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PREFERENCE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF FOUNDATION STUDENTS OF OMAN COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES, MUSCAT: AN INPUT IN DEVELOPING LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

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Abstract:
This study explores the realm of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), specifically the factors that influence the success of non-native English learners, with a special focus on their Language Learning Strategies (LLS) and individual learning preferences. Recognizing the diversity of learning strategies and preferences, the study conducts a critical analysis to provide English teachers with empirical data to advance their knowledge and recalibrate their teaching approaches to foster more effective English language instruction. Using a descriptive-quantitative approach, the study employs a survey questionnaire to collect relevant data from the respondents. The survey focuses on demographic details such as age, sex, and GPA, and the Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), covering six strategy categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Results reveal metacognitive strategies as the most preferred, indicating a strong inclination towards self-regulation and planning, while affective and memory strategies are the least utilized. Correlations between demographic variables, such as age and GPA, highlight the impact of students' backgrounds on language learning preferences. The findings offer vital implications for English teachers, emphasizing the need to design more adaptive teaching methodologies aligned with individual learning styles and preferences. This empowers English teachers to enhance both academic performance and second language

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acquisition, ultimately supporting students' long-term proficiency and success in their use of the target language.

Keywords: preference, language learning strategies, cognitive, metacognitive, affective

1. Introduction

Several factors must be addressed when learning English to achieve the desired outcomes. These factors include the effectiveness of teaching methods, the availability of learning resources, the use of instructional media, the competencies of the teacher, classroom management skills, communication patterns, and various elements that influence the teaching and learning process. Recognizing that each student employs different learning strategies and preferences, it is essential to analyze these strategies so teachers can implement the most effective instructional methods.

Students' diverse learning preferences significantly impact how they process information. For example, some students thrive in quiet settings, while others concentrate better with headphones or in dynamic environments. Likewise, some learners rely on visual aids, whereas others benefit more from verbal explanations. Importantly, no single learning style is universally superior; each offers specific advantages and limitations.

Students advance at varying rates in intellectual development, with differences in skills and knowledge. Thus, teachers must plan lessons carefully to help students achieve their best potential. Addressing individual learning profiles ensures that teaching methods align with students' unique needs. In regions where English is primarily taught in classrooms, teachers hold a pivotal role—not only in delivering content but also in creating engaging, motivating lessons (Kassing, 2021). Since many students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, such lessons often serve as their primary opportunity to use the language for communication (Suryati, 2013).

Proficient language learners are often creative and imaginative, viewing language as a tool for experimentation. They explore grammar, vocabulary, and sounds, practicing both inside and outside the classroom. They embrace uncertainty, focusing on what they know rather than dwelling on gaps in their understanding. As second-language learners, they use their first language and contextual clues to aid comprehension, immersing themselves in the language environment. This helps them acquire idiomatic expressions and develop conversational fluency while adapting their skills to different situations.

While not all proficient learners exhibit every characteristic, most develop these traits over time. They learn independently yet see teachers as facilitators or partners. According to Sykes (2015), a good language learner integrates classroom knowledge into both formal and informal contexts. By understanding their learning styles and refining their strategies, students can make learning more effective and enjoyable. Sewell (2003) emphasizes that interest in language learning strategies stems from the need to identify traits of effective language learners, underscoring the proactive role students play in their learning process.

Kassin (2014) highlights the importance of social strategies, such as seeking clarification and practicing with peers, in developing communicative competence. However, Kassin also observed that cultural exploration remains underutilized, suggesting learners may miss opportunities to immerse themselves in the broader social and cultural dimensions of language learning.

Oxford defines language 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*." Thus, language learning strategies are techniques or approaches that students use to enhance their progress in understanding, internalizing, and using a second or foreign language. Despite the goal of strategy training to promote autonomous learning, teachers remain crucial in guiding students toward self-directed learning and in evaluating their learning processes. Zimmerman (2014) argues that a teacher's initial task should be to identify students' learning strategies so that instruction can be tailored accordingly and to instruct learners on when and how to use strategies from the outset. Even when learners become independent and use strategies effectively, teachers must still assess their strategy use and offer further support. In essence, teachers are pivotal in the instruction of language learning strategies.

In the case of Oman College of Health Sciences - General Foundation Program, where the student population is diverse, understanding the students' strengths and weaknesses, as well as their overall performance in the ESL classroom, is essential to improve teaching methods and instructional approaches to enhance students' knowledge and skills. The researchers believe that understanding how students use Language Learning Strategies (LLS) or preferences offers valuable insights for language teachers to recognize and materialize a successful second language acquisition and develop a stable linguistic environment that is relevant to the current world.

2. Research Questions

The general purpose of this study is to describe the preferred language learning strategies used by the General Foundation Programme (GFP) Level 1 students. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following research questions.

1) What is the socio-demographic profile of the students in terms of:
   a. Age;
   b. Sex;
   c. Grade Point Average (GPA).
2) What are the preferred language learning strategies of the Level 1 General Foundation students?
3) What are the most and the least preferred language learning strategies of the Level 1 General Foundation students?
4) Is there a significant relationship between the preferences in language learning strategies and students' socio-demographic profile?

3. Study Aim/Specific Objectives/Hypothesis

3.1 Aim

The main target of this study is to determine the preferences in language learning strategies of level 1 GFP students in OCHS, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.

