

Uncovering Language Learning Strategies and Their Link to Academic Success: A Case Study of KIP-Assisted Students in a Vocational School in Babat Lamongan

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Abstrak

Makalah penelitian ini menyelidiki strategi belajar bahasa Inggris yang digunakan oleh siswa SMK penerima bantuan KIP di Babat, Lamongan. Meskipun bantuan finansial dari KIP meningkatkan akses terhadap pendidikan, hasil belajar masih belum lengkap dan jauh berbeda dari kesejahteraan yang dicanangkan, terutama dalam pemerolehan bahasa asing dan pembelajaran bahasa. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus deskriptif kualitatif untuk mengumpulkan data dari 45 siswa KIP di Babat, Lamongan, menggunakan kuesioner SILL, wawancara, dan catatan akademik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa strategi metakognitif paling banyak dimanfaatkan, termasuk perencanaan dan regulasi diri, serta pemantauan, dan bahwa siswa berprestasi tertinggi dan terendah lebih cenderung menggunakan strategi sosial. Kendala kontekstual yang berbeda, seperti akses ke sumber daya dan dukungan orang tua, terbukti memengaruhi variabel siswa dalam keterlibatan belajar. Mereka yang terlibat menggunakan regulasi internal juga jauh lebih mampu menunjukkan ketahanan akademik. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa strategi belajar bahasa Inggris, khususnya strategi metakognitif, berkontribusi signifikan terhadap prestasi bahasa Inggris, melampaui akses dan bantuan materi.

Kata Kunci: *strategi belajar bahasa, metakognisi, KIP, siswa SMK, prestasi bahasa Inggris*

Abstract

This study explores the learning strategies used in English learning by the vocational high school students who were supported with KIP money in Babat, Lamongan. While the financial support from KIP has improved access to education, the learning outcomes are leaving students with incomplete literacy skills and far away from declared welfare statuses, especially with respect to foreign language learning and language acquisition. The study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design, and involved 45 KIP students in Babat, Lamongan, and SILL questionnaire, interviews, and academic performance data were collected. The study found the most common strategies were metacognitive strategies (which included planning, self-regulating, and effective monitoring), and highest achievers and lower achievers were more likely to use social strategies. Different constraints of contexts played a role among students' variables for participating in learning, such as having materials and supportive parents, and those using internal regulation, were able to demonstrate great academic resilience to learn English. This study concludes that learning strategies for English learning, particularly metacognitive strategy, are only a few causes of English achievement based on learned behaviour, access, and material and monetary assistance.

Keywords: *language learning strategies, metacognition, KIP, vocational students, English achievement*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian government's commitment to educational equity is reflected in the *Kartu Indonesia Pintar* (KIP) program, which provides financial assistance to students from low-income families to support their educational participation (Masitoh & Kurnia, 2022). While the program has contributed to reducing school dropout rates, access to education does not automatically lead to improved learning outcomes. This challenge is

particularly evident in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, where success depends not only on school attendance but also on learners' ability to engage effectively with the learning process.

For vocational high school students, English serves both as an academic subject and a skill relevant to future employment. However, many KIP recipients face additional challenges, including limited exposure to English, restricted access to learning resources, and fewer opportunities for academic support outside school. These conditions raise an important question: how do financially disadvantaged students manage their English learning, and what learning strategies enable some students to achieve better outcomes than others?

Research on Language Learning Strategies (LLS) provides a useful framework for addressing this issue. Previous studies have consistently shown that the use of effective learning strategies is associated with improved language achievement (Ellis, 1994; Oxford, 2003; Pammu et al., 2017). In particular, metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation have been found to promote learner autonomy and academic success (Suhaimi, 2017). Nevertheless, socioeconomic conditions may influence learners' access to and use of these strategies. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often rely more heavily on social or compensation strategies and may have fewer opportunities to develop higher-order metacognitive skills (Indrapuri, 2023).

