# The Use of Language Learning Strategies by Pakistani M.A. English Students in Literature/Linguistics

Akbar Ali[*], Mamuna Ghani[**], Fazal Malik[***] and Aziz Ahmad[****]

## Abstract

*The present study (450 participants) investigated the frequency of language learning strategies' (LLS) use by M.A.in English Literature/Linguistics students in Pakistan by using SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning). The data was analyses by using SPSS (statistical Package for Social Sciences). The findings of the study revealed that most of these students use LLS at a medium frequency for the overall list of 50 strategies. Out of the six subgroups of strategies only 'meta cognitive' strategies are used highly frequently by all the students, implying that managing and organising their language learning is more important for them than any other thing.*

**Keywords:** English Language, Language learning strategies, English Literature, Linguistics, Pakistan

## English Language in Pakistan

Pakistan is a multilingual country where Urdu is the national language of Pakistan while English enjoys the status of official language in the country. However, excluding English language there are 72 languages spoken in the country. Out of these 72 languages, Aero and Gowro has the smallest number of speakers (Aero has 150 and Gowro 200 speakers only) while Punjabi has the largest number of speakers of 61 million.[1]

Despite the fact that English is a compulsory subject for the initial fourteen years of every student's academic career, the students do not achieve that level of proficiency in English as can

[*] Dr. Akbar Ali, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Hazara University, Dhodial, Mansehra.

[**] Dr. Mamuna Ghani, Professor, Department of English, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur.

[***] Fazal Malik, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Abbottabad University of Science &

Technology, Havelian, Abbottabad.

[****] Aziz Ahmad, Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Malakand.

be expected from learners exposed to any language for such long time. Why these students reach the expected level of proficiency is not the focus of the present study? The current study has, rather, investigated the use of LLS by these students which is a means to probe into reasons of failure to learn English language successfully.

**Literature Review**

It is customary for the strategies' researchers to begin their literature review with Rubin[2] because she was among the first researchers in the field of language learning strategies who carried out a systematic study in this field. She made her mark in 1975 which made her known in the world of research.

For the past three/four decades, there has been a great emphasis on how language learners learn a language. Especially, since the mid-seventies, the first priority of the researchers is to put responsibility on the language learner himself/herself to create an awareness about the process of language learning and realize the importance of certain strategies which have the potential to be "an extremely powerful learning tool" for learning language.[3] But most of such researchers focused their attention on the "good language learner." Rubin[4] , Stern and Naiman et al.[5] are among those pioneering researchers who tried to find out what 'good' or 'successful' language learners actually do when they learn a target language. The strategies employed by successful learners were categorized and then were suggested for unsuccessful language learners to apply them in order to make their own language learning process successful.

The three studies mentioned above spurred many language researchers to work on the achievements of successful language learners.[6,] But most of these studies ignored "factors affecting the individual differences in learners' language learning strategy use, e.g. gender, ethnicity, age, degree of language learning experiences, world knowledge, motivation, anxiety, beliefs, attitudes and learning styles – along with data on social context and learning conditions to explore the relationships between language learning strategies and learner performance".[7]

But this gap, concerning the lack of attention given to how learner differences influence language learning strategy use and language achievement was, later on, filled by researchers like Bialystok and Frohlich,[8] Oxford and Ehrman,[9] Oxford and Nyikos,[10] and Yang.[11] They emphasized how individual differences among language learners' relate to their language

performance. Later researchers even further explored different vistas for the future generations who could delve deeply into the field of language learning strategies. Examples of such researchers are Oxford and Ehrman,[12] Yang,[13] Wharton,[14] and Ok,[15] etc.

**Data Analysis**
The data collected through the questionnaire (SILL) was fed into SPSS (statistical package for social sciences) and analysed. The tables for data analysis are as follows.