3.2 Specific Objectives

1) To determine the socio-demographic profile of the level 1 GFP students
2) To identify the specific preferences on language learning strategies of the GFP Level 1 students
3) To determine the most and the least preferred language learning strategies of the GFP Level 1 students

3.3 Hypothesis

- There is a significant relationship between the preferences in Language Learning Strategies and the GFP Level 1 students' socio-demographics.

4. Theoretical Framework

The study of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) is grounded in several key theoretical frameworks that provide a foundation for understanding how these strategies facilitate language acquisition. The following ideas serve as the backbone of the study, shedding light on the interconnected roles of various theories, studies, and literature.

This paper is anchored in different bodies of knowledge, such as the Cognitive Theory, which is central to understanding LLS, emphasizing that learning involves mental processes such as attention, memory, and problem-solving. According to this theory, language learning strategies are the tools or techniques that learners use to process information more effectively. Cognitive strategies, such as repetition, summarization, and inferencing, are considered essential for managing cognitive load during language learning.

It is also believed that Metacognitive Theory, which builds on cognitive theory, focuses on higher-order thinking processes that guide learning. Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's learning process. Learners who use metacognitive strategies can reflect on their learning, set goals, and adapt their strategies to improve outcomes.

Language learning strategies employed by students can also be associated with Social Learning Theory, as proposed by Bandura (1977), which suggests that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and modeling within a social context. This theory underpins the use of social strategies in language learning, where learners engage in cooperative learning, seek help from peers or teachers, and practice language through social interactions. Social strategies, such as asking questions, engaging in group work, and participating in discussions, are seen as crucial for language development.

Another classical theory that describes how students can effectively learn and acquire a new language is the concept of Affective Theory, which emphasizes the emotional aspects of learning, such as motivation, anxiety, and attitudes. Language learning can be an emotionally charged process, and effective strategies help learners manage their emotions to facilitate learning. Strategies like self-encouragement, anxiety reduction techniques, and maintaining a positive attitude toward learning are rooted in affective theory.

Lastly, Constructivist Theory, largely influenced by Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978), theorizes that learners construct their knowledge through experiences and interactions with their environment. In the context of LLS, constructivism suggests that learners actively engage in the learning process by using strategies to make sense of new language inputs, connect them with prior knowledge, and apply them in meaningful contexts. Vygotsky's concept of the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) is particularly relevant, as it highlights the importance of scaffolding and guided learning, where learners use strategies to bridge the gap between their current abilities and potential development.

Hence, this research is inherently interdisciplinary, with each theory contributing to a different aspect of strategy use, whether it be cognitive processing, emotional regulation, social interaction, or a constructivist approach. By integrating these theories, teachers can better understand the diverse ways in which learners use strategies to overcome challenges in language learning and achieve proficiency.

5. Literature Review

A study on language learning strategies (LLS) among less proficient learners in Oman examined the strategies most commonly used, focusing on the effects of age, gender, and work experience. The research, conducted with 82 students from Majan College, found that less proficient learners relied more on compensation and memory strategies than on cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective strategies. Interestingly, neither age nor gender significantly influenced the frequency of strategy use. However, part-time students with work experience demonstrated greater utilization of strategies than their full-time counterparts. This study employed the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) as its assessment tool (Boggu & Sundarsingh, 2014).

Similarly, Radwan (2020) surveyed 128 students at a college in Oman to investigate the relationship between gender and English proficiency. The study revealed no significant differences in strategy use between genders, consistent with findings by Ismail & Al Khatib (2020), Razi (2022), and Abu Shamis (2021). However, Radwan noted that strategy use varied between Omani and Palestinian students. Among Omanis, proficiency levels influenced overall strategy use, while Abu Shamis (2021) found no such effect for Palestinians.

In another study, Inguva, Tuzlukova, and Sancheti (2019) analyzed English learner profiles in Oman, focusing on internal and external factors influencing success in foundation English courses. Conducted at Sultan Qaboos University, this research utilized a bilingual questionnaire (English and Arabic) to collect detailed accounts of students' experiences, achievements, and challenges. The findings emphasized the value of learner profiles in guiding curriculum development, shaping student personalities, and equipping them with skills for academic and professional success.

Haifa (2018) investigated Language Learning Strategies Employed by English Majors at Qatar University and found that students used strategies with medium to high frequency. Metacognitive strategies were the most preferred (75.3%), while affective strategies were the least utilized (58.6%). The study concluded that proficiency levels influence strategy preferences, with metacognitive strategies helping learners organize and manage their language learning effectively. These findings align with Nurliana, Oktaviani, and Lestari's (2015) comparative study on English Education Department students, which revealed that while learners utilized all strategy types, metacognitive strategies were the most prevalent.

Additionally, Trabelsi (2018) explored General Foundation Program (GFP) students' preferences regarding written corrective feedback (WCF) in an Omani EFL context. The study aimed to evaluate students' perceptions of WCF and identify challenges in addressing teacher feedback. Findings indicated that students valued feedback when it was timely, clear, comprehensive, and effective. However, perceptions varied regarding the need for revising work based on feedback. Some students were motivated to revise, while others faced difficulties understanding feedback or engaging in one-on-one consultations. These results highlight the importance of tailoring feedback processes to student preferences.

