

**Students' Strategies in Learning English at Law Faculty
of Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu**

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the English language learning strategies used by law students and to identify the strategies most frequently employed in learning English at the Law Faculty of Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu. The research employed a quantitative descriptive design involving 77 first-semester students of the Law Study Program in the 2025/2026 academic year. Data were collected using a questionnaire adapted from Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which covers six categories of learning strategies: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including total scores and mean interpretation. The results reveal that students utilized all six types of language learning strategies, indicating varied and active engagement in English learning. Among the strategies, affective strategies were the most frequently used, followed by cognitive and social strategies. This finding highlights the significant role of motivation, emotional regulation, and active mental processing in supporting English learning among non-English major students. In contrast, metacognitive and compensation strategies were used less frequently, suggesting limited awareness of learning planning, self-monitoring, and strategic risk-taking in communication. The study concludes that while law students demonstrate strong affective and cognitive engagement in learning English, there is a need for explicit strategy-based instruction to enhance metacognitive awareness and communicative flexibility.

Keywords: *Language learning strategies; English as a foreign language (EFL); Law students; Non-English major students; Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL); Higher education*

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, English proficiency has become an indispensable skill for university students across disciplines, including non-English major programs such as law. English not only functions as a medium of international communication, but also as a critical academic tool for research, legal writing, and professional discourse (Oxford, 1990, as cited in Chen, 2025, p. 1). According to Chen (2025), "language learning strategies are tools for active, self-directed engagement that are vital for developing communicative competence" (p. 1). Such strategies enable learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning processes intentionally.

Language learning strategies (LLSs) refer to the specific actions, thoughts, and behaviors that learners consciously employ to improve their language acquisition and performance. The widely-used Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) characterizes these strategies into six

categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies (Oxford, 1990, as cited in Chen, 2025, p. 1). Recent empirical studies highlight the central role of metacognitive strategies—those that help learners *plan, monitor, and evaluate* their learning—in facilitating students' English language development at the university level. For example, Redjeki (2024) reports that "graduate students utilized metacognitive strategies more frequently to acquire English skills and demonstrated higher learner autonomy" (p. 1). Similarly, Loviani's (2024) research indicates that *Indonesian university students adopt a variety of English language learning strategies*, including metacognitive and cognitive ones, to support their language acquisition.

Despite the rich literature on language learning strategies among English majors and general learners, there remains a gap with respect to *students in the Faculty of Law*, who often take English as a compulsory but non-major course. Law students face specific linguistic challenges, such as understanding complex legal texts and expressing argumentative ideas in English. Waliyudin and Annisah (2024) emphasize that non-English majors encounter difficulties with vocabulary and grammatical structures and tend to apply *strategic learning actions* to address these challenges in their English learning process. They note, "students faced challenges in mastering English vocabulary, sentence structure, and comprehension due to limited language exposure," which necessitates the use of varied strategies to improve learning outcomes (Waliyudin & Annisah, 2024, p. 1).

Given this context, examining how law students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu select and implement learning strategies is both timely and necessary. By identifying which strategies these students employ and how they impact their ongoing English learning experiences, this study provides insight into learners' strategic behavior and offers implications for curriculum design and pedagogical support.

Based on the aforementioned background, this study aims to investigate the English language learning strategies employed by students of the Law Faculty at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu. Specifically, this research seeks (1) to identify the types of learning strategies used by law students in learning English, and (2) to identify the most strategies frequently used by law students in learning English.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to investigate English language learning strategies used by students of the Law Faculty at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu. The participants were 77 first-semester students of the Law Study Program in the 2025/2026 academic year, selected through total sampling to ensure full population representation. Data were collected using a questionnaire adapted from Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which consists of six strategy categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The questionnaire applied a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always) to measure the frequency of strategy use. Content validity was ensured through expert judgment, while instrument reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with a coefficient of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable. The data collection was conducted during regular class sessions with participants'

informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including mean scores and percentages, and the results were interpreted based on Oxford's (1990) strategy use classification to determine the level of strategy utilization among the students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

1. Types of Learning Strategies Used by Law Students in Learning English

The first objective of this study was to identify the types of English language learning strategies used by first-semester law students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu. The findings reveal that students employed all six categories of language learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1990), namely memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. This indicates that students did not rely on a single approach in learning English but instead applied a combination of strategies to support their language learning process.

Memory strategies were used to assist students in retaining new vocabulary through repetition, categorization, association, and the use of flashcards. Among these strategies, repeating vocabulary items frequently obtained the highest score (319), suggesting that repetition remains a primary technique for vocabulary retention among beginner learners. This result reflects the students' early stage of English learning, where memorization plays a significant role in building foundational language knowledge.

