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UNPACKING LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF HIGH-ACHIEVING TOEIC LEARNERS IN BATAM, INDONESIA

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Abstract: English proficiency is an important aspect for university students, particularly in higher education contexts where English proficiency is one of requirements for graduation. However, limited research has examined the language learning strategies of high-achieving English proficiency, specifically TOEIC in Indonesian higher education. This study investigates the language learning strategies used by high-achieving university EFL learners at a private University in Batam, Indonesia. The methodological of research used a quantitative descriptive design, then number of participants were collected from 207 students who achieved TOEIC scores of 605 or above through a 48-item questionnaire adapted from Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations. The findings showed that metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used category (M = 3.58), followed by compensation strategies (M = 3.45) and cognitive strategies (M = 3.44), while affective strategies were the least frequently used (M = 3.08). Overall, the findings show that high-achieving learners reported frequent use of strategies related to planning, monitoring, managing language gaps, and completing language-learning tasks. These findings provide practical insights for understanding strategy use among high-achieving TOEIC learners and may inform strategy-based approaches in English and TOEIC preparation programs in higher education.
Keywords: *Language Learning Strategies; TOEIC; English learners; higher education*

INTRODUCTION

Learning English contributes substantially to academic and professional success, particularly at the university level, where students need the language to access knowledge, research, and career opportunities. From a second language acquisition (SLA) perspective, however, learners who receive similar instruction rarely reach the same level of proficiency. This is especially visible in EFL settings such as Indonesia, where exposure to English outside the classroom is limited and university students differ in their educational backgrounds, motivation, and study habits. Among the individual factors that may explain these differences, language learning strategies (LLS) are of particular interest. LLS are the actions that learners consciously and intentionally employ to learn the language more efficiently and effectively, supporting their comprehension, memory, and usage of the target language (Zhang, 2024). The importance of such learner-driven effort is also reflected in local research at Universitas Internasional Batam, where Zaki et al. (2025) concluded that English proficiency is vital for professional interaction in the workplace, particularly in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and that learners' strategy use is important for improving their language competence. Well-selected strategies can also foster independent learning, reduce anxiety, and improve learners' performance in language acquisition, particularly in tertiary education (Teng, 2023).

One common approach to categorize language learning strategies is Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which divides strategies into six types: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and

social strategies (Chen et al., 2025). Memory strategies assist learners in memorizing and recalling new information. Cognitive strategies refer to using the language skills of practice, analysing, and summarizing, while compensation strategies enable learners to compensate for inadequate knowledge of the target language. Planning, monitoring, and evaluating are characteristic of metacognitive strategies, and whereas feelings, attitude, and motivation are aspects of affective strategies, and interaction, and cooperation are part of social strategies. This taxonomy has been reported to be frequently adopted to explore learners' strategic behaviour (Thuan & Hanh, 2026).

More contemporary viewpoints of language learning strategies, exemplified by the Model Strategic Self-Regulation (S^2R) model. S^2R model defines as integration of language learning strategies into other internal and external factors in language learning including cognition, emotion, motivation, and social interaction (Istifci, 2024; Nguyen & Bao Dinh, 2025). This study adopts the SILL as the operational tool for reporting learners' strategy use, and the wider theoretical perspective as embodied in the S2R Model, which describes strategic self-regulation. As metacognitive strategy is one dimension of self-regulation as it is tied to learners' planning, monitoring, and assessing their learning (Siregar et al., 2024). Self-regulated learning (SRL) consists of an active process that involves learning goals planning, progress tracking, strategy regulation, and outcome evaluation. In foreign language learning, SRL gives learners the chance to manage cognitive, motivational, and behavioural aspects of the learning process. Siregar et al. (2024) underscore the importance of metacognitive strategies as one of the key elements of SRL because it enables learners to carry out their language learning planning, monitoring, and evaluation effectively.