Several studies have demonstrated that high-achieving students from low-income backgrounds tend to employ metacognitive strategies more frequently than their lower-achieving peers (Indrapuri, 2023; P. A. Sari, 2020; Hamsia, 2018). These findings suggest that strategic learning behavior may help learners overcome socioeconomic constraints. However, most existing studies have focused on urban schools or general student populations. Research examining KIP recipients, particularly those studying in rural vocational schools, remains limited.

This gap is significant because KIP should not merely be viewed as a financial assistance program but as a policy intervention intended to enhance educational opportunities. From a theoretical perspective, financial assistance may function as an enabling condition that reduces economic barriers, while learning strategies represent a form of learner agency that determines how educational opportunities are utilized.

Therefore, understanding the relationship between social assistance and strategic learning behavior may provide a more comprehensive explanation of language learning success among disadvantaged students.

Guided by Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and Self-Regulated Learning Theory (Zimmerman, 2002), this study proposes a conceptual framework in which KIP support creates opportunities for learning, whereas language learning strategies mediate the transformation of those opportunities into academic achievement. Within this framework, learner success is shaped not only by financial support but also by learners' capacity to regulate, monitor, and manage their own learning processes.

Accordingly, this study addresses three research questions: (1) What language learning strategies are employed by KIP-supported vocational high school students in rural areas? (2) How are different types of language learning strategies associated with English achievement? and (3) How does the rural vocational context influence the development and use of these strategies?

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it extends language learning strategy research to an underrepresented population, namely KIP-supported students in rural vocational schools. Second, it proposes a conceptual link between educational assistance and learner agency by examining how learning strategies mediate the benefits of financial support. Third, it provides empirical evidence that may inform educational policies aimed at ensuring that increased access to education is accompanied by meaningful learning outcomes. By exploring the intersection of social assistance, learner autonomy, and English achievement, the study offers a deeper understanding of how educational equity can be translated into academic success.

METHOD

In this study, a qualitative approach is utilized within the design of a descriptive case study. A case study design has been selected in order to get insights that offer deep understanding of the experiences of English learning strategies that students with the Smart Indonesia Card (KIP) at the Vocational High Schools (SMK) in Babat in Lamongan Regency. The descriptive case study allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon in an authentic, naturalistic setting of learners and allows for the researcher to describe how

learning strategies are utilized in a rural vocational education context.. This employed approach refers to earlier studies not limited to Susilo et al. (2019), who focused on metacognitive planning in group debating activities, and Pradita and Nindita (2022), who focused on the variation of strategies among students on vocational majors. Khatami & Ambarwati (2023) also have shown this relevance of this approach to investigate the vocabulary strategic choices of pupils enrolled in vocational school.

This research was conducted at one of the public vocational schools in Babat District of Lamongan Regency in East Java, Indo-nesia, which provides vocational education to students across several more impoverished locations. The time the research was implemented was up until May 2025. The selection of this place has evidence of a high prevalence of KIP recipients, as well as the socio-economic background of pupils relevant to the focus of the research.

The subjects were 45 students from the X and XI grades and as a condition of data collection the subjects were required to be KIP recipients. Their selection as subjects was sensibly chosen based on a purposive sampling technique, with the conditions that the participants should have at least meaningfully one semester of experience studying English and to contribute to a variety of students' academic achievement levels. Data about students was acquired from school documents from the previous academic term, specifically documentation for and recommendations by English teachers to guarantee a variation of students strategy use from high, middle and low-achieving students, a method used in prior studies (Khatami & Ambarwati, 2023; Pradita & Nindita, 2022; Susilo et al., 2019)

This research uses three main instruments for data collection. First, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) use version 7.0 (from Oxford) consisted of 50 statements and six types of strategies: metacognitive, cognitive, memory, compensating, affective, and social. SILL is a standard instrument and has been widely used in research of language learning strategies (Oxford, 2003). Second, semi structured interviews were conducted of ten students, of three categories of academic achievement (high, medium, low) to enable a deeper understanding of the reasons and context for using their strategies. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian to provide comfort and openness, and then transcribed for analysis. Third, the data on mid-semester exam scores for English subjects

were collected as a measurable indicator of academic achievement, the scores were categorized as high (≥ 85), medium (70 -84) and low (< 70), which is based on school assessment categories.

