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# Exploring Strategies in Language Learning

Nur Natasha Eliana Abdul Rahim[1], Siti Nur Yasmin Sheikh Suhaimi[2], Shanaa Fatihah Mohd Abu Bakar[3], Nur Akmal Mohamad Zaki[4], Azizah Abdul Majid[5]

[1,2,3]Centre of Foundation Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Dengkil, 43800 Dengkil, Selangor, Malaysia, [4]UOW Malaysia KDU University College, Ultropolis Glenmarie Campus, Jalan Kontraktor U1/14, Seksyen U1, Glenpark U1, 40150 Shah Alam, Selangor, [5]Pusat Tamhidi Usim, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, 78100 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan

Email: natashaeliana@uitm.edu.my, sitinuryasmin@uitm.edu.my, shanaafatihah@uitm.edu.my, akmal.m@uow.edu.my, azimad@usim.edu.my

Corresponding Author Email: sitinuryasmin@uitm.edu.my

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**Abstract**

Different learners utilize distinct strategies for acquiring a new language. Prioritizing suitable learning strategies is fundamental for educators seeking to enhance the language acquisition process. This quantitative study is aimed to explore the perception of learners on their use of learning strategies among undergraduates in Malaysia. A purposive sample of 167 participants responded to the survey. The respondents were Foundation students from a public university. The instrument used was a 5-point Likert scale survey consisting of three components: cognitive, metacognitive self-regulation and resource management. The results generally suggest students' strong inclination towards all three components. Understanding these causes can help create learning strategies to enhance language learning in the educational environment, as it sheds light on the relationship between learning strategies and language acquisition. The results also suggest a strong positive relationship between cognitive and metacognitive, metacognitive and resource management, as well as cognitive and resource management components.

**Keywords:** Learning Strategies, Cognitive Components, Metacognitive Components, Resource Management in Language Learning.

## Introduction

*Background of Study*

Learners are usually able to manage and take control of their learning when they are aware of the effective methods or strategies to be employed when learning. Wenden (1987) as cited in Hardan (2013) mentioned that learning strategies are the different strategies that learners

use to make sense of their learning process. In learning a new language, different strategies are employed by different learners in acquiring a language. Oxford (1990) defines language learning strategies (LLS) as specified actions taken by learners to make the learning process easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations. Oxford further classifies LLS into two major categories namely direct and indirect strategies where direct strategies are strategies used to learn the new language directly involving memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies group while indirect strategies involve metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. There are various factors that influence these strategies including their personality, biography and situational factors (Oxford, 1990). Siti Nur Shahida and Parilah (2020) noted that it is vital to keep in mind the learning strategies to be considered when planning courses, teaching students and designing classroom research and appropriate learning strategies must be among the first in the list of any ESL/EFL lecturer or researcher who wants to enhance students' learning.

Understanding the nuances of language acquisition strategies holds huge significance in educational contexts. By delving into the strategies employed by students, educators gain invaluable insights into tailoring teaching methodologies to suit diverse learning styles and needs. This study not only sheds light on the strategies themselves but also highlights their utility and effectiveness in nurturing language acquisition. By recognizing which strategies produce ideal results, educators can refine their teaching approaches, leading to enhanced student engagement, comprehension, and proficiency in language learning. In addition, a deeper understanding of these strategies allows educators to address individual student needs more efficiently, promoting inclusivity and personalized learning experiences. Thus, this research serves as a key resource for educators, providing actionable insights that can improvise language instruction and ultimately supplement student's learning experience.

**Statement of Problem**

Discovering language learning strategies is still a long way and there is still more to be covered by both learners and educators. The identification and comprehension of learners' diverse learning strategies pose a significant challenge in the realm of education. Students vary in their approaches to the learning process and how they handle different learning activities (Callahan et al., 2002). Simsek & Balaban (2010) assured that there is no single strategy that guarantees success in every learning context. Recognizing that students employ different strategies to learning and that one style of strategies may not suit all students is essential for their academic success and personal development. The diversity in students' learning strategies grows bigger and as one student may adopt more learning strategies than the other student (Simsek & Balaban, 2010). Therefore, effective learning strategies are intricately linked with academic success, highlighting the crucial role of understanding and implementing these strategies for students' independent and lifelong learning journeys (Mok, Ma, Liu, & So, 2005).

**Objective of the Study and Research Questions**

This study is done to explore perception of learners on their use of learning strategies. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions:

- How do learners perceive the use of cognitive components in language learning?
- How do learners perceive the use of metacognitive components in language learning?