A similar perspective is offered by Entwistle (1988), who categorises learning into three primary approaches. The surface approach involves memorization without deeper understanding. The deep approach is characterized by active questioning and comprehension, while the strategic approach combines elements of both to achieve optimal performance. These approaches underscore the need for differentiated instructional strategies.

The study by Ras (2013), "Outstanding Students' Learning Strategies in Learning English at Riau University, Indonesia," found significant differences in strategy use based on gender, ethnicity, parents' income, and academic background. Similarly, Tam (2013), in "A Study on Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) of University Students in Hong Kong," identified gender-based differences, with females using memory, compensation, cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies more frequently than males. Madhumathi, Ramani and Prema (2014), in "Language Learning Strategy Use and English Proficiency of Below Average Indian ESL Students," observed a linear relationship between low proficiency students and their overall strategy use, particularly favoring metacognitive and cognitive strategies.

Several studies suggest that context-based, meaningful strategies outperform rote methods. Oxford (1990) emphasized the effectiveness of creating meaningful associations, such as forming sentences with new words, for vocabulary retention. This approach aligns with cognitive theory, which underscores the importance of connecting new input to prior knowledge.

Chamot (2015) noted that learners often avoid mechanical memorization techniques, such as flashcards or rhymes, in favor of dynamic methods like mental imagery. Similarly, Cohen and Weaver (1998) highlighted that visualizing words in real-life contexts enhances retention and recall. Nation (2001) underscored the importance of reviewing and repetition but observed that learners often lack consistency in applying these strategies.

Mental Imagery and Retention by Cohen and Weaver (1998) suggest a moderately high usage of mental imagery strategies, such as creating a mental picture of a word in a context, which helps learners visualize the use of language in real-life situations, thereby improving both retention and recall. This method allows learners to integrate language into practical scenarios, making it easier to retrieve when needed. In his study on Reviewing and Repetition, Nation (2001) emphasized that while reviewing is important for vocabulary retention, learners often struggle with consistency in their review strategies. The findings suggest that although students acknowledge the value of repetition, it may not be applied as frequently as it should be.

The findings of the following authors highlight the significance of metacognitive strategies in language learning. Oxford (2011) emphasized the role of metacognitive strategies in fostering learner autonomy and self-regulation, which are crucial for language learning success. Her research demonstrated that learners who actively engage in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their language learning process tend to perform better and develop stronger language skills. Similarly, Vandergrift and Goh (2017) underscored the importance of metacognitive strategies in listening comprehension. They found that learners who pay attention to how they listen, assess their comprehension, and adjust their strategies accordingly are more effective in understanding spoken language. Tseng, Dornyei, and Schmitt (2019) examined self-regulation in vocabulary acquisition, finding that students often struggle with time management and planning, which are key components of metacognitive strategies. Their study concluded that learners who are more disciplined in managing their study time and setting clear goals tend to acquire vocabulary more effectively. Finally, Magno (2018) explored the role of metacognitive skills in developing critical thinking, finding that learners who regularly reflect on their learning, analyze their mistakes, and seek improvement opportunities are better equipped to think critically and solve problems in language learning contexts. These studies collectively emphasize that the effective use of metacognitive strategies is essential for language learners to become more independent and capable in their language acquisition journey.

6. Material and Methods

6.1 Research Design and Method

This study employed a descriptive-quantitative design which used a survey questionnaire to answer the statement of the problem. As Rangarajan and Shields (2013) elaborate, descriptive research is a tool to describe data and characteristics of the population or phenomenon being studied. In this case, the researcher described comprehensively the specific language learning preference/s that students apply in their English subjects.

6.2 Sample and Sampling Technique

The respondents of the study were Level 1 General Foundation Programme (GFP) students at Oman College of Health Sciences, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, with a primary focus on their English Language subject. The study aimed to describe and understand the Language Learning Preferences (LLP) of these students, with a total of 274 Level 1 GFP students considered. Total enumeration was employed, meaning all students in this group were included in the sample.

6.3 Data Collection

The study used a survey tool that covered two main variables: the personal profile and the language learning preferences. The questionnaire consisted of two parts:

- **Part One** collected basic demographic information, including age, sex, and Grade Point Average (GPA), which reflects students' previous academic performance. To obtain the students' GPA, a request letter was sent to the Office of Student Affairs, which approved the release of this data. The letter explicitly stated that the GPAs would be categorized to comply with Data Privacy Laws.
- **Part Two** focused on preferences for Language Learning Strategies (LLP), specifically examining Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, Metacognitive, Affective, and Social preferences based on Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The six categories include:
    - **Memory strategies** for enhancing recall.
    - **Cognitive strategies** for mental processing techniques.
    - **Compensation strategies** for addressing knowledge gaps.
    - **Metacognitive strategies** for planning, monitoring, and assessing learning activities.
    - **Affective strategies** for managing emotions.
    - **Social strategies** for interacting and learning with others.

The scale was modified from a 5-point Likert scale to a 3-point scale to simplify responses. The questionnaire was designed to assess specifically the language learning techniques used by students.

The validity of the instrument was ensured through content validity, which was established by consulting language teaching experts with extensive knowledge of English

language instruction and student linguistic development. To establish reliability, the instrument was administered to a different group of students who were not participants in the study, and the Cronbach Alpha Value was calculated.

6.4 Data Analysis

The study used both descriptive and inferential analyses to analyze the data. Descriptive analysis, including frequency and percentage, was used to describe the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, while the mean and standard deviation were used to examine the language learning preferences.