Some studies have generally indicated that better language learners use learning strategies intentionally. Zou & Lertlit (2022) and Cahyo et al. (2024), for instance, revealed that successful learners made use of metacognitive strategies to plan and monitor the learning, cognitive strategies to accomplish language tasks and social strategies to interact with others. Those strategies might also have positive implications for learner motivation and autonomy (Valipour & Salehi (2026). Similar findings have been reported with proficient EFL learners Azizi & Yusuf (2024), suggested that students with high English proficiency relied heavily on metacognitive strategies during speaking development. Similarly, some previous study confirmed the positive correlation between self-regulated learning strategy use and vocabulary learning achievement with EFL learners test (Copland et al., 2024; Dong et al., 2026; Rahmasari et al., 2025). Overall, these findings reveal that high proficient learners tend to be more aware of and control over their own language learning development.

Another consistent finding in the literature is the frequent use of metacognitive strategies among proficient or successful EFL learners. Some studies have reported that learners often use metacognitive strategies to improve their language capacity and skills.(Maulida & Mubaraq, 2023; Rudiastika et al., 2024; Supriyono et al., 2024; Tahmina, 2023; Wang, 2024). However, the repeated finding that metacognitive strategies are frequently used does not fully explain how high-achieving learners use the broader range of language learning strategies within a specific institutional and test-preparation context. Some studies revealed that metacognitive strategies are among the most frequently used strategies by EFL learners, as their self-regulating strategy in learning process, fundamentally contributing to improved language proficiency and learning. Because of this imbalance in the literature, it remains unclear how high-achieving learners specifically regulate their learning, sustain motivation, and engage in strategic behaviours to reach high levels of English proficiency.

Besides that, the role of the institution, such as those providing English courses and TOEIC preparation, in helping learners develop effective strategies has not been sufficiently studied. The institutional learning environment may also shape how students develop and use learning strategies. Pebiana & Febria (2023) found that technology-supported learning through Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) could support students' motivation and speaking performance. Similarly, Zaki et al. (2025) reported that English enrichment programs could support students' language development through structured activities and continuous practice. These findings indicate that institutional support can provide opportunities for learners to develop effective learning practices. However, the present study focuses specifically on the strategies reported by students who have already achieved the required TOEIC benchmark rather than on the effectiveness of a particular instructional program and language strategies.

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Recently, one of private university in Batam has been highlighting English proficiency as a main tool to prepare students for the global labour market. The university has made obtaining the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) a student graduation requirement, with a minimum official TOEIC score set at 605. TOEIC was chosen because it is a well-known and reliable test of English communication skills used mainly in work and business situations. To help students achieve the required score, the university provides English language course as mandatory in first and second semesters, language laboratories, and TOEIC preparatory classes. On one hand, a good number of students find it very difficult to obtain the minimum TOEIC score, even though these facilities and compulsory English classes are available. On the other hand, some students consistently achieve very high TOEIC scores, which indicates that these students might be using effective language learning strategies and have strong learning habits.

Although many studies have explored language learning strategies (LLS) among EFL learners, less attention has been given to university students who have already reached a proficiency level set by their institution and verified through a standardized test such as the TOEIC. Much of the existing LLS research has focused on general EFL learners, on strategies for a specific language skill, or on classroom learning (Maulida & Mubaraq, 2023). Some studies have investigated successful or high-proficiency learners, including high achievers on the TOEFL Junior test in an Islamic boarding school classroom (Cahyo et al., 2024), high-proficiency students majoring in Information Systems (Bayu, Sari, Galuh Wardani, & Solikhah, 2024), and vocabulary learning strategies of high-proficiency learners (Tahmina, 2023). However, these studies differ from the present one in learner population, institutional context, or the type of proficiency benchmark. Three gaps can therefore be identified. The first is a context gap: little research has examined Indonesian EFL learners in higher education institutions where a TOEIC score is a graduation requirement. The second is a population gap: few studies have focused on a clearly defined group of learners who have already met a specific proficiency benchmark, in this case a TOEIC score of 605 or above. The third is a methodological gap: previous studies often involved a single case, program, or small group of learners, whereas the present study surveyed a larger sample of 207 high-achieving students from various study programs at one university. By addressing these gaps, this study provides a clearer picture of the strategies used by learners who have succeeded in a TOEIC-based proficiency requirement.