*Frequency Means for overall Strategies and the Six Subscales of SILL*

Table 1: (n=450) Mean Scores for Overall and Subscales of SILL across all Students

| Type of Strategy | Mean (n=450) | SD | Frequency Category |
|---|---|---|---|
| Memory Strategy | 3.03 | .57 | Medium use |
| Cognitive Strategy | 3.29 | .54 | Medium use |
| Comprehension Strategy | 3.22 | .63 | Medium use |
| Meta cognitive Strategy | 3.73 | .66 | High Use |
| Affective Strategy | 3.01 | .65 | Medium use |
| Social Strategy | 3.26 | .77 | Medium use |
| Over all strategies use | 3.28 | .44 | Medium use |

Figure 1: Mean Scores for Overall and Subscales of SILL across all Students
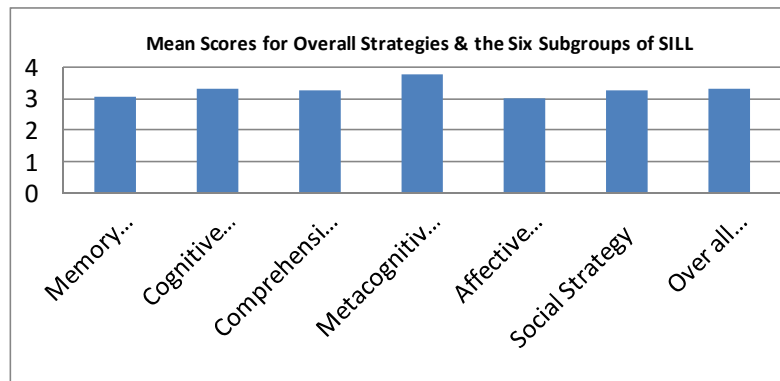


The above table 1 and figure1 reveal that the mean frequency of the strategy use over all students is 3.28. The high frequency range

of strategy use is defined as 3.5 or above.[16] This means that all the participants used the strategies at a medium range. With the exception of meta-cognitive group of strategies, with a mean frequency of 3.73, the rest of five subgroups of LLSs have low frequency mean than the standard of 3.5 as set by Oxford.[17] The use of *metacognitive strategies* at high frequency reveals that managing and organising their language learning is more important for the students than any other thing. *Cognitive Strategies* are the second subgroup after *Metacognitive Strategies,* with the mean value of 3.29 which have the more frequently used but they still do not fall among the highly used strategies.

*Frequency Means for overall 50 Strategies of SILL*

Table 2: Average Frequency of the Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

| Item No | Paraphrased Statement for each item of SILL | SILL Subgroup | Mean | SD | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 32 | pay attention to someone speaking | Meta-cognitive | 4.27 | 0.92 | High Use |
| 33 | try to find to be a better learner | Meta-cognitive | 4.14 | 0.92 | High Use |
| 31 | notice mistakes and use information | Meta-cognitive | 4.10 | 0.96 | High Use |
| 38 | think about my progress in learning | Meta-cognitive | 3.99 | 0.94 | High Use |
| 18 | First I skim read, then read carefully | Cognitive | 3.69 | 1.19 | High Use |
| 40 | encourage myself to speak | Affective | 3.67 | 1.15 | High Use |
| 17 | write notes, message etc. in English | Cognitive | 3.61 | 1.15 | High Use |
| 24 | make guesses | Compensation | 3.60 | 1.05 | High Use |
| 29 | use a similar word or phrase | Compensation | 3.57 | 1.14 | High Use |
| 37 | have clear goals for improving | Metacognitive | 3.55 | 1.10 | High Use |
| 36 | look for opportunities to read as much | Metacognitive | 3.52 | 1.08 | High Use |
| 45 | If do not understand ask to slow down | Social Strategy | 3.52 | 1.17 | High Use |
| 4 | make a mental picture of the situation | Memory | 3.51 | 1.17 | High Use |
| 30 | try to find as many ways as I can | Metacognitive | 3.48 | 1.04 | Medium Use |
| 2 | use new words in sentence | Memory | 3.47 | 1.11 | Medium Use |
| 49 | ask questions in English | Social | 3.46 | 1.11 | Medium Use |
| 13 | use the words in different ways | Cognitive | 3.43 | 1.10 | Medium Use |
| 47 | practise English with other students | Social | 3.43 | 1.13 | Medium Use |
| 12 | practise the sounds | Cognitive | 3.42 | 1.10 | Medium Use |
| 1 | think of relationship | Memory | 3.39 | 0.97 | Medium Use |
| 16 | read for pleasure | Cognitive | 3.36 | 1.22 | Medium Use |
| 23 | make summaries of the information | Cognitive | 3.36 | 1.21 | Medium Use |