- How do learners perceive the use of resource management in language learning?
- Is there a relationship between all language learning strategies?

**Literature Review**

*Language Learning Strategies*

The concept of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) has been defined in many different ways by researchers. With Rigeney (1978) being one of the pioneers, defined LLS as deliberate actions or behaviours employed by language learners to improve the process of acquiring new information (as cited in Hardan, 2013). Wenden and Rubin (1987) later defined LLS as the specific actions taken by learners to turn learning into a more enjoyable, more effective and easier task (as cited in Zare, 2012). Moreover, the definition by Oxford (1990) included classifying the strategies into three main categories, namely cognitive, metacognitive and socio affective (as cited in Hardan, 2013). Cognitive strategies include mental processing, metacognitive strategies are related to self-management and self-regulation, while socio-affective strategies focus on the social and emotional aspects of language learning. Since then, LLS taxonomy has been widely adopted by scholars, encompassing both direct and indirect strategies.

*Past Studies on Language Learning Strategies*

LLS have been studied extensively by many scholars especially across fields of second and foreign language acquisition. The emphasis was placed on the methods employed by learners to navigate their second or foreign language learning, particularly in pinpointing the strategies contributing to successful outcomes and also those associated with less effective learning.

There have been many past studies on Language Learning Strategies (LLS). The study by Sukying (2021) is done to investigate the choices of LLS employed by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university learners. This study investigates 1,523 Thai university students on the language learning strategies they choose to use. Findings were gathered through a questionnaire and it is found that the use of LLS among Thai university learners differs based on individual distinctions and contextual elements. According to Sukying (2021), the implication of the study is that students could experience significant advantages from training in the use of LLS.

Next, the study by Siti Nur Shahida Md. Aziz and Parilah Mohd Shah (2020) also looked at the preference of students' language learning strategy and whether or not gender affects the LLS choices. The respondents of the study were thirty third semester students of Polytechnic of Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah, Shah Alam. Data were obtained through the use of an adapted questionnaire. Findings revealed that there was high preference for cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The affective and compensation strategies on the other hand were the least preferred strategy used by respondents. It was also found that gender did not play much statistically significant difference in the preference of LLS.

**Conceptual Framework**

Learners need to use a variety of strategies to make learning successful. According to Rahmat (2018), language learning strategies employed by the learners may facilitate or even hinder learning. Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. This study is rooted from

Wenden and Rubin's (1987) language learning strategies and they are cognitive, metacognitive and resource management.

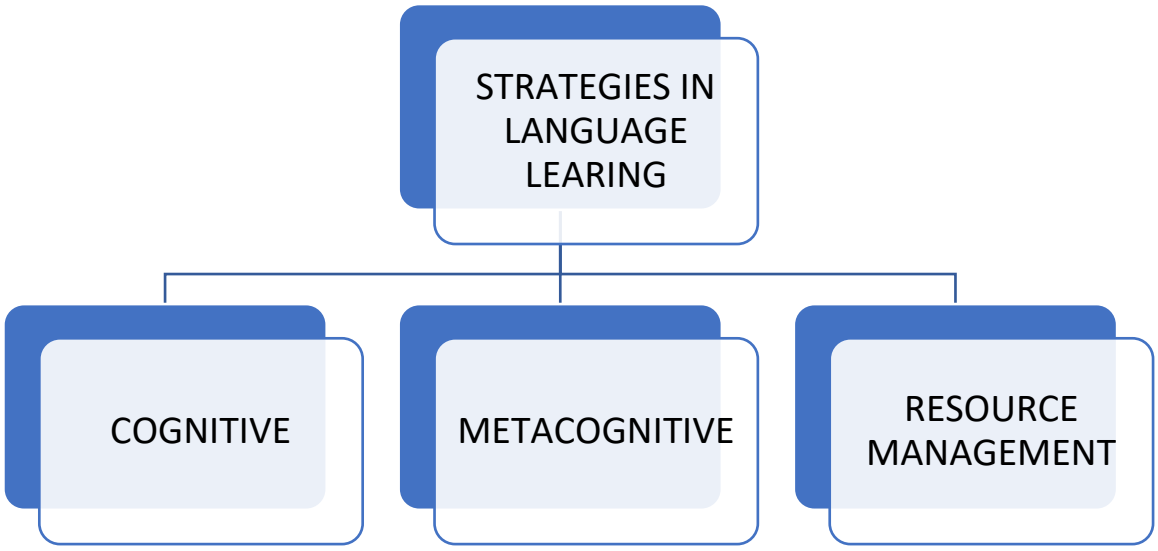


Figure 1 - Conceptual Framework of the Study-
Strategies in Language Learning

**Methodology**

This quantitative study is done to explore motivation factors for learning among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 167 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Wenden and Rubin (1987) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 4 sections. Section A has items on demographic profile. Section B has 19 items on cognitive components. Section C has 11 items on metacognitive self-regulation and Section D has 11 items on resource management components.