Based on the background and research gaps discussed above, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What language learning strategies are used by high-achieving university EFL learners? (2) Which categories of language learning strategies are most and least frequently used by high-achieving university EFL learners?

This study novelty is the investigation of high achievers in the TOEIC, which is an institutional standard of English proficiency 605 or higher in this case in an Indonesian higher education context. Most research of general EFL learners, individual language skills, or classroom behaviour explore strategy use; though, this research explores strategy use from high achieving learners who have already shown they possess the required level of English proficiency through a standard language test. On top of that, in this research, students of various majors in one institution are examined, such law, management, accounting, information system, civil engineering and architecture.

Based on the literature review, this research is expected to contribute to the fields of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) in several ways. Theoretically, this research adds to the evidence available on the applicability of the Strategic Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) system to gain insight into strategy use by high achievers in a standardized test context. Pedagogically, the output can be beneficial to lecturers and TOEIC teachers provide explanation on the types of strategies reported by high-expectancy learners, and perhaps give some advice for their TOEIC strategy-based preparation. Institutionally, the results of the study could be useful for the higher education institutions applying English proficiency requirement as graduation criteria. This way, this research offers a link between the research issue and the practice in English learning and TOEIC preparation in Indonesian colleges and universities. Requirements for graduation set as standard English proficiency tests yield further pressure on university students in that not only do students need to acquire the skills, but they must also obtain a required score in those skills. For instance, make sure to better understand how students themselves learn English and prepare for English exams. Then, studying students who have already achieved the score set by the university that allows the researcher to investigate learning

strategies used by successful test-takers. It could be beneficial for the university under investigation and may be referenced in other similar Indonesian higher education settings that apply proficiency standards.

METHOD

The present study used a quantitative research method of a descriptive nature, inquiring into the language learning strategies employed by university students who are high achievers in their EFL performance, as measured by the TOEIC. Creswell & Poth (2024) argues that quantitative research studies phenomena by collecting numerical data and performing statistical analysis. Considering that this study aimed to identify participants' strategy use as well as to determine the most and least used strategy categories, a descriptive quantitative design was considered the most appropriate approach.

The study was conducted at a private university in Batam, Indonesia, where English proficiency is assessed through the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and a minimum score is a graduation requirement. The participants were undergraduate students from various study programs who had already obtained an official TOEIC score of 605 or above. According to the university's TOEIC standard, this score corresponds to a relatively high level of English proficiency. In total, 257 students met this criterion and were invited to take part, and 207 of them agreed to participate, a response rate of approximately 80.5%. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed of the purpose of the study beforehand. Their informed consent was obtained prior to data collection.

The tool used for this research was a questionnaire, which utilized google form to collect data collectively from participants. The questionnaire consisted of 48 questions that were posed on a 5-point likert scale with 1 indicating the strongest disagree (SD) and 5 indicating the strongest agree (SA). The questions of the questionnaire were adapted from the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) developed by Oxford. The type of questions were used to examine and analyse the high achieving EFL learner's language learning strategies. The SILL description states anddivided into six categories of strategy used to boost one's language learning; memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies (Chen et al., 2025). There were nine questions on memory strategy use, thirteen questions were included to measure cognitive strategy use, five questions measured the use of compensation strategies, nine questions on metacognitive strategy use, six questions on affective strategy use, and six questions about social strategy use. The questionnaire items were modified for the situation of university EFL learners' TOEIC-related English learning. The reported strategies were categorized into what comes next six groups using the SILL categories as a modification.

The questionnaire link was distributed to eligible students who had achieved the required TOEIC score, along with a brief explanation of the purpose of the study and an assurance of the confidentiality of their responses. Students who agreed to participate completed the questionnaire independently within the time provided. The study procedures, including the consent process and the handling of participants' data, were reviewed by the researchers' supervising faculty prior to data collection, and all responses were treated confidentially and used solely for academic purposes.