Cognitive strategies were widely employed and included activities such as reading English texts, writing sentences or paragraphs, imitating native speakers' pronunciation, and using dictionaries or digital applications. The high scores in this category indicate that students actively processed language input to understand meaning and improve accuracy. The frequent use of dictionaries and digital tools suggests that students are adaptive learners who utilize available resources to support comprehension, particularly when dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary.

Compensation strategies were also used, although at a lower level compared to cognitive and affective strategies. These strategies involved guessing meanings from context, using synonyms, or employing gestures when encountering communication difficulties. The relatively moderate use of compensation strategies suggests that while students attempt to maintain communication, they may still experience hesitation or lack confidence when dealing with linguistic gaps.

Metacognitive strategies reflected students' awareness of managing their learning processes, such as planning learning goals, monitoring progress, and evaluating learning effectiveness. Although these strategies were present, their moderate usage indicates that students have not yet fully developed strong self-regulation skills. This is understandable given that the participants were first-semester students who were still adjusting to university-level learning demands.

Affective strategies focused on emotional aspects of learning, including self-motivation, anxiety reduction, and self-encouragement. Social strategies involved interaction with others, such as asking for clarification, practicing English with peers, and collaborating in group activities. The use of these strategies indicates that students recognized both emotional and social dimensions as important factors in successful English learning.

2. The Most Frequently Used Learning Strategies by Law Students

The second objective of this study was to identify the learning strategies most frequently used by law students in learning English. The results show that affective strategies were the most dominant, followed by cognitive and social strategies. The high total score of affective strategies (1504) indicates that students placed strong emphasis on maintaining motivation and controlling emotional barriers in learning English.

The item related to self-motivation received the highest individual score among all questionnaire items, highlighting that students consciously encouraged themselves to persist in learning English despite difficulties. This finding suggests that emotional resilience plays a crucial role in sustaining learning engagement, especially for non-English major students who may perceive English as a challenging subject. The prominence of affective strategies aligns with previous studies emphasizing the importance of motivation and anxiety management in EFL contexts, particularly among learners with limited exposure to English.

Cognitive strategies ranked as the second most frequently used category, with a total score of 1459. Students frequently relied on reading practice, dictionary use, contextual guessing, and pronunciation imitation to improve their language skills. This finding indicates that students preferred practical and task-oriented strategies that directly support language comprehension and production. In the context of legal studies, where understanding texts and terminology is essential, the use of cognitive strategies is particularly relevant and beneficial.

Social strategies also showed a high frequency of use, with a total score of 1450. Students actively sought assistance from peers and lecturers, asked questions when encountering difficulties, and participated in group work. This result highlights the role of collaborative learning and social interaction in facilitating language development. Interaction with others provides opportunities for clarification, feedback, and exposure to different language uses, which are essential for developing communicative competence.

In contrast, memory strategies, metacognitive strategies, and compensation strategies were used less frequently. The lower frequency of metacognitive strategies suggests that students may lack sufficient awareness of planning and evaluating their learning processes. Similarly, the limited use of compensation strategies indicates that students may still be reluctant to take communicative risks when facing language limitations. These findings suggest that while students are emotionally and cognitively engaged, they require further guidance to develop higher-level strategic competence.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that first-semester law students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu employ a wide range of English language learning strategies, with affective strategies emerging as the most frequently used, followed by cognitive and social strategies. This pattern reflects the students' need to manage emotional challenges, sustain motivation, and actively engage with learning tasks when learning English as a foreign language in a non-English major context.

The dominance of affective strategies aligns with a growing body of recent research emphasizing the importance of emotional regulation and motivation in EFL learning. Waliyudin and Annisah (2024) found that non-English major students in Indonesian universities heavily relied on self-motivation and anxiety control to cope with limited vocabulary and low speaking confidence. Similarly, Teimouri, Plonsky, and Tabandeh (2020) argued that affective variables such as motivation and anxiety significantly influence learners' engagement and persistence in language learning. For first-semester students, who are still adjusting to academic demands and unfamiliar learning environments, affective strategies appear to function as a foundational mechanism that supports sustained learning effort.

Cognitive strategies were identified as the second most frequently used category, indicating that students actively processed language input through reading practice, dictionary use, contextual guessing, and pronunciation imitation. This finding is consistent with Loviani (2024), who reported that cognitive strategies were among the most commonly employed by Indonesian EFL learners due to their direct contribution to comprehension and language accuracy. Moreover, a systematic review by Plonsky and Kim (2023) highlighted that cognitive strategies remain central to successful language learning, particularly in contexts where learners must independently manage vocabulary acquisition and comprehension. For law students, the frequent use of cognitive strategies may be attributed to the academic requirement to understand complex texts, which encourages learners to rely on analytical and problem-solving approaches.