Furthermore, Chi-Square analysis was employed to explore the significant relationship between Language Learning Strategies and socio-demographic variables, using a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. This analysis tested the statistical significance of the association between one or more independent variables (socio-demographics) and two or more dependent variables (preferences in language learning strategies).

Before performing the statistical inference, assumptions such as homoscedasticity and linearity were assessed to ensure that the variables were linear (Ho, 2014). This can be done using the Shapiro-Wilk or Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests or by testing for skewness and kurtosis.

6.5 Ethical Considerations & Approval

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were upheld with the highest priority, particularly in relation to anonymity and confidentiality. All responses were used exclusively for research purposes, and the information collected was kept strictly confidential and private. This was clearly communicated to the respondents to ensure transparency and to prevent them from providing inaccurate or misleading information. To protect their identities, coded identifiers were used, ensuring that participants' identities remained untraceable and were safeguarded in compliance with the Data Privacy Law. In addition, informed consent was obtained from the students, confirming their voluntary participation and affirming that their rights and well-being would be fully respected.

Before involving the target respondents, the researchers provided a thorough orientation, explaining the study's aims, objectives, procedures, and the potential benefits and risks of participation. Since this study was purely descriptive-quantitative and involved only the completion of survey forms, the researchers assured that there were no risks posed to the student-respondents throughout the study.

For data management, all relevant information was handled following proper data protection protocols, ensuring that no part of the collected data would be made public. As part of the required research procedures, the study was submitted for approval to the College Research Committee (CRC) and the Research Center of the Ministry of Health, adhering to the appropriate chain of authority.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1 Socio-Demographic Profile of Level 1 GFP Students

Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the socio-demographic profile of Level 1 General Foundation Program (GFP) students. The data indicate that a majority of the students (60.2%) are 18 years old, while 39.8% are 17 years old. In terms of gender, the student population is predominantly female, with 66.8% of the students identifying as female, compared to 33.2% male students.

When examining their GPA distribution, most students (91.6%) have GPAs ranging from 90 to 100. A smaller proportion of students (5.4%) fall within the GPA range of 86 to 89, while 1.5% of students have GPAs between 80 to 85 and 75 to 79, respectively. The generally high GPAs among Level 1 GFP students could be attributed to several factors, such as robust academic support, a strong emphasis on foundational skills, and high levels of motivation among the students.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Socio-Demographic Profile of Level 1 GFP Students

Socio-Demographic Profile		***f***	%
Age	17 y/o	109	39.8
	18 y/o	165	60.2
Sex	Male	91	33.2
	Female	183	66.8
GPA	100 – 90 (Outstanding)	251	91.6
	89 – 86 (Very Satisfactory)	15	5.4
	85 – 80 (Satisfactory)	4	1.5
	79 – 75 (Fairly Satisfactory	4	1.5
Total		**274**	**100.0**

7.2 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Using Memory Strategies

Table 2 highlights the use of memory strategies for learning English, revealing key insights about the most and least frequently used strategies. The highest mean of x = 2.46 was found for the strategy "I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember," indicating that this method is frequently employed by students. Similarly, strategies such as thinking of relationships between old and new knowledge (x = 2.36) and creating mental images of words in use (x = 2.38) also show relatively high usage, reflecting their effectiveness in aiding memory retention.

On the other hand, the strategy "I use flashcards to remember new English words" had the lowest mean (x = 1.62), showing that this method is rarely utilized by students. Other less commonly used strategies include using rhymes (x = 1.79) and physically acting out new words (x = 1.88), which were only used occasionally.

It can be concluded that the category mean value of 2.156 suggests, on average, that students use memory strategies only occasionally. The findings indicate that while certain strategies, like using words in sentences and connecting new knowledge to prior

understanding, are popular, others, like using flashcards or rhymes, are less widely adopted. This suggests a preference for more context-based and integrative methods over repetitive or mechanical memorization techniques.

This finding aligns with Oxford (1990), who noted that context-based strategies, such as using new words in sentences or connecting new knowledge to prior learning, are more effective for vocabulary retention, which explains their higher frequency in the study. In contrast, the low use of mechanical strategies, such as flashcards and rhymes, aligns with Chamot's (2015) findings, which suggest that learners often find these methods less engaging.

Table 2: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Using Memory Strategies

Memory Strategies	**Mean**	**SD**	**DI**
1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	2.36	0.578	Often
2. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember.	2.46	0.542	Often
3. I connect the sound of a new English word and an image of the word to help me remember it.	2.24	0.685	Sometimes
4. I remember a new word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	2.38	0.612	Often
5. I use rhymes to remember new English words.	1.79	0.704	Sometimes
6. I use flashcards to remember new English words.	1.62	0.691	Never
7. I physically act out new English words.	1.88	0.739	Sometimes
8. I review English lessons often.	2.26	0.642	Sometimes
9. I remember new words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board.	2.41	0.664	Often
Category Mean	**2.156**	**0.6508**	**Sometimes**

Level: Never = 1.00 – 1.67, Sometimes = 1.68 – 2.33, Often = 2.34 – 3.00.