| 35 | look for people I can talk to | Metacognitive | 3.36 | 1.17 | Medium Use |
|----|------------------------------|---------------|------|------|------------|
| 10 | say or write words several times | Cognitive | 3.35 | 1.18 | Medium Use |
| 25 | unfamiliar words, I make guesses | Compensation | 3.33 | 1.18 | Medium Use |
| 3 | When can't think a word, use gestures | Memory | 3.30 | 1.28 | Medium Use |
| 8 | review lessons | Memory | 3.30 | 1.28 | Medium Use |
| 39 | relax when feel afraid of using English | Affective | 3.28 | 1.21 | Medium Use |
| 21 | divide the word in parts | Cognitive | 3.26 | 1.21 | Medium Use |
| 15 | watch language shows or go to movies | Cognitive | 3.22 | 1.22 | Medium Use |
| 19 | look for similar words in my language | Cognitive | 3.19 | 1.21 | Medium Use |
| 9 | remember the location of the words | Memory | 3.17 | 1.34 | Medium Use |
| 41 | give myself reward or treat | Affective | 3.16 | 1.33 | Medium Use |
| 11 | try to talk like native speakers | Cognitive | 3.15 | 1.26 | Medium Use |
| 34 | plan my schedule | Metacognitive | 3.15 | 1.18 | Medium Use |
| 14 | start conversation | Cognitive | 3.14 | 1.09 | Medium Use |
| 42 | notice if I am tense nervous | Affective | 3.13 | 1.28 | Medium Use |
| 28 | try best guess what the other will say | Compensation | 3.11 | 1.13 | Medium Use |
| 46 | ask for correction when I talk | Social | 3.11 | 1.32 | Medium Use |
| 48 | ask for help from English speakers | Social | 3.07 | 1.29 | Medium Use |
| 20 | try to find patterns in English | Cognitive | 3.02 | 1.15 | Medium Use |
| 50 | learn the culture of English speakers | Social | 2.99 | 1.33 | Low Use |
| 22 | do not translate word for word | Cognitive | 2.98 | 1.27 | Low Use |
| 26 | make up new English words | Compensation | 2.96 | 1.25 | Low Use |
| 44 | talk to someone else how I feel | Affective | 2.83 | 1.22 | Low Use |
| 27 | read without looking up every word | Compensation | 2.76 | 1.25 | Low Use |
| 7 | physically act out words | Memory | 2.66 | 1.26 | Low Use |
| 5 | use rhymes | Memory | 2.52 | 1.26 | Low Use |
| 43 | write my feelings in a diary | Affective | 2.02 | 1.21 | Low Use |
| 6 | use flash cards | Memory | 1.92 | 1.13 | Low Use |

The table 2 above show the frequency means of the overall language learning strategies with the standard deviation across all the 450 students. The original statements of the SILL are paraphrased here for the purpose of brevity.  The 13 highly used strategies are highlighted for the sake of clarity. It can be observed from the table that six (i.e. item no. 31, 32,33,36,37 and 38 of SILL) out of the thirteen highly used strategies belong to the Meta cognitive group of strategies.  The top four strategies in table are item no. 32 (I pay attention when someone is speaking English), item no. 33 (I try to find out how to be a better learner of English), item no. 31 (I notice my mistakes in English and use the information to help me do better) and item no.38 (I think about my

progress in learning English). All these four items belong to the Meta cognitive group of strategies. It means that managing and organising their learning is more important for the learners than other activities that are part of the language learning process. Two of the 13 highly used strategies are cognitive strategies and two compensation strategies while there is only one affective strategy, one memory strategy and one social strategy in the list of highly used strategies. It should also be noted that memory strategies are the lowest in the frequency table.   Item 6 (I use flash cards), 43 (I write my feelings in a dairy) and 5 (I use rhymes to remember a word) are the least used strategies. Two of these strategies are memory while one is affective strategy. This suggests that people here in Pakistan rarely use flash cards, rhymes and or dairies for learning English language. Below the overall frequency scores for all the 50 items of SILL have been given which provides us subscale-wise overview of the overall strategies use.