Data collection was done during school hours supported by the classroom teachers to enable collaborative engagement of students and hassle free (administration) procedures. The teacher also provided prior information to students about the research purpose and ensured that the questionnaire and the interview processes are scheduled.

The data collected was analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data from the SILL questionnaire was analyzed through the average score of strategy usage. The scores were categorized as high (3.5–5.0), medium (2.5–3.4), and low (1.0–2.4) based on the Oxford categories. The strategy scores were then cross-tabulated against levels of academic achievement in order to examine the relationships between strategy use and student learning outcomes. The qualitative findings from the student interviews were analyzed based thematic analysis methods, specifically grouping the main themes grouped that emerged from students' responses, in order to provide additional support the interpretation of the quantitative data.

For validity of the findings, data triangulation was performed through comparing questionnaires results, interview responses, and academic score documents. Studies that employed data triangulation were done by Susilo et al. (2019), Khatami and Ambarwati (2023), as well as other researchers in the area of language learning strategy use. The research cycle for this study consisted of three phases: (1) preliminary data collection with the use of questionnaires and documents; (2) interviews subsequent to the questionnaire and document with the intention of enriching and validating the preliminary data; and (3) integrated analysis and interpretation of the data to draw informal inferences.

With this approach and stages, the research is expected to be able to provide a comprehensive overview of the English learning strategies used by KIP recipients at SMK Babat and the contextual factors that influence it. Additionally, the findings of this analysis will provide a strategic justification on how to enhance language learning outcomes for students from low socio-economic backgrounds in rural vocational education contexts.

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative data to investigate the language learning strategies used by Kartu Indonesia Pintar (KIP) recipients in a rural vocational high school context. The quantitative component aimed to identify the frequency and types of language learning strategies used by students and examine their relationship with English achievement. The qualitative component was used to provide deeper insights into students' strategic learning behaviors and the contextual factors influencing strategy use.

A mixed-methods approach was considered appropriate because language learning strategies involve both measurable behavioral patterns and individual experiences that cannot be fully captured through numerical data alone. Similar approaches have been employed in previous studies on language learning strategies among vocational school students (Susilo et al., 2019; Pradita & Nindita, 2022; Khatami & Ambarwati, 2023).

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at a public vocational high school in Babat, Lamongan Regency, East Java, Indonesia, between March and May 2025. The school was selected because it serves a relatively high proportion of students receiving KIP assistance and represents a rural vocational education context.

A total of 45 students from Grades X and XI participated in the study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) active recipients of KIP assistance, (2) completion of at least one semester of English instruction, and (3) representation of different achievement levels. Although the sample size is relatively small, the study does not aim to generalize findings to all KIP recipients in Indonesia. Instead, it seeks to provide an in-depth description of learning strategy use within a specific educational context.

Instruments

Three instruments were used for data collection.

First, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0 developed by Oxford (2003) was administered to all participants. The instrument consists of 50 items covering six strategy categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Prior to administration, the questionnaire was translated

into Indonesian and reviewed by two English education experts to ensure linguistic clarity and content equivalence. A pilot test involving 20 students from a neighboring vocational school was conducted. The instrument demonstrated acceptable internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.87.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten students representing high-, medium-, and low-achievement groups. The interviews explored students' reasons for using particular strategies and the contextual challenges influencing their learning.

Third, students' English mid-semester examination scores were collected as indicators of academic achievement. Achievement categories followed the school's assessment policy: high (≥ 85), medium (70–84), and low (< 70).

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the SILL questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, to determine the frequency of strategy use. Strategy levels were interpreted using Oxford's (2003) classification: high (3.5–5.0), medium (2.5–3.4), and low (1.0–2.4).