7.3 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Using Cognitive Strategies

Table 3 focuses on the use of cognitive strategies for language learning. It particularly highlights that the strategy, "I say or write new English words several times," obtained the highest mean, x = 2.52, and was described as used frequently. This indicates that repetition is a commonly used method for language practice, consistent with Oxford's (1990) observation that repetition enhances retention in language learning. Similarly, strategies such as trying to talk like native speakers (x = 2.49) and practicing English sounds (x = 2.54) are also employed often, reflecting learners' efforts to improve pronunciation and fluency, aligning with the findings of Zimmerman (2014), which highlight the importance of mimicry and practice in language acquisition.

On the other hand, less frequently used strategies include reading for pleasure (x = 1.82) and writing notes or letters in English (x = 1.98), both of which had lower mean. This suggests that while students focus more on oral and auditory strategies, they may not engage as much in reading and writing activities outside of structured academic tasks. Additionally, strategies like avoiding word-for-word translation (x = 1.92) and looking for patterns in English (x = 1.94) are also underutilized, which could indicate that

students may struggle with deeper linguistic analysis or prefer more direct methods of learning.

The computed category mean score of x = 2.214 suggests that cognitive strategies are used occasionally, with an emphasis on practical, repetitive, and oral practices over more complex or independent activities like reading or writing for pleasure. The result aligns with Ghafournia (2020), who investigated the differences across varying levels of EFL learners in the frequency and choice of learning strategies. The study found that as learners' reading ability improved, they were more inclined to choose strategies to facilitate reading processing, which reflected a greater autonomy in language learning.

Table 3: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Using Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive Strategies	**Mean**	**SD**	**DI**
1. I say or write new English words several times.	2.52	0.549	Often
2. I try to talk like a native English speaker.	2.49	0.543	Often
3. I practice the sounds of English.	2.42	0.607	Often
4. I use the English words I know in different ways.	2.47	0.556	Often
5. I start conversations in English.	2.1	0.644	Sometimes
6. I watch English TV shows or go to movies that are spoken in English.	2.23	0.707	Sometimes
7. I read for pleasure in English	1.82	0.654	Sometimes
8. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English	1.98	0.736	Sometimes
9. I first skim an English passage (read it quickly), then go back and read it carefully.	2.36	0.649	Often
10. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	2.36	0.656	Often
11. I try to find patterns in English.	1.94	0.666	Sometimes
12. I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	2.3	0.611	Sometimes
13. I try not to translate word-for-word.	1.92	0.701	Sometimes
14. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	2.09	0.733	Sometimes
Category Mean	**2.214**	**0.6437**	**Sometimes**

Level: Never = 1.00 – 1.67, Sometimes = 1.68 – 2.33, Often = 2.34 – 3.00.

7.4 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Using Compensation Strategies

Table 4 reveals an interesting mix of how compensation strategies are employed by learners. Notably, the most frequently used strategy is substituting unknown English words with phrases that convey a similar meaning, with a mean of x = 2.56. This indicates that students tend to rely on flexible language use to keep communication flowing when their vocabulary is limited. According to Dörnyei (2005), such adaptive strategies allow learners to navigate conversations with confidence despite gaps in their knowledge, underscoring their practical importance in second language acquisition.

Another commonly used strategy is guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words (x = 2.43), suggesting that learners frequently infer meanings from context. This aligns with the findings of O'Malley and Chamot (1990), who highlight guessing as a key compensation strategy for language learners to bridge understanding in real-time

interactions. However, strategies like creating new words (x = 2.11) and reading without looking up every word (x = 1.91) are used less frequently. This shows a reluctance to engage in riskier or more independent methods, perhaps due to fear of making mistakes or misunderstanding key elements, a finding consistent with Cohen's (2011) work on learner anxiety and cautious behavior in language learning.

As shown in the category mean of x = 2.255, compensation strategies are used moderately, reflecting a balanced approach where learners make use of guessing and substitution but are less inclined to take creative linguistic risks. This suggests that while learners are adept at overcoming communication barriers, they tend to stick to safer methods when unsure of the language.

Table 4: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Using Compensation Strategies

	Mean	SD	DI
1. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	2.43	0.525	Often
2. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	2.26	0.703	Sometimes
3. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	2.11	0.679	Sometimes
4. I read English without looking up every new word.	1.91	0.678	Sometimes
5. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	2.26	0.702	Sometimes
6. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	2.56	0.633	Often
Category Mean	**2.255**	**0.6533**	**Sometimes**

Level: Never = 1.00 – 1.67, Sometimes = 1.68 – 2.33, Often = 2.34 – 3.00.

7.5 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Using Metacognitive Strategies

Table 5 reveals key insights into the use of metacognitive strategies among language learners. The strategy with the highest mean, x = 2.59, is "I try to find out how to be a better learner of English," emphasizing that learners are actively seeking ways to improve their learning processes. This finding aligns with Oxford's (2011) study, which highlights the importance of metacognitive strategies in fostering learner autonomy and self-regulation, essential components for successful language acquisition. Additionally, "I pay attention when someone is speaking English" (x = 2.57) also ranks highly, reporting that learners are attentive listeners, which is critical for language comprehension and skill development, as noted by Vandergrift and Goh (2017).

On the lower end, "I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English" has x = 2.11, indicating that while learners are motivated to improve, time management is less of a priority. This echoes the findings by Tseng, Dörnyei, and Schmitt (2019), who observed that students often struggle with planning and managing study time, which can impact their language development. Similarly, "I look for people I can talk to in English" (x = 2.14) is used less frequently, suggesting that while learners are open to improvement, they may have fewer opportunities for authentic language practice or may not actively seek them out, a pattern observed in a study by Magno (2018).