Prior to the main analysis, responses were checked for completeness, and incomplete submissions were excluded so that only fully completed questionnaires from the 207 participants were retained for analysis. Data collected were then analysed through descriptive statistics, namely mean scores and standard deviations. The responses were sorted based on the six categories of language learning strategies suggested by Zou & Lertlit (2022). Frequencies of strategy usage were estimated by computing mean scores for each item and for each overall category. In addition, mean scores were used to determine the most and least frequently used language learning strategy categories among the participants. Mean scores were categorized into three levels of strategy use: high (3.5–5.0), medium (2.5–3.4), and low (1.0–2.4), following the classification used in the study. Since this study aimed to identify the frequency and ranking of language learning strategies rather than examine causal relationships or group differences, descriptive statistics were considered appropriate. Afterward, the results were discussed in relation to Oxford's categorization of language learning strategy use.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study in relation to the two research questions guiding this research: (1) types of EFL learning strategies of university learners who do not fail in FL learning

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and (2) the most and least used strategy categories. The result is derived from the participants "responses on a 48-item questionnaire". As can be seen from the findings, participant learners generally claimed to use all of the six ways of employing strategies found in the SILL: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies, but the level of frequency in its use belonged to a different category.

Language learning strategies used by high-achieving EFL learners

Table 1 presents the mean scores and standard deviations of all 48 questionnaire items across the six categories of language learning strategies, namely memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

Table 1. *Language learning strategy items*

No.	Strategy Category	Items	Mean	SD
1	Memory	I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	3.53	0.91
2		I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	3.46	0.93
3		I connect the sound of a new English word and an image to remember it.	3.39	1.11
4		I remember new words by making mental pictures of situations.	3.27	1.05
5		I use rhymes to remember new English words.	3.13	1.10
6		I use flashcards to remember new English words.	2.65	1.14
7		I physically act out new words.	3.20	1.02
8		I review English lessons often.	2.90	1.00
9		I remember words by their location on a page or board.	3.21	1.12
10	Cognitive	I say or write new English words several times.	3.32	0.99
11		I try to talk like native English speakers.	3.61	0.98
12		I practice the sounds of English.	3.62	0.95
13		I use English words in different ways.	3.47	0.94
14		I start conversations in English.	3.29	1.01
15		I watch English TV shows or movies.	4.00	1.03
16		I read for pleasure in English.	3.43	0.96
17		I write notes or messages in English.	3.32	1.04
18		I skim and then read carefully.	3.41	0.92
19		I look for similarities between English and my language.	3.21	1.09
20		I break words into parts to understand them.	3.35	1.09
21		I avoid translating word-for-word.	3.38	1.09
22		I summarize information in English.	3.35	0.96
23	Compensation	I guess meanings of unfamiliar English words.	3.62	0.91
24		I use gestures when I do not know a word.	3.52	1.11
25		I make up new words if I do not know the correct ones.	3.17	1.12
26		I read without looking up every new word.	3.16	1.01
27		I use similar words when I forget vocabulary.	3.79	0.97
28	Metacognitive	I try to find many ways to use English.	3.60	0.94
29		I notice my mistakes and improve.	3.85	0.85
30		I pay attention when someone speaks English.	3.84	0.93
31		I try to become a better English learner.	3.96	0.95
32		I plan my schedule to study English.	3.03	1.08
33		I look for people to talk to in English.	3.52	1.05
34		I look for opportunities to read English.	3.55	1.02
35		I set clear goals for improving my English.	3.40	1.10
36		I think about my learning progress.	3.49	1.07
37	Affective	I try to relax when I feel afraid using English.	3.30	1.06
38		I encourage myself to speak English.	3.54	0.98
39		I reward myself when I do well in English.	3.08	1.26
40		I notice when I feel nervous studying English.	3.29	1.22
41		I write my feelings in a learning diary.	2.54	1.25
42		I talk to others about my feelings in learning English.	2.73	1.22

