down or say it again. | 3.53 |
| 50 | I try to learn about the culture of English speakers. | 3.53 |
| 48 | I ask for help from English speakers. | 3.44 |
| 46 | I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk. | 3.06 |
| 49 | I ask questions in English. | 2.88 |

In Part F, the questions are designed to test the ability of using strategies to learn with others. The analysis of the data signifies that participants mostly prefer strategies in items 47, 45, and 50; they practice English with classmates, ask the other person to slow down or say it again, and try to learn culture of English speakers. In this section, the answers of the participants show that they do not use strategy in item 49 at all: They rarely ask questions in English.

### 4.1.2. The Relationship between Proficiency, Performance, and LLSs

To answer the second and third research question, the relationship between strategies variables and English proficiency and the course performance, a Pearson's correlation was used (see Table 10).

**Table 10. Correlation between LLSs and English Proficiency**

| | | STRATEGIES | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | MEMORY | COGNITIVE | COMPEN SATION | META COGNITIVE | AFFECTIVE | SOCIAL |
| ENGLISH PROFICIENCY | Pearson Correlation | .223 | .348 | *<br>**.407** | **<br>**.477** | .171 | **.406**$^*$ |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .219 | .051 | .021 | .006 | .351 | .021 |
| *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). | | | | | | | |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | | | | | |

Significant correlations at the level of 0.05 were found between Metacognitive Strategies (0.006 < 0.05), Compensation Strategies (0.021 < 0.05), and Social Strategies (0.021 < 0.05). In contrast, Memory Strategies, Cognitive Strategies, and Affective Strategies were not significantly correlated to English proficiency. The results confirm other findings of other studies. However, the present research revealed no significant correlations between

English proficiency and Memory Strategies which is uncommon. Therefore, more studies have to be conducted in this area in order to confirm whether this is the feature among Papua students, the significant correlations occurred on 32 and 38 showing that the frequency participants use strategies to pay attention when someone is speaking English, and think about their progress in English affect their English proficiency. The strategies of using synonyms of the words and practice English with classmates also had significant correlation with proficiency.

## 4.2 Conclusion and Recommendation

The results showed that the participants were overall medium-to-high strategy users and that almost all language learning strategies were used by the students. The present study supports research into language learning strategies that to be more successful language learners should use learning strategies more frequently and choose strategies that are more appropriate to the task. Further, effective ways to use LLSs should be learnt not only by the students but also the teachers.

Eventually, one that needs to be more studied is the role of the teachers. Teachers may have a direct, or indirect, influence on the development and use of learners' learning strategies. Direct influence refers to the impact caused by teachers who carry out or infiltrate learning strategy training into teaching activities. Indirect influence on learning strategies refers to the subtle influence of teachers' teaching experience, teaching methods and teaching approaches on learners' use and development of learning strategies.

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