Hence, the overall category mean of x = 2.373 shows that metacognitive strategies are frequently used, with a tendency toward reflective and improvement-oriented

practices rather than structured planning or proactive engagement in real-world conversations.

Table 5: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Using Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive Strategies	Mean	SD	DI
1. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	2.47	0.594	Often
2. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	2.56	0.597	Often
3. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	2.57	0.578	Often
4. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	2.59	0.521	Often
5. I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	2.11	0.616	Sometimes
6. I look for people I can talk to in English.	2.14	0.738	Sometimes
7. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	2.22	0.597	Sometimes
8. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	2.42	0.583	Often
9. I think about my progress in learning English.	2.28	0.637	Sometimes
Category Mean	**2.373**	**0.6067**	**Often**

Level: Never = 1.00 – 1.67, Sometimes = 1.68 – 2.33, Often = 2.34 – 3.00.

7.6 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Using Affective Strategies

The findings from Table 6 highlight the frequent use of affective strategies among the learners, with the overall category mean of 2.082 indicating that these strategies are used "often." The highest mean was recorded for the statement, "I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake," with x = 2.43. This indicates that learners frequently motivate themselves to overcome fear and hesitation in using English. Similarly, the strategy with x = 2.42, "I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English," also ranked high, which underscores that learners often manage their anxiety when speaking English. These results suggest that managing fear and anxiety plays a central role in their language-learning process.

On the other hand, the lowest mean was found for the strategy "I write down my feelings in a language learning diary" (x = 1.55), showing that students seldom use this reflective approach to process their emotions while learning. Another relatively infrequent strategy was "I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English," with x = 1.95, implying that learners rarely share their emotional experiences with others.

Supporting the overall findings, Oxford (2011) states the importance of effective strategies in language learning, particularly in managing anxiety and promoting positive emotions. The research suggests that learners who effectively handle their emotions tend to be more successful in language acquisition. This is also congruent with the study of Inguva, Tuzlukova, and Sancheti (2019), whose results highlighted that understanding learner profiles could guide future curriculum design and implementation, shaping students' personalities and preparing them with the skills needed for academic and professional success.

Table 6: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Using Affective Strategies

Affective Strategies	**Mean**	**SD**	**DI**
1. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	2.42	0.67	Often
2. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	2.43	0.614	Often
3. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	1.93	0.752	Often
4. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	2.21	0.724	Often
5. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	1.55	0.706	Sometimes
6. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	1.95	0.771	Sometimes
Category Mean	**2.082**	**0.7062**	**Often**

Level: Never = 1.00 – 1.67, Sometimes = 1.68 – 2.33, Often = 2.34 – 3.00.

7.7 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Using Social Strategies

Table 7 shows the findings on social strategies. It reveals that the SILL strategy is used moderately by the learners, as reflected in the overall category mean $\underline{x} = 2.182$. This implies that GFP students tend to use this language-learning strategy sometimes. It is observed that the majority of the GFP students use the statement, *"If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again"*, often with $\underline{x} = 2.46$ which denotes that the learners frequently seek clarification in conversations to better comprehend spoken English. This reflects their proactive effort to ensure comprehension during communication, a crucial social interaction strategy in language learning.

Meanwhile, GFP students show less interest in the strategy "I try to learn about the culture of English speakers," as reflected by its mean of x=1.99, suggesting that learners engage infrequently in exploring the cultural context of the language. Similarly, other social strategies, such as "I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk" (x=2.08) and "I practice English with other students" (x=2.17), were also used less frequently, indicating a tendency to avoid direct feedback or peer interaction.

The result aligns with the findings of Trabelsi (2018), who investigated the perceptions and preferences of General Foundation Program (GFP) students regarding written corrective feedback (WCF) in an Omani EFL context. The study revealed that students generally put a high value on feedback, viewing it as timely, clear, comprehensive, and effective, much like how learners in this current study engage in seeking clarification to improve their English communication skills. Kassin (2021) also suggests that while students are proactive in seeking assistance or clarification, they may be missing out on fully engaging with the social and cultural dimensions of the language.

Table 7: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Using Social Strategies

Social Strategies	Mean	SD	DI
1. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again.	2.46	0.568	Often
2. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	2.08	0.719	Sometimes
3. I practice English with other students.	2.17	0.757	Sometimes
4. I ask for help from English speakers.	2.16	0.744	Sometimes
5. I ask questions in English.	2.23	0.619	Sometimes
6. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	1.99	0.812	Sometimes
Category Mean	**2.182**	**0.7032**	**Sometimes**

Level: Never = 1.00 – 1.67, Sometimes = 1.68 – 2.33, Often = 2.34 – 3.00.

7.8 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning in the Six Strategies

The summary of the six Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) categories highlights varying degrees of strategy use among learners. The most preferred strategies are metacognitive strategies, with a mean of 2.373, indicating that learners frequently engage in self-monitoring, planning, and evaluating their learning process. This suggests that learners are often mindful of their learning progress and make efforts to improve their English skills. On the other hand, the least preferred strategies are affective strategies, with a mean of 2.082, suggesting that students are less inclined to manage their emotions or seek emotional support when learning English. This is also true in memory and social strategies.