No.	Strategy Category	Items	Mean	SD
43	Social	I ask others to repeat or slow down.	3.25	1.08
44		I ask others to correct my English.	3.51	1.11
45		I practice English with other students.	3.24	1.20
46		I ask for help from English speakers.	3.28	1.14
47		I ask questions in English.	3.04	1.06
48		I learn about the culture of English speakers.	3.13	1.04

Based on Table 1, the individual strategy used most frequently by the high-achieving EFL learners was the cognitive strategy "I watch English TV shows or movies" (M = 4.00, SD = 1.03), the only item in the questionnaire to reach the mean of 4.00. This suggests that learners deliberately created exposure to authentic English outside the classroom, which is especially important in an EFL setting like Indonesia, where daily contact with the language is limited. From an SLA perspective, such media exposure provides rich input that can support listening comprehension, vocabulary, and pronunciation at the same time (Kupchyk & Litvinchuk, 2025). It is also an enjoyable, low-effort activity that can be built into daily routines. In contrast, the least-used strategy was the affective strategy "I write my feelings in a learning diary" (M = 2.54, SD = 1.25), a difference of 1.46 points between the highest and lowest items. The large standard deviation shows that responses varied considerably, so some learners used this strategy while many rarely did.

Significant use of cognitive strategies was indicated from table 1. The highest score on the individual cognitive factors was I watch English TV shows or movies (M=4.00). This was also the highest individual mean score for all 48 items together, indicating that the learners were exposed to a lot of English media sources. The second and third rank of highest individual cognitive factors were " I practice English sounds and talking like the native speaker" (M 3.62 and 3.61 respectively). As the use of cognitive strategies is known for learners actively using and manipulating the target language (Kupchyk & Litvinchuk, 2025), this result is congruent with a tendency for learners to practice, analyse, and process language input through activities or speaking practice (Awinindia, 2023; Hardiyanto et al., 2024).

The metacognitive category also revealed a distinct trend. The three items, "I try to become a better English learner" (M= 3.96), "I notice my mistakes and improve" (M= 3.85), and "I pay attention when someone speaks English" (M= 3.84), scored higher than the rest, indicating that learners often expressed behaviours that monitored their own learning and engaged in regulating their own learning. Literature offers support in the form of other studies using university EFL learners that have revealed similar trends on planning, monitoring, and evaluation of learning (Chen et al., 2025; Septiani et al., 2024; Suharni et al., 2024)

Compensation strategies were also frequently reported as the third category. The item "I use similar words when I forget vocabulary" obtained a mean of 3.79, while "I guess meanings of unfamiliar English words" obtained a mean of 3.62. These results suggest that participants commonly used alternative expressions and contextual clues when they encountered gaps in their vocabulary knowledge. Such strategies can help learners continue understanding or communicating when they do not know an exact word. This pattern is consistent with research describing compensation strategies as a way for EFL learners to manage limitations in their existing language knowledge (Ali et al., 2026) .

Social strategies were used at a moderate level. The highest-scoring item in this category was "I ask others to correct my English" (M = 3.51). This result suggests that participants were willing to use interaction and feedback as part of their English learning. Social strategies may provide learners with opportunities to receive correction, clarification, and communicative practice. However, the lower overall position of this category compared with metacognitive, compensation, and cognitive strategies suggests that interaction was not the most frequently reported approach among the participants.

Affective strategies showed a different pattern. Although "I encourage myself to speak English" received a relatively high mean score (M = 3.54), "I write my feelings in a learning diary" (M = 2.54) and "I talk to others about my feelings in learning English" (M = 2.73) received the lowest scores in this category. This suggests that participants reported using self-encouragement more often than strategies involving explicit emotional reflection or discussion. Therefore, affective strategy use appeared to be more action-oriented than reflective among the participants.