To examine the relationship between language learning strategies and English achievement, Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed because the achievement data were grouped into ordinal categories and the sample size was relatively small. The significance level was set at $p < .05$.

Qualitative interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were coded, categorized, and organized into themes related to strategy use, learning experiences, and contextual influences. The qualitative findings were then used to explain and enrich the quantitative results.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Several procedures were employed to enhance the credibility of the findings. First, the SILL instrument underwent translation review, pilot testing, and reliability analysis. Second, methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing questionnaire results, interview findings, and academic achievement records. Third, interview summaries were reviewed to ensure consistency between participants' responses and researchers' interpretations.

Research Procedure

The study was conducted in three stages. First, quantitative data were collected through the administration of the SILL questionnaire and the collection of English achievement scores. Second, interview participants were selected based on achievement levels and strategy profiles identified in the quantitative phase. Third, quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of language learning strategy use among KIP-supported vocational students.

This mixed-methods design enabled the study to examine not only what strategies students used but also how and why those strategies were associated with their English learning experiences and achievement outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Dominant Language Learning Strategies

The analysis of the SILL questionnaire revealed that metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used learning strategies among the 45 KIP recipients, with a mean score of 3.3. Social strategies ranked second, with a mean score of 3.1. These findings indicate that students tended to engage in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning while also seeking support from peers during the learning process.

Examples of commonly reported metacognitive strategies included setting learning goals, reviewing completed tasks, and monitoring personal progress. Social strategies mainly involved asking classmates for clarification, discussing learning materials, and collaborating during classroom activities.

These findings are consistent with previous studies. Indrapuri (2023) reported that high-achieving students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds frequently employed metacognitive strategies. Similarly, Pradita and Nindita (2022) found that vocational school students commonly used metacognitive and social strategies regardless of their academic major. Khatami and Ambarwati (2023) also highlighted the importance of peer interaction in supporting language learning among vocational students.

Figure 1. Average Scores of Language Learning Strategies

Figure 1 presents the average scores of the six strategy categories measured by the SILL questionnaire. Metacognitive strategies obtained the highest mean score (3.3), followed by social strategies (3.1). Cognitive (2.8), memory (2.7), and compensation strategies

(2.6) were used at moderate levels, whereas affective strategies showed the lowest mean score (2.4).

Overall, the results suggest that KIP recipients relied primarily on strategies that helped them regulate their learning and obtain support from peers. These findings indicate that students attempted to manage their learning actively despite facing socioeconomic challenges.

3.2 Strategy Use Across Achievement Groups

To explore patterns of strategy use among students with different levels of English achievement, strategy scores were compared across three achievement groups: high (≥ 85), medium (70–84), and low (< 70).

Table 1. Strategy Use Across Achievement Groups

Academic Group	Dominant Strategy	Mean Score	Common Learning Behaviors
High (≥ 85)	Metacognitive	3.7	Goal-setting, self-monitoring, independent study
Medium (70–84)	Metacognitive and Social	3.2	Group work, time management, collaborative learning
Low (< 70)	Social	2.6	Dependence on peers, repetition without review

The comparison shows noticeable differences in strategy preferences among achievement groups. Students in the high-achievement group reported the highest use of metacognitive strategies. They frequently described planning their study activities, monitoring their understanding, and evaluating their learning progress. Interview data further indicated that these students often set learning goals and reviewed materials independently.

Students in the medium-achievement group combined metacognitive and social strategies. They benefited from peer collaboration while also demonstrating some degree of self-regulated learning through time management and study planning.

In contrast, students in the low-achievement group relied primarily on social strategies. Interview responses suggested that these students frequently depended on classmates for explanations and guidance and were less likely to engage in self-monitoring or independent review activities.

These findings suggest that different achievement groups demonstrate different patterns of strategy use. Although the present study does not establish a causal relationship, the results indicate that students with higher achievement levels tended to report more frequent use of metacognitive strategies, whereas students with lower achievement levels relied more heavily on social support during learning. Similar patterns have been reported in previous studies on language learning strategies among secondary and vocational school learners (Susilo et al., 2019; Lestari & Fatimah, 2020).