Haifa (2018) on Language Learning Strategies Employed by English Majors at Qatar University, found out that the students used learning strategies with high to medium frequency. They preferred to use metacognitive strategies the most (75.3%), while they showed the least use of affective strategies (58.6%). Overall, the results indicate that Level and Proficiency have an impact on the use of certain strategies. The strategy use reported by these learners indicated a high preference for metacognitive strategies which helped them in directing, organizing and planning their language learning.

Table 8: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning in the Six Strategies

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning	Mean	SD	DI
1. Memory Strategies	2.156	0.6508	Sometimes
2. Cognitive Strategies	2.214	0.6437	Sometimes
3. Compensation Strategies	2.255	0.6533	Sometimes
4. Metacognitive Strategies	2.373	0.6067	Often
5. Affective Strategies	2.082	0.7062	Sometimes
6. Social Strategies	2.182	0.7032	Sometimes

Level: Never = 1.00 – 1.67, Sometimes = 1.68 – 2.33, Often = 2.34 – 3.00.

7.9 Most Preferred SILL by the Level 1 GPS Students

Table 9 highlights the most preferred strategies of Level 1 GFP students in their English learning process. The most frequently used strategies, as indicated by the highest mean scores, are predominantly metacognitive strategies. The top-ranked strategy, "I try to find

out how to be a better learner of English," falls under the metacognitive category with a mean of 2.59. Other metacognitive strategies, such as paying attention when someone is speaking English (2nd place) and noticing mistakes to improve (4th place), also rank high. This mirrors the findings from Table 8, where metacognitive strategies have the highest overall mean (2.373), making them the most preferred category among students. This finding shows that students tend to favor strategies that involve active self-monitoring and problem-solving (metacognitive strategies). A similar finding was presented by Nurliana Oktaviani Lestari (2015) in her study on the language learning strategies of English Education Department students at FITK. Her comparison of fourth and sixth-semester students revealed that both groups most frequently used metacognitive strategies. However, the least frequently used strategy differed between the groups: fourth-semester students used memory strategies the least, while sixth-semester students reported using social strategies the least.

Table 9: Most Preferred SILL by the Level 1 GPS Students

SILL Statements	Category	Mean	DI	Rank
1. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	Metacognitive	2.59	Often	1st
2. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	Metacognitive	2.57	Often	2nd
3. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	Compensation	2.56	Often	3rd
4. I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	Metacognitive	2.56	Often	4th
5. I say or write new English words several times.	Cognitive	2.52	Often	5th
6. I try to talk like a native English speaker.	Cognitive	2.49	Often	6th
7. I use the English words I know in different ways.	Cognitive	2.47	Often	7th
8. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	Metacognitive	2.47	Often	8th
9. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember.	Memory	2.46	Often	9th
10. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again.	Social	2.46	Often	10th
11. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	Compensation	2.43	Often	11th
12. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	Affective	2.43	Often	12th
13. I practice the sounds of English.	Cognitive	2.42	Often	13th
14. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	Metacognitive	2.42	Often	14th
15. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	Affective	2.42	Often	15th
16. I remember new words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board.	Memory	2.41	Often	16th
17. I remember a new word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	Memory	2.38	Often	17th
18. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	Memory	2.36	Often	18th
19. I first skim an English passage (read it quickly), then go back and read carefully.	Cognitive	2.36	Often	19th
20. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	Cognitive	2.36	Often	20th

Level: Never = 1.00 – 1.67, Sometimes = 1.68 – 2.33, Often = 2.34 – 3.00.

7.10 Least Preferred SILL by the Level 1 GPS Students

Table 10 presents the least preferred language learning strategies by Level 1 GFP students, with emphasis on affective and cognitive strategies. The strategy ranked as the lowest is *"I write down my feelings in a language learning diary,"* categorized under affective strategies, with a mean of 1.55, indicating it is *"never"* used by students. This suggests that students are less inclined to engage in emotional reflection or self-expression as part of their language-learning process. The second least preferred strategy is *"I use flashcards to remember new English words,"* a cognitive strategy with a mean of 1.62. This ranking indicates that students are less frequently relying on traditional memorization strategies like the use of flashcards for vocabulary retention. This finding is in line with the overall trend from Table 8, where affective strategies have a lower category mean $\underline{x} = 2.082$, showing that students generally do not prioritize strategies focused on managing emotions and cognitive strategies, where flashcards are less favored in comparison to other methods. In both cases, the least preferred strategies highlight that students are less likely to use strategies focused on emotional management or rote memorization, in contrast to more active or reflective learning techniques such as metacognitive strategies. However, Boggu and Sundarsingh (2014) found that less proficient learners tended to use compensation and memory strategies more frequently than cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective strategies.

Table 10: Least Preferred SILL by the Level 1 GPS Students

SILL Statements	Category	Mean	DI	Rank
1. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	Affective	1.55	Never	1st
2. I use flashcards to remember new English word.	Cognitive	1.62	Never	2nd

Level: Never = 1.00 – 1.67, Sometimes = 1.68 – 2.33, Often = 2.34 – 3.00.

7.11 Correlational Analysis Between the Preferences in Language Learning Strategies and Students' Socio-Demography

Table 11 presents a correlational analysis between the preferences in language learning strategies and the socio-demographic factors like age, sex, and GPA. The analysis reveals several significant relationships, particularly between language learning strategies and students' age and GPA.