Among the memory strategies, the highest-scoring item was "I think of relationships between

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what I already know and new things I learn in English" (M = 3.53). This suggests that the high-achieving learners tended to link new language to their existing knowledge, a meaningful and associative way of storing information. This preference is also reflected in other highly rated items, such as using new English words in a sentence to remember them (M = 3.46) and connecting the sound of a word with an image (M = 3.39). In contrast, the lowest-scoring item in this category was "I use flashcards to remember new English words" (M = 2.65, SD = 1.14), followed by reviewing English lessons often (M = 2.90). These strategies rely on repetition and isolated review, and they were used less than strategies that connect new vocabulary to meaning and context. This pattern indicates that the learners favoured making sense of new language over memorizing it mechanically.

Overall, the findings for the first research question show that the learners used strategies from all six SILL categories at medium to high levels (category means from 3.08 to 3.58). The items with the highest means came mainly from the cognitive, metacognitive, and compensation categories, for example watching English media (M = 4.00), noticing and correcting mistakes (M = 3.85), and using similar words when a word is forgotten (M = 3.79). These strategies can be built into learners' everyday English use: using media input, monitoring errors, and inferring meaning from context. In contrast, the items with the lowest means, namely keeping a learning diary (M = 2.54) and using flashcards (M = 2.65), require a separate, dedicated activity, whether emotional reflection or deliberate memorization. This pattern suggests that the high-achieving learners favored strategies that fit naturally into their daily English use over strategies that needed extra, isolated effort

Frequency and ranking of language learning strategy categories

Table 2 presents the overall frequency of language learning strategy use among the participants, ranked from the most to the least frequently used category.

Table 2. *Frequency of language learning strategy use*

Rank	Strategy Category	Mean	SD	Strategy Use
1	Metacognitive	3.58	0.09	High
2	Compensation	3.45	0.09	Medium
3	Cognitive	3.44	0.06	Medium
4	Social	3.24	0.06	Medium
5	Memory	3.19	0.08	Medium
6	Affective	3.08	0.11	Medium

From Table 2, the most used strategy was metacognitive strategies with (M=3.58, SD=0.09), then compensation strategies with (M=3.45, SD=0.09), cognitive strategies with (M=3.44, SD=0.06), social strategies with (M=3.24, SD=0.06), memory strategies with (M=3.19, SD=0.08), and the least affective strategies with (M=3.08, SD=0.11). In the accordance with the classification system used in this research, the metacognitive strategies were classified as high, while the other five strategies were in medium scale.

The data indicate that among the participants, metacognitive strategies were the most commonly employed language learning strategies (M = 3.58), with compensation strategies (M = 3.45) and cognitive strategies (M = 3.44) close behind. In contrast, affective strategies were identified as the least frequently used category (M = 3.08). This suggests that learners are more inclined to focus on the aspects of planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning process, rather than on strategies for emotional regulation. Zou & Lertlit (2022) and Fitrianingsih et al. (2025) argue that metacognitive strategies enable learners to arrange, supervise, and appraise their learning tasks, thereby empowering them to become more self-directed and efficient language learners.

The strong presence of metacognitive strategies in this study is consistent with Bayu et al. (2024), who investigated top-performing students in English majoring in Information Systems and found that metacognitive strategies were the most frequently employed category among learners with good English proficiency. Their paper noted that metacognitive strategies equip learners with the ability to control their own learning and to make informed decisions about their language learning progress. Similarly, Theyap (2024) revealed that university-level EFL students preferred metacognitive strategies over cognitive and social ones, as the former helped them plan learning sessions effectively and build language skills. The alignment of this research with previous studies

indirectly confirms the crucial role of metacognitive strategies in facilitating English language acquisition at the university level (Idham et al., 2025; Nandi, n.d.; Pratiwi et al., 2025; Zhao, 2025).