Table 3: Cognitive Strategies

| Item No | Paraphrased Statement for each item of SILL | Mean | Status |
|---------|---------------------------------------------|------|--------|
| 18 | First I skim read, then read carefully | 3.69 | High Use |
| 17 | write notes, message etc. in English | 3.61 | High Use |
| 13 | use the words in different ways | 3.43 | Medium Use |
| 12 | practise the sounds | 3.42 | Medium Use |
| 16 | read for pleasure | 3.36 | Medium Use |
| 23 | make summaries of the information | 3.36 | Medium Use |
| 10 | say or write words several times | 3.35 | Medium Use |
| 21 | divide the word in parts | 3.26 | Medium Use |
| 15 | watch language shows or go to movies | 3.22 | Medium Use |
| 19 | look for similar words in my language | 3.19 | Medium Use |
| 11 | try to talk like native speakers | 3.15 | Medium Use |
| 14 | start conversation | 3.14 | Medium Use |
| 20 | try to find patterns in English | 3.02 | Medium Use |
| 22 | do not translate word for word | 2.98 | Low Use |

Table 3 reveals that SILL item 17(I write notes, messages, letters or reports in English) and 18(I first skim-read an English passage (read over the passage quickly), then go back and read carefully) are the highly used strategies by the learners with mean frequency values of 3.61 and 3.69 respectively. The rest of the 12 strategies are used at a medium frequency. Only item 22(I try not to translate word for word) among the cognitive strategies is the least used item with a mean frequency value of 2.98. On the whole, cognitive

strategies seem to play an important role in learning English language due to its consistent use at medium frequency level.

Table 4: Meta-cognitive Strategies

| Item No | Paraphrased Statement for each item of SILL | Mean | Status |
|---------|----------------------------------------------|------|--------|
| 32 | pay attention to someone speaking | 4.27 | High Use |
| 33 | try to find to be a better learner | 4.14 | High Use |
| 31 | notice mistakes and use information | 4.10 | High Use |
| 38 | think about my progress in learning | 3.99 | High Use |
| 37 | have clear goals for improving | 3.55 | High Use |
| 36 | look for opportunities to read as much | 3.52 | High Use |
| 30 | try to find as many ways as I can | 3.48 | Medium Use |
| 35 | look for people I can talk to | 3.36 | Medium Use |
| 34 | plan my schedule | 3.15 | Medium Use |

Table 4 lists all the Meta cognitive strategies. It shows that out of 9 Meta cognitive strategies 6 strategies are the most highly used strategies by the learners. These highly used strategies are SILL item 32, 33, 31, 38, 37 and 36 with a high frequency of occurrence in the same sequence. The most highly used strategy in the whole group of meta cognitive strategies is SILL item 32 (I pay attention when someone is speaking English) which means listening to understand is more important for the learners than any other thing.

Table 5: Affective Strategies

| Item No | Paraphrased Statement for each item of SILL | Mean | Status |
|---------|----------------------------------------------|------|--------|
| 40 | encourage myself to speak | 3.67 | High Use |
| 39 | relax when feel afraid of using English | 3.28 | Medium Use |
| 41 | give myself reward or treat | 3.16 | Medium Use |
| 42 | notice if I am tense nervous | 3.13 | Medium Use |
| 44 | talk to someone else how I feel | 2.83 | Low Use |
| 43 | write my feelings in a diary | 2.02 | Low Use |

Table 5 shows a list of all the Affective Strategies of SILL. These strategies are used in a mixed manner i.e. out of the six affective strategies only item 40 is used highly frequently by the learner wile item 39, 41 and 42 are used with medium frequency and only item

43 has the lowest frequency of use. On the whole, the mean values of the five out of six affective stregies reveal that these strategies rarely applied by the learners.

Table 6: Compensation Strategies

| Item No | Paraphrased Statement for each item of SILL | Mean | Status |
|---------|---------------------------------------------|------|--------|
| 24 | make guesses | 3.60 | High Use |
| 29 | use a similar word or phrase | 3.57 | High Use |
| 25 | unfamiliar words, I make guesses | 3.33 | Medium Use |
| 28 | try best guess what the other will say | 3.11 | Medium Use |
| 26 | make up new English words | 2.96 | Low Use |
| 27 | read without looking up every word | 2.76 | Low Use |

Table 6 reveals that the learners have great variation in the use of Compensation Strategies. Out of the six compensation strategies item 24 and 29 are among the highly used strategies while item 25 and 28 are used with a medium frequency level and item 26 and 27 are among the lowest used strategies.

Table 7: Social Strategies

| Item No | Paraphrased Statement for each item of SILL | Mean | Status |
|---------|---------------------------------------------|------|--------|
| 45 | If do not understand ask to slow down | 3.52 | High Use |
| 49 | ask questions in English | 3.46 | Medium Use |
| 47 | practise English with other students | 3.43 | Medium Use |
| 48 | ask for help from English speakers | 3.07 | Medium Use |
| 50 | learn the culture of English speakers | 2.99 | Low Use |

The table 7 reveals that the learners use 3 out of 5 social strategies at a medium frequency level while 1 strategy is used at high frequency level and 1 at low frequency level.