Age has the most significant correlation with most strategies. Memory strategies ($\chi^2 = 10.2$, $p = 0.006$), cognitive strategies ($\chi^2 = 7.80$, $p = 0.020$), compensation strategies ($\chi^2 = 7.45$, $p = 0.024$), metacognitive strategies ($\chi^2 = 6.63$, $p = 0.036$), and affective strategies ($\chi^2 = 12.1$, $p = 0.002$) all demonstrate statistically significant relationships with age, indicating that students' age plays a notable role in their preference for various language learning strategies. This indicates that as students age, they are likely to be more inclined toward certain strategies over others. GPA also shows a strong correlation with several strategies. Memory strategies ($\chi^2 = 58.1$, $p < .001$), cognitive strategies ($\chi^2 = 24.7$, $p < .001$), and affective strategies ($\chi^2 = 13.6$, $p = 0.034$) are significantly related to students' GPA,

implying that students with higher GPAs tend to prefer certain strategies, particularly memory and cognitive strategies. This indicates that students with better academic performance are likely to use more systematic and reflective approaches to language learning. Sex, however, only shows a significant correlation with metacognitive strategies ($\chi^2 = 14.6$, $p < .001$) and social strategies ($\chi^2 = 0.895$, $p = 0.011$). This indicates that male and female students differ significantly in their use of metacognitive and social strategies but not in other areas, such as memory or cognitive strategies.

It can be said that age and GPA seem to be the most influential socio-demographic factors affecting students' language learning strategies, particularly in memory, cognitive, and affective strategies. Sex is also a significant factor, but only in the preference for metacognitive and social strategies.

As cited by Ras (2013), who explored the learning strategies of outstanding students at Riau University, Indonesia, there was a significant difference in the use of strategies based on gender, ethnic group, parents' income, and academic background. Similarly, Tam (2013) found that Hong Kong university students displayed gender differences in their use of memory, compensation, cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies, with females using these strategies more frequently. Madhumathi, Ramani, and Prema (2014) also identified a linear relationship between low-proficiency ESL students and their overall strategy use, suggesting that lower proficiency aligns with reduced strategy application.

According to Inguva, Tuzlukova, and Sancheti (2019), who examined the English language learner profile in Oman, the learner profile had an important role in shaping the personality of Omani foundation program students and equipping them with all the necessary skills required for their future academic studies and work. It could serve as a guide for redesigning the foundation program curriculum, rethinking teaching methodologies and rewording the graduate attributes aligning with the societal demand. However, age and gender have no significant influence on the frequency of strategy use. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) for learners of English as a foreign language was employed in the study (Boggu & Sundarsingh, 2014)

Table 11: Correlational Analysis Between the Preferences in Language Learning Strategies and Students' Socio-Demography

Socio-Demography / **SILL**		**Age**	**Sex**	**GPA**
Memory Strategies	χ^2	10.2	2.69	58.1
	$p-value$	**0.006**	0.261	**<.001**
Cognitive Strategies	χ^2	7.80	2.04	24.7
	$p-value$	**0.020**	0.361	**<.001**
Compensation Strategies	χ^2	7.45	2.48	8.83
	$p-value$	**0.024**	0.289	0.183
Metacognitive Strategies	χ^2	6.63	14.6	9.42
	$p-value$	**0.036**	**<.001**	0.151
Affective Strategies	χ^2	12.1	0.222	13.6
	$p-value$	**0.002**	0.895	**0.034**
Social Strategies	χ^2	4.85	0.895	8.99
	$p-value$	0.089	**0.011**	0.174

SILL Level: Often-3, Sometimes-2, Never-1
N = 274, df = 2(age, sex), df = 6(GPA) Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

8. Recommendations

This study will serve as a valuable guide for English language teachers in developing targeted programs for non-English-speaking students or those struggling with the basics of English. By identifying the most effective language learning strategies (LLS), teachers will be able to tailor their teaching methods to meet the specific needs of their students, ultimately leading to improved language acquisition.

Moreover, the findings can help in the creation of programs that not only improve students' language skills but also their comprehension and retention in other English-taught subjects, boosting their overall academic success. These insights can also support school administrators in developing policies and programs that equip non-English students with the necessary tools and resources for effective language learning. Over the long term, mastering language through effective LLS can open up greater career opportunities in the global job market, enhancing professional prospects in diverse fields.

9. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is evident that students demonstrate varying preferences for language learning strategies, with metacognitive strategies being the most commonly used, while memory and affective strategies being the least preferred. This suggests that learners prioritize self-regulation and reflection in their English language acquisition but may underutilize strategies related to emotional management and memory retention techniques. The correlation between strategy preferences and socio-demographic factors

like age, gender, and academic performance further highlights the need for targeted instructional approaches that cater to diverse learner profiles.

In light of these findings, teachers should focus on fostering a balanced use of language learning strategies by providing more opportunities for students to engage with underutilized strategies, such as memory aids and affective techniques. Teachers can incorporate activities that encourage emotional resilience in language learning, as well as introduce more creative ways to enhance memory retention, such as the use of flashcards or mnemonic devices. Additionally, personalized learning plans could be developed to address the specific needs of different student groups, ensuring that all learners can effectively apply a broad range of strategies in their language learning journey.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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