



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Indirect Language Learning Strategies Employed by TVET Students at Higher Learning Institute

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Jun 30, 2024	<p>Language Learning Strategies (LLS) are significant element for both students and language instructors to discover as it helps both towards language learning. One of the significant models of LLS is Oxford Model and it is divided into direct and indirect LLS. However, this study focuses on indirect learning strategies among technical engineering students at Technical Vocational Engineering Technology (TVET) in Johor Bahru. A quantitative approach was employed for this study and to obtain the data, questionnaire was distributed to the respondents. The respondents of this study were the students enrolling in three technical engineering programs. A popular questionnaire which is Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) was employed in the study as the data collection instrument. The findings from the data collection were analysed statistically and it was found that, majority of the students preferred to use Metacognitive strategy followed by Social strategy and Affective strategy. In brief, knowing the most preferred LLS by the respondents, language instructors will be able to plan suitable teaching and learning activities to assist them in acquiring the language.</p>
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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Learning strategies are definite actions, attitudes, or techniques employed by learners to overcome language difficulty as to improve their learning (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). However, Rose (2015) defines learning strategies as actions taken to learn language more effectively, while Oxford (1990), considers strategies simplify learning and make learning fun. There are quite a number of popular models of LLS and one of them is Oxford Model (1990). This model classified LLSs into six main types, namely, cognitive, memory, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social. The three types of indirect LLS are metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

Metacognition is defined as the process of awareness, analysis, and knowledge that a person has learned or thought (Teng & Yue, 2022). Learners usually used this strategy to assist them in planning their learning, control and also in evaluating their learning (Mark, 2023). With metacognitive, learners can create an appropriate plan for learning to take place and memorize required information. This strategy helps learners in identifying resources in terms of its availability, value, and planning towards learning goals. Learners who use metacognitive strategies, they gradually can become independent and autonomous learners (Efklides, 2008). In addition, students who employ

metacognitive strategies have positive impact on becoming more confidence and improve speaking proficiency (Forbes & Fisher, 2018).

Affective strategy is the second indirect learning strategy which refers to how learners identify their feelings and become aware of the learning situation or tasks assign to them (Arnold, 1999). These strategies enable learners to control their anxiety because they may practice deep breathing, laugh or they can choose to have positive-talk with someone that they prefer.

The next indirect learning strategy is Social strategies which are helpful for learners to achieve more effective language learning and understand the culture of the language they are learning. Some of the Social strategies are asking questions for clarification or confirmation, asking for help, and learning about social or cultural norms. Oxford (1990) delineates three sets of social strategies: asking questions for clarification or verification and correction; cooperating with others and empathizing with others to develop cultural understanding and becoming aware of others' thoughts and feelings.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) version 7 questionnaire, as it is the most cited questionnaire developed by Oxford (1990). The questionnaire used in this study is available in both English and Bahasa Melayu, comprises of 50 items to evaluate language learning strategies. Extensive reliability testing yielded an internal reliability value of 0.74, signifying its suitability for the study. Despite the questionnaire's comprehensive nature, this research focused specifically on 29 items because these items are categorized under indirect language learning strategies. To elaborate, the analysis delved into 9 items related to Metacognitive strategy, 6 items associated with Affective strategy, and 6 items pertaining to Social strategy.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study focused on students enrolling in the Technical Engineering program at a TVET higher learning institute in Johor Bahru. Specifically, participants were in semester 2 and 3 of their studies. A total of 146 students participated, with a significant gender disparity: 66.4% of the participants were male, whereas only 33.6% were female. This skewed gender ratio can be attributed to the program's inherent nature, emphasizing technical engineering education, which traditionally attracts a higher number of male students.

The respondents displayed a stronger inclination toward utilizing Metacognitive strategies in comparison to Affective and Social strategies. Specifically, the mean score for Metacognitive strategy was  $M=3.09$ , while Affective strategy scored  $M=3.09$ , and Social strategy scored  $M=3.29$ . These mean values indicate a moderate level of usage for all the strategies. The findings suggest that respondents employ these strategies moderately in their English learning endeavors, with Metacognitive strategy being the most frequently utilized among them.