Table 1. Comparison of Strategy Use by Academic Performance Group

Academic Group	Dominant Strategy Used	Mean Strategy Score	Common Behaviors
High (> 85)	Metacognitive	3.7	Goal-setting, reflections, independence study
Medium (70-84)	Mixed (Meta + Social)	3.2	Group work, Time management
Low (< 70)	Social	2.6	Peer dependence, repetition without review

Table 1 outlines the dominating strategies identified by three groups of students (based on midterm exam English subjects): The group with high scores (≥ 85): Generally using metacognitive strategies, the highest level of with a mean of 3.7. They exhibited study habits, which may involve making a study plan with goals to achieve and then self-evaluating upon completion. This indicates reflective and independent learning dispositions. Moderate-scoring group (70–84): Metacognitive and social strategy use combined provided a average score of 3.2. They were able to demonstrate a level of flexibility in learning by combining group work with management of time and personal plans for study. Low scoring group (< 70): They relied only on social strategies averaging a score of 2.6. They seemed reliant on friends to understand the material and did not devote much effort towards managing their own learning.

This table clarified relationships between level of usage of reflective strategies and students' academic achievement. Higher the students' intensity of usage of metacognitive strategies, the better their academic results, as corroborated by Lestari & Fatimah (2020) Susilo et al. (2019). In contrast, students who relied solely on social strategies without

paying attention to their internal strategies, could miss out on potential achievement, especially in the field of language learning that requires student active involvement and sustainability of effort.