Table 8: Memory Strategies

| Item No | Paraphrased Statement for each item of SILL | Mean | Status |
|---------|---------------------------------------------|------|--------|
| 4 | I make a mental picture of the situation | 3.51 | High Use |
| 2 | I use new words in sentence | 3.47 | Medium Use |
| 1 | I think of relationship | 3.39 | Medium Use |
| 3 | When can't think a word, I use gestures | 3.30 | Medium Use |
| 8 | I review lessons | 3.30 | Medium Use |
| 9 | I remember the location of the words | 3.17 | Medium Use |

| 7 | I physically act out words | 2.66 | Low Use |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | I use rhymes | 2.52 | Low Use |
| 6 | use flash cards | 1.92 | Low Use |

Table 8 shows the results for memory strategies. It is obvious from the statistics above that only one out of 9 strategies is used highly frequently while 5 strategies are used at a medium frequency and 3 strategies are used at medium frequency level. It is apparent from the analysis above that learners do use memory strategies.

**Results and Findings**

After the calculations of frequency means for overall 50 strategies of SILL, it was found that all the strategies were used at medium frequency i.e. below the high frequency standard which is 3.50 set by Oxford.[18] Not only the overall strategies but the subscales of SILL were also used at a medium frequency rate with the exception of *Meta cognitive Strategies* whose means score was 3.73 which is above the Oxford's[19] high frequency standard. It suggests that *Meta cognitive Strategies* are the most important of all subscales of SILL that needs to be focused more by teachers. *Cognitive Strategies* and *Compensation Strategies* have the second best frequency rate after *Meta cognitive Strategies*. *Memory, Affective and Social Strategies* are among the least used strategies of SILL.

# Notes & References

[1] M. Paul Lewis, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, *Ethnologue: Languages of the world*, Vol. 16. (Dallas, TX: SIL international, 2009).

[2] Joan Rubin, "What the good language learner can teach us", *TESOL Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1975): 41-51.

[3] Michael J. O'Malley, Anna Uhl Chamot, Gloria Stewner-Manzanares, Lisa Kupper and Rocco P. Russo, "Learning strategies used by beginning and intermediate ESL students", *Language Learning* 35, no. 1 (1985): 21-46.

[4] Joan Rubin, "What the good language learner can teach us", op.cit.

[5] Neil Naiman, M. Fröhlich, Fl Stern, and A. Todesco, *The Good Second Language Learner*, Research in Education Series No. 7 (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1978).

[6] Ellen Bialystok, and Maria Fröhlich, "Variables of Classroom Achievement in Second Language Learning", *The Modern Language Journal* 62, no. 7 (1978): 327-336. See also: Michael J. O'Malley, et.al., Learning strategies used by beginning and intermediate ESL students", op.cit.

[7] Nisakorn Prakongchati, "Factors Related to the Use of Language Learning Strategies by Thai Public University Freshmen", Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Suranaree University of Technology (2007), 25

[8] Ellen Bialystok, and Maria Fröhlich, "Variables of Classroom Achievement in Second Language Learning", op.cit.

[9] Rebecca L.Oxford and Madeline E. Ehrman, "Adults' language learning strategies in an intensive foreign language program in the United States", *System* 23, no. 3 (1995): 359-386.

[10] Rebecca Oxford and Martha Nyikos, "Variables affecting choice of language learning strategies by university students", *The Modern Language Journal* 73, no. 3 (1989): 291-300.

[11] Nae-Dong Yang, "The relationship between EFL learners' beliefs and learning strategy use", *System* 27, no. 4 (1999): 515-535.

[12] Rebecca L.Oxford and Madeline E. Ehrman, "Adults' language learning strategies in an intensive foreign language program in the United States", op.cit.

[13] Nae-Dong Yang, "The relationship between EFL learners' beliefs and learning strategy use", op.cit.

[14] Wharton, G. Language learning strategy of bilingual foreign language learners In Singapore. *Language Learning* 50 no. 2 (2000): 203-243.

[15] Lee Kyung Ok, "The relationship of school year, sex and proficiency on the use of learning strategies in learning English of Korean junior high school students", *Asian EFL Journal* 5, no. 3 (2003): 1-36.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.