A high use of metacognitive strategies is evidenced by several items in the questionnaire. For instance, the item "I try to become a better English learner" received the highest mean score (M = 3.96), with "I notice my mistakes and improve" ranking second (M = 3.85). This indicates that learners continuously assessed their learning and worked on their weaknesses. These behaviours align with metacognitive regulation, which includes planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Septiani et al. (2024) similarly found that EFL students intensely used strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluating vocabulary learning. Their results demonstrated that learners regularly check and evaluate their vocabulary acquisition to improve. Likewise, Suharni et al. (2024) and Kiani & Roohani (2025) reported that metacognitive reading strategies were widely used by university EFL students, particularly strategies involving monitoring comprehension and evaluating understanding while reading. All these findings emphasize the role of metacognitive awareness in language acquisition.

Compensation strategies were found to be the second most used category by the current study's participants. Guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words was the most common strategy among learners (M = 3.62), and using similar words when a word could not be remembered was even more common (M = 3.79). According to Ali et al. (2026), compensation strategies help learners handle communication despite limitations in vocabulary knowledge. The findings imply that learners knew how to use contextual clues and express ideas in different ways to maintain understanding. This is consistent with Theyap (2024), who found that EFL learners used compensation strategies extensively to sustain communication and comprehension despite language limitations.

When considering all categories, cognitive strategies were ranked third overall. The most prominent cognitive strategy item was "I watch English TV shows or movies" (M = 4.00), pointing to students regularly exposing themselves to authentic English content. Kupchyk & Litvinchuk (2025) note that cognitive strategies comprise direct use of the target language, for instance, practicing, analysing, and summarizing while receiving language input. When students are exposed to authentic materials, their vocabulary, listening comprehension, and pronunciation naturally improve. Hardiyanto et al. (2024) and Awinindia (2023) found that cognitive strategies were the most frequently used strategies among ESL learners, showing that learners often carried out direct language practice activities to enhance their English acquisition.

The results further showed that social strategies (M = 3.24) and memory strategies (M = 3.19) were fairly used. Learners frequently asked others to correct their English and practiced English with friends. In addition, English interaction was regarded as one of the significant factors in language learning. Lin et al. (2021) suggested that social strategies promote language acquisition through communication, cooperation, and feedback from others. Meanwhile, memory strategies enabled learners to store and recall vocabulary by associating and repeating it. Although these strategies were not the dominant ones, they still contributed to the development of learners' language abilities, particularly by supporting vocabulary retention needed for TOEIC-related tasks.

The current study shows that affective strategies are the least popular category of strategies used by students. Among these items, the statement "I write my feelings in a learning diary" yielded the lowest mean score in the entire questionnaire (M = 2.54). This indicates that learners emphasized direct, effective learning behaviours more than emotional management strategies. A similar pattern was reported by Peter & Hashim (2023) in a systematic review analysing 32 studies published between 2019 and 2023, which found that metacognitive strategies were regularly the most favoured language learning strategies, while strategies for emotional and memory-related learning were among the least frequently used categories.

More broadly, the findings indicate that learners used multiple strategies for language learning, with metacognitive strategies standing out most clearly, while affective strategies were the least frequently used. These findings align with Zou & Lertlit (2022) and Iqlima et al. (2023), whose frameworks suggest that effective language learning entails learners actively regulating and monitoring their own learning process. Given the observed coherence between this study and prior research, it can be argued that metacognitive strategies play a very important role in supporting the English language learning of university EFL learners (Ni'mah et al., 2025). Because of this,

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English language programs should encourage students toward greater self-awareness in metacognition and self-regulated learning habits, in order to achieve better language learning outcomes (Marnita et al., 2026; Olop et al., 2024; Redmer & Mirafuentes, 2025). In practical terms, this may involve embedding explicit strategy training—such as goal-setting workshops, guided self-reflection on TOEIC practice results, and structured study-planning exercises—into existing English courses and TOEIC preparation classes, so that a wider range of students, not only those who are already high achievers, can develop similarly strong metacognitive habits.