Table 1
*Distribution of Items in the Survey*

| SECT | STRATEGY (Wenden and Rubin (1987) | | SUB-STRATEGY | | | Cronbach Alpha |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B | COGNITIVE COMPONENTS | (a) | Rehearsal | 4 | 19 | 0.906 |
| | | (b) | Organization | 4 | | |
| | | (c ) | Elaboration | 6 | | |
| | | (d) | Critical Thinking | 5 | | |
| | | | | | | |
| C | METACOGNITIVE SELF-REGULATION | | | | 11 | 0.846 |
| | | | | | | |
| D | RESOURCE MANAGEMENT | (a) | Environment Management | 5 | 11 | 0.779 |
| | | (b) | Effort Management | 4 | | |
| | | (c ) | Help-Seeking | 2 | | |
| | | | | | 41 | 0.939 |

Table 1 also shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.906 for section B, 0.846 for section C and 0.779 for section D. Overall, the reliability of the survey is 0.939. Thus, this reveals a good reliability of the instrument chosen. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

**Findings**

Findings for Demographic Profile

Table 2
*Percentage for Demographic Profile*

| Q1 | Gender | Male | Female |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | 18% | 82% |
| Q2 | Discipline | Science & Technology | Social Science |
| | | 5% | 95% |

In table 2, female respondents represented 82% and the male respondents represented 18%. Table 2 also shows two main disciplines of studies with Social Science the biggest number of respondents 95% and 5% from Science & Technology.

*Findings for Cognitive Components*

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive the use of cognitive components in language learning?

Cognitive Components (19 items)

Table 3

*Mean for Rehearsal (4 items)*

| ITEM | MEAN |
|---|---|
| LSCCRQ1 When I study for the classes, I practice saying the material to myself over and over. | 3.8 |
| LSCCRQ2 When studying for the courses, I read my class notes and the course readings over and over again. | 4.0 |
| LSCCRQ3 I memorize key words to remind me of important concepts in this class. | 4.3 |
| LSCCRQ4 I make lists of important items for the courses and memorize the lists. | 4.0 |

Table 3 indicates the mean score for rehearsal which consists of 4 items. The third statement has the highest mean score of 4.3 which says 'I memorize key words to remind me of important concepts in this class'. The second highest mean score is 4 for two statements; 'When studying for the courses, I read my class notes and the course readings over and over again' and secondly, 'I make lists of important items for the courses and memorize the lists'. The lowest mean score is for the statement 'When I study for the classes, I practice saying the material to myself over and over' with 3.8.

Table 4

*Mean for Organization (4 items)*

| ITEM | MEAN |
|---|---|
| LSCCOQ1 When I study the readings for the courses in the program, I outline the material to help me organize my thoughts. | 3.8 |
| LSCCOQ2 When I study for the courses, I go through the readings and my class notes and try to find the most important ideas. | 4.3 |
| LSCCOQ3 I make simple charts, diagrams, or tables to help me organize course materials in this program. | 3.4 |
| LSCCOQ4 When I study for the courses, I go over my class notes and make an outline of important concepts. | 4.0 |

Table 4 shows the mean score for organization which consists of 4 statements. The highest mean score is 4.3 for the statement 'When I study for the courses, I go through the readings and my class notes and try to find the most important ideas'. The second highest score is 4.0 for the statement 'When I study for the courses, I go over my class notes and make an outline of important concepts'. Next, the statement 'When I study the readings for the courses in the program, I outline the material to help me organize my thoughts' scored 3.8. The lowest mean score is for the statement that says 'I make simple charts, diagrams, or tables to help me organize course materials in this program' with a score of 3.4.