Figure 1. Average Scores of English Learning Strategies Used by KIP Students

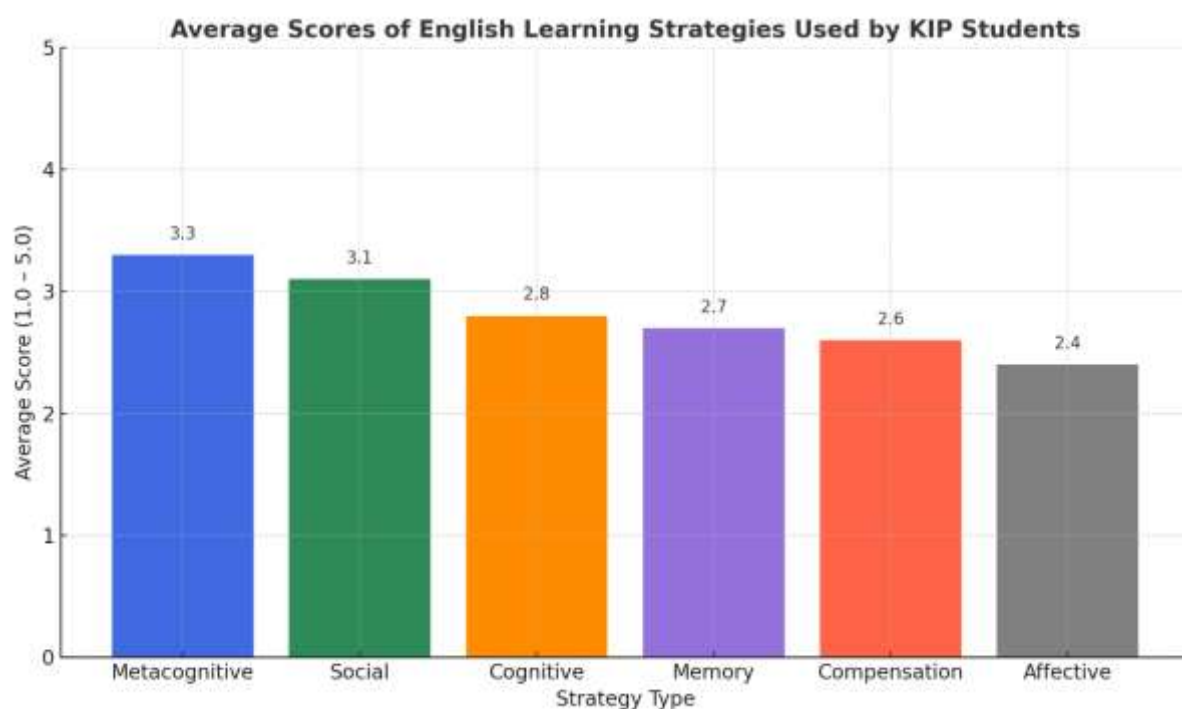


Figure 1 displays the comparison of average scores, from six types of English learning strategies based on the result of the SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) questionnaire which was completed by 45 KIP recipients. Metacognitive strategies was positioned 1st with an average score of 3.3 and social strategies with a score of 3.1. The other types of strategies were at moderate or low levels: cognitive (2.8), memory (2.7), compensatory (2.6), and affective (2.4).

This visualization suggests that students prefer strategies that would help them organize, manage and evaluate their learning independently, as well as those that provide social support from their peers. Overall, these findings confirm that associated with the fact that students are from lower socio-economic conditions, they are obliged to create their own internal learning control and utilizing social interaction as a mode of learning.

This is supported with prior research Indrapuri (2023) and Pradita & Nindita (2022) that discussed the explicit understanding of the role of metacognitive strategies and social strategies designed for groups of students from low economic status to deal with improving their academic achievement.

The comparison shows noticeable differences in strategy preferences among achievement groups. Students in the high-achievement group reported the highest use of metacognitive strategies. They frequently described planning their study activities, monitoring their understanding, and evaluating their learning progress. Interview data further indicated that these students often set learning goals and reviewed materials independently.

Students in the medium-achievement group combined metacognitive and social strategies. They benefited from peer collaboration while also demonstrating some degree of self-regulated learning through time management and study planning.

In contrast, students in the low-achievement group relied primarily on social strategies. Interview responses suggested that these students frequently depended on classmates for explanations and guidance and were less likely to engage in self-monitoring or independent review activities.

These findings suggest that different achievement groups demonstrate different patterns of strategy use. Although the present study does not establish a causal relationship, the results indicate that students with higher achievement levels tended to report more frequent use of metacognitive strategies, whereas students with lower achievement levels relied more heavily on social support during learning. Similar patterns have been reported in previous studies on language learning strategies among secondary and vocational school learners (Susilo et al., 2019; Lestari & Fatimah, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that metacognitive strategies and social strategies were the most frequently utilized English learning strategies by KIP recipients at a rural BA in Babat, Lamongan. Students who were able to achieve higher academic performance were the only students that consistently used metacognitive strategies, including goal-setting, self-monitoring, and reflecting. Meanwhile, students with lower academic achievement

tended to rely on social strategies, such as group collaboration and peer assistance, without sufficient personal planning or evaluation. These findings highlight the significance of developing learners' strategic awareness—especially in under-resourced environments where self-regulation can serve as a compensatory mechanism for limited support structures.

In this study, the findings suggest that contextual challenges including economic difficulties, the study context, and access to learning materials can all impact students' capacity to use effective strategies. However, those with metacognitive awareness seemingly had greater personal responsibility and flexibility to overcome these contextual challenges. While this study has made important contributions, its limitations include the narrow focus on one rural school and the data are gathered solely from the students' perspective. There was no consideration of the teachers' role or the potentially influencing factors in the form of institutional support or classroom practices that are supportive of or discourage strategic learning.

Future studies should establish how teachers model and promote strategic learning in a vocational classroom, especially metacognitive strategy use. Longitudinal studies could also help examine how strategy use changes over time, and particularly for the KIP beneficiaries as they move through different educational domains. Finally, exploring the effects of formal interventions such as explicit instruction of strategies or culturally relevant pedagogy may improve understanding of how to maximize the educational benefits of national assistance programs like KIP.

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