Social strategies also played a significant role in students' learning experiences. The frequent use of asking for help, collaborative learning, and peer interaction supports sociocultural perspectives of language learning, which emphasize the role of social interaction in constructing meaning (Vygotskian framework). Recent studies have confirmed that social strategies contribute positively to learners' confidence and communicative competence. For instance, Alhaisoni (2021) found that EFL learners who actively engaged in social interaction demonstrated better communicative outcomes and reduced speaking anxiety. The present findings suggest that law students perceive peer and teacher support as essential resources in navigating linguistic challenges.

In contrast, memory strategies, metacognitive strategies, and compensation strategies were used less frequently. The moderate use of memory strategies suggests that while repetition and association are still relevant, students may gradually shift toward more meaningful learning practices. This finding differs slightly from studies involving beginner EFL learners, where memory strategies often dominate (Griffiths & Oxford,

2019). The relatively low use of metacognitive strategies is consistent with Redjeki (2024), who found that metacognitive awareness is closely related to learner autonomy and typically develops over time. As first-semester students, the participants may not yet possess sufficient experience to effectively plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning strategies.

Similarly, compensation strategies were the least frequently used, indicating students' reluctance to take risks when facing linguistic gaps. This finding supports previous research suggesting that EFL learners, particularly in Asian contexts, often avoid using compensation strategies due to fear of making mistakes or losing face (Sasaki & Takeuchi, 2021). Such reluctance may limit students' communicative development and highlights the importance of fostering a supportive learning environment that encourages strategic risk-taking.

Overall, when compared with previous studies, the findings of this research reinforce the conclusion that non-English major students tend to prioritize affective, cognitive, and social strategies, while higher-order strategies such as metacognitive and compensation strategies require further instructional support. These results suggest that English instruction in law faculties should incorporate explicit strategy-based instruction, helping students develop greater awareness of planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning, as well as encouraging flexible communication strategies. By doing so, students can gradually develop learner autonomy, confidence, and strategic competence necessary for academic and professional English use.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the English language learning strategies used by first-semester law students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu and identified the strategies most frequently employed in learning English. The findings reveal that the students utilized all six categories of language learning strategies—memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies—indicating that they adopted a variety of approaches to support their language learning process. This suggests that law students are actively engaged in learning English despite it being a non-major subject.

Among the six strategy types, affective strategies were found to be the most frequently used, followed by cognitive and social strategies. The dominance of affective strategies highlights the crucial role of motivation, emotional control, and anxiety management in sustaining students' engagement in English learning, particularly for first-semester and non-English major students. The frequent use of cognitive strategies demonstrates students' efforts to actively process language input through reading, dictionary use, and contextual understanding, while the use of social strategies underscores the importance of interaction and collaborative learning in enhancing comprehension and confidence.

However, metacognitive and compensation strategies were used less frequently, indicating that students may not yet fully develop skills related to learning planning, self-monitoring, evaluation, and strategic

risk-taking in communication. These findings imply the need for explicit strategy-based instruction in English courses, particularly to foster learners' metacognitive awareness and communicative flexibility.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed for English language teaching and future research. First, English lecturers in law faculties are encouraged to incorporate strategy-based instruction into their teaching practices. Particular attention should be given to developing metacognitive strategies, such as goal setting, learning planning, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation, as well as compensation strategies that encourage students to maintain communication despite linguistic limitations. Explicit guidance and classroom activities that model these strategies may help students become more autonomous and confident English learners.

Second, considering the dominant use of affective strategies, English instructors should create a supportive and low-anxiety learning environment that promotes motivation and positive attitudes toward English learning. Activities such as collaborative tasks, reflective learning journals, and positive feedback can further strengthen students' emotional engagement and reduce fear of making mistakes.

Third, English courses for law students should be designed with greater emphasis on English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly legal English, to enhance the relevance of learning materials to students' academic needs. Integrating authentic legal texts, case discussions, and task-based activities may encourage more effective use of cognitive and social strategies.

Finally, future researchers are recommended to extend this study by employing mixed-methods or qualitative approaches, such as interviews or classroom observations, to gain deeper insights into students' strategic behavior and learning experiences. Further studies may also explore the relationship between language learning strategies and variables such as English proficiency, learner autonomy, or academic achievement across different semesters or faculties.

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