Table 5
*Mean for Elaboration (6 items)*

| ITEM | MEAN |
|---|---|
| LSCCEQ1 When I study for the courses in this program, I pull together information from different sources, such as lectures, readings, and discussions. | 4.0 |
| LSCCEQ 2 I try to relate ideas in one subject to those in other courses whenever possible. | 4.0 |
| LSCCEQ3 When reading for the courses, I try to relate the material to what I already know. | 4.3 |
| LSCCEQ4 When I study for the courses in this program, I write brief summaries of the main ideas from the readings and my class notes. | 3.8 |
| LSCCEQ5 I try to understand the material in the classes by making connections between the readings and the concepts from the lectures. | 4.1 |
| LSCCEQ6 I try to apply ideas from course readings in other class activities such as lecture and discussion. | 4.1 |

Table 5 shows the mean score for elaboration that consists of 6 statements. The highest mean score is 4.3 for the statement 'When reading for the courses, I try to relate the material to what I already know'. Next, the second highest mean score is for two statements that say 'I try to understand the material in the classes by making connections between the readings and the concepts from the lectures' and 'I try to apply ideas from course readings in other class activities such as lecture and discussion' with a score of 4.1. The lowest mean score is for two statements that say 'When I study for the courses in this program, I write brief summaries of the main ideas from the readings and my class notes' with a score of 4.0.

Table 6
*Mean for Critical Thinking (5 items)*

| ITEM | MEAN |
|---|---|
| LSCCCTQ1 I often find myself questioning things I hear or read in the courses to decide if I find them convincing. | 4.0 |
| LSCCCTQ2 When a theory, interpretation, or conclusion is presented in classes or in the readings, I try to decide if there is good supporting evidence. | 3.9 |
| LSCCCTQ3 I treat the course materials as a starting point and try to develop my own ideas about it. | 3.9 |
| LSCCCTQ4 I try to play around with ideas of my own related to what I am learning in the courses. | 4.0 |
| LSCCCTQ5 Whenever I read or hear an assertion or conclusion in the classes, I think about possible alternatives. | 3.8 |

Table 6 exhibits the mean score for critical thinking that consists of 5 statements. The highest mean is 4.0 for two statements that say 'I often find myself questioning things I hear or read in the courses to decide if I find them convincing' and 'I try to play around with ideas of my own related to what I am learning in the courses'. The second highest mean score is 3.9 for two statements that say 'When a theory, interpretation, or conclusion is presented in classes or in the readings, I try to decide if there is good supporting evidence' and 'I treat the course materials as a starting point and try to develop my own ideas about it'. The lowest mean score

is for the statement that says 'Whenever I read or hear an assertion or conclusion in the classes, I think about possible alternatives' with a score of 3.8.

*Findings for Metacognitive Components*

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners perceive the use of metacognitive components in language learning?

Table 7
*Mean for Metacognitive Self-Regulation (11 items)*

| ITEM | MEAN |
|---|---|
| MSSRQ1 During class time, I often miss important points because I am thinking of other things. | 3.1 |
| MSSRQ2 When reading for the courses, I make up questions to help focus my reading. | 3.4 |
| MSSRQ3 When I become confused about something I am reading for the classes, I go back and try to figure it out. | 4.1 |
| MSSRQ4 If course readings are difficult to understand, I change the way I read the material. | 3.8 |
| MSSRQ5 Before I study new course material thoroughly, I often skim it to see how it is organized. | 3.9 |
| MSSRQ6 I ask myself questions to make sure I understand the material I have been studying in this program. | 3.9 |
| MSSRQ7 I try to change the way I study in order to fit any course requirements and the instructors' teaching style. | 3.7 |
| MSSRQ8 I try to think through a topic and decide what I am supposed to learn from it rather than just reading it over when studying for the courses in this program. | 3.9 |
| MSSRQ9 When studying for the courses in this program I try to determine which concepts I do not understand well. | 4.1 |
| MSSRQ10 When I study for the courses, I set goals for myself in order to direct my activities in each study period. | 3.8 |
| MSSRQ11 If I get confused taking notes in classes, I make sure I sort it out afterwards. | 3.9 |

Table 7 indicated the mean for Metacognitive Self Regulation that consists of 11 items. The highest mean is 4.1 that states when students are studying the courses, they try to determine which concepts they do not understand. Similarly, most students adopt the method of reading when they go back after class if they have any topics that confuses them. The second highest mean (3.9) method adopted is skimming the material for the course, asking oneself questions to ensure understanding when studying the course, thinking through the topic rather than just reading and lastly sorting out notes if one gets confused during note-taking in class. The lowest ranking is that students often miss important points because of thinking on other things.

*Findings for Resource Management*

This section presents data to answer research question 3- How do learners perceive the use of resource management in language learning?

Resource Management Component (11 items)

Table 8

*Mean for Environment Management (5 items)*

| ITEM | MEAN |
|---