These findings can also be understood in relation to the broader concept of self-regulated learning discussed by Teng (2023) and Muhsinin et al. (2025), who argues that appropriate strategy use supports self-regulation, reduces anxiety, and improves language performance, particularly in higher education settings. The dominance of metacognitive strategies observed among the high-achieving participants in this study reflects precisely this kind of self-regulation: learners who plan their study schedules, monitor their own mistakes, and evaluate their progress are, in effect, taking ownership of their own learning process rather than depending solely on classroom instruction. This is consistent with the institutional findings of Nugraha & Zaki (2024) and Zaki et al. (2025), both of which emphasize those structured, well-supported learning environments at the university level, when paired with learners' own strategic initiative, contribute meaningfully to English language achievement. Taken together, these findings suggest that TOEIC achievement in this context is not simply a function of institutional provision, such as English courses and language laboratories, but of how actively and strategically individual learners engage with the resources made available to them.

In general, the results reveal that high proficient learners employed ~~utilization of~~ multiple categories of learning strategies rather than a specific category of strategies. The metacognitive strategies were found to be the most frequently used strategies and followed by cognitive and compensation strategies that also were found to be relatively high strategies used by students. These results are in line with other previous studies that learners tend to use multiple strategies according to their learning needs and contexts (Mazandarani, 2024; Taufiqulloh et al., 2025). The results also contribute to support the broader idea of self-regulated learning and its components including planning, monitoring, and evaluating a learning process (Burhanuddin, 2025; Muhsinin et al., 2025; Teng, 2023; Yücedağ & Arslan, 2025). Due to a descriptive design used to examine the trend of learning strategies among successful students as well as the selection of students who have achieved at least a score of 605 on the TOEIC, the results are not explanations the pattern of learning strategies among successful students and not involved in identifying the causality between learning strategies and TOEIC achievement.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the language learning strategies used by high-achieving university EFL learners at one of the universities in Batam, Indonesia. In response to the first research question, the findings revealed that learners employed strategies across all six categories proposed by Chen et al. (2025) and organized by Zou & Lertlit (2022), namely memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies, with a clear preference for practical, goal-directed strategies such as watching English media, self-correction, and contextual guessing, over rote memorization or emotional disclosure. The learner cited their frequent use of practical, goal-oriented, and direct strategies, which include exposure to English media, correct their own target language, and use context to understand unfamiliar language. In answering to the second research question, the respondents reported the most frequent use of two categories of learning strategies, metacognitive strategies and the second one is comprising the combination of compensation and cognitive strategies. The least frequently used category was affective strategies.

These latter results offer a somewhat clearer picture of the strategy use reported by the students who had already met the institutional TOEIC standard. The high frequency of use of metacognitive strategies indicated the planning, monitoring, and evaluating of learning was not uncommon among these students. Because the research was descriptive in nature and was conducted with a group of students who had already achieved a TOEIC score of 605 or higher, the results are limited to support the use of the strategies as a way to predict or cause a high score on the institutional TOEIC, but rather describe what seem to be the strategy patterns used by successful learners within this context. For curriculum designers and English instructors, the results may offer some ideas for including strategy

attention in English and TOEIC preparation courses, more exactly in activities that involve checking progress, discussing test performance and noting contextual clues in unfamiliar language.

There are some limitations to this research study. Firstly, the data was obtained from a self-report questionnaire, and so is susceptible to social desirability bias or discrepancies between reported and actual strategy use. Secondly, this research was conducted at one university and it is so not possible to generalize the results to other institutional or cultural contexts. Thirdly, the use of a quantitative descriptive research design prevents the researcher from providing an in-depth reason for why learners made particular strategy choices or how they actually used them in an authentic learning setting. Future research that combines quantitative and qualitative questionnaires, classroom observation strategy, checklists or other behavioural data collection instruments could provide insight into the relationship between strategic preferences and actual strategy use. Future research may also want to examine the effectiveness of direct metacognitive strategy instructions or explore other type learning strategies for helping learners who have not yet achieved the target English language benchmark reach the goal.

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