The Metacognitive strategy in the questionnaire encompasses nine items, spanning from item number 30 to number 38. Among these, three items stand out with a notably high level of usage, as indicated by their Mean scores, while the remaining items fall into the category of medium usage. The highest Mean score was observed for item 32, wherein respondents actively pay attention when someone speaks English ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = .70$ ). Following closely are item 33 ( $M = 3.88$ ,  $SD = .86$ ) and item 31 ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = .85$ ). Item 33 demonstrates that respondents actively seek ways to enhance their English language skills and take note of mistakes made in English, utilizing this information to improve their language proficiency (item 31). On the other hand, the least utilized strategy among respondents was item 34, involving the planning of their schedules to dedicate ample time for English learning ( $M = 2.90$ ,  $SD = .97$ ). Despite this, the Mean score for item 34 falls within the medium level of usage, indicating an effort to allocate time for English learning activities. In summary, among the nine items within this strategy, none registered a Mean score at a low level of usage. Consequently, it can be inferred from the means of metacognitive strategies that respondents employ these strategies moderately in their English language learning endeavors.

The finding from this study showed a similar result with a study conducted by Nisbet, Tindall, and Arroyo (2005) which revealed that Chinese university students predominantly favored employing metacognitive strategies for language learning. Conversely, another study involving Chinese students, as well as students from three other racial backgrounds, found that Chinese students preferred utilizing social strategies. Similarly, Japanese, Korean, and students from other racial backgrounds showed a strong inclination towards metacognitive strategies in language learning (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). Both studies shared a similarity which they focused on non-native English speakers, indicating a prevalent preference for strategies such as active listening, self-improvement techniques, and error analysis. Moreover, Indian college students, too, demonstrated a preference for metacognitive strategies (Sheorey, 1999). These findings collectively suggest that non-native English speakers tend to favor metacognitive strategies. These approaches empower learners to effectively engage with English, facilitating communication and enabling consistent practice, thereby enhancing their language proficiency.

The Affective strategy, constituting six items ranging from item number 39 to number 44, represents the second indirect language learning strategy. Among these items, item 43 stands out with a notably low Mean score, signaling infrequent use of the strategy of expressing their feelings about learning English ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ). It is apparent that writing down their emotions related to English learning is seldom practiced. However, within the Affective strategy, three items reflect a moderate level of usage, while two items indicate a high level of usage. The highest mean score was attained by item 40 ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = .90$ ) (encourage themselves to speak in English even when faced with the fear of making mistakes), indicating that respondents consistently employ this language learning strategy. Following closely, item 39 represents the second-highest Mean in the Affective strategy category, depicting a high level of usage. This suggests that respondents consistently attempt to relax when feeling apprehensive about using English. Conversely, the Affective strategies with moderate usage levels reveal that learners occasionally recognize their nervousness or tension during English learning or language use (item 42) ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = .99$ ). They also occasionally reward themselves for performing well in English (item 41) ( $M = 2.97$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ) and share their feelings or engage in discussions about their English learning experiences. In summary, the Mean score for Affective strategies is considered at a moderate level of usage ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ).

In the realm of affective learning strategies, respondents in this study exhibited a strong inclination towards self-encouragement, motivating themselves to speak in English without fear of making mistakes (item 40). Additionally, they preferred adopting a relaxed approach when facing apprehension about using English (item 39). However, the strategy of documenting their feelings in a language learning diary was markedly unpopular. This aversion can be linked to the technical and engineering background of the students, where maintaining a diary seemed impractical and, in some cases, gender stereotyped as an activity primarily for female students. Furthermore, given the predominantly male composition of the respondents, the reluctance to express emotions in a diary was particularly evident among male students. Interestingly, a noteworthy affective strategy employed by the respondents involved their keen awareness of feeling nervous or tense when learning or using English. This heightened sensitivity to language elements such as grammar and pronunciation explained their apprehension, which contrasted with students who focused more on the message or content, overlooking grammatical intricacies. Moreover, engineering technology students engaged in self-reward, a strategy employed whenever they excelled in English. This self-motivation served as a driving force, encouraging them to enhance their language proficiency and become more adept language users.

Affective strategies are mostly considered the least strategy employed based on previous studies (Oxford, 1990). This is consistent with the finding of this study as Affective strategies are ranked as the least preferred strategies. The finding indicated that engineering technology students have low preferences to employ Affective strategies in language learning. Among the strategies in Affective group of strategies is lowering learners' anxiety such as by trying to relax when they feel afraid to use English (item 39) and giving self-encouragement by encouraging themselves to speak in English even though they are afraid to make mistake (item 40) either in pronunciation or grammar. This

finding is in agreement with Hong-Nam and Leavell (2007) which Affective learning strategy is the least preferred by monolingual Korean university students. On the other hand, based on Malaysia context, Noor Zainab and Babikkoi (2014) discovered that Malaysian secondary school students preferred to use Affective strategies the most as compared to other indirect learning strategies. This finding is in agreement with the study which involved 50 Chinese distance learners at Shantou Radio and Television University in China (Xiao & Hurd, 2007). It was found that students from the first year, second year and those who have graduated preferred to use Affective strategies the most, while the third-year students preferred to employ Cognitive strategies, which is the direct learning strategy. Thus, in average the most frequent used of strategies among the distance learners is Affective strategy. The differences between the ranked of Affective strategies in this study and other studies could be due to certain factors. For the students of engineering technology of this study, the factor is due to easy access of Internet as compared to secondary school students. On the contrary, for distance learners in China they might have insecure feeling in which they rarely in contact with other learners and also the lecturers.

The third category of indirect language learning strategies, Social strategy, comprises six items from item number 45 to item number 50. Among these, item 45 (asking others to speak slower or repeat when they do not understand certain things in English) stood out as the highly utilized strategy among respondents ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = .99$ ). However, the Means for the other five items in social strategies fell into the category of moderate usage. Notably, item 46 (asking English speakers to correct them when they talk) emerged as the second-highest Mean ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = .98$ ), indicating respondents' moderate engagement in this strategy. They also exhibited moderate involvement in learning about the culture of English speakers (item 50,  $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = .97$ ) and practicing English with fellow students (item 47,  $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = .94$ ). In summary, the Mean for social strategies indicates a moderate level of usage ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = .97$ ), suggesting that respondents moderately employed social strategies in their language learning endeavors. Consequently, Social learning strategies ranked as the second preferred language learning strategies among engineering technology students in the realm of indirect language learning strategies.

This study highlights the preference of engineering technology students for the Social learning strategy of asking others to slow down or repeat when faced with understanding difficulties. This inclination aligns with the characteristic of the younger generation, who are often unhesitant to request clarification from lecturers or peers when encountering challenging topics. However, it is important to note that this behavior may not be universal, as individuals with inherently shy traits might not engage in such interactions. Interestingly, Social learning strategies as the second preferred choice for indirect LLS among engineering technology learners, indicating a moderate level of usage. This contrasts with a study involving Malaysian secondary students, where Social strategies ranked third in preference (Noor Zainab & Babikkoi, 2014). The disparity in these findings can be attributed to the distinct settings and age groups involved. School environments and university settings differ significantly, impacting students' learning strategies. As students transition to university, they adapt to new systems and environments, which can influence their language learning strategies. Moreover, divergent results can also be found within university studies. For instance, a study conducted with first year TESL students from a local university ranked Social strategies as the second most preferred choice, contradicting the current study's placement of social strategies at number two. These inconsistencies might stem from the varying fields of study, indicating that the nature of the discipline could influence students' preferred learning strategies.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In brief, learners of engineering technology students preferred to use Metacognitive strategy the most, followed by Social and Affective strategies. The findings from this study mean that learning activities should be designed to match with the preferred LLS because it will enable students to acquire the language effectively. Nevertheless, learners should also be taught about LLS as it teachable and it will guide them to choose which strategy to use. LLS will be beneficial to both learners and teachers, because they can prepare themselves towards teaching and learning activities

better. Furthermore, with the fast development of internet after Covid-19, teaching and learning have started to move into Online Distance Learning (ODL), and LLS would be interesting to be investigated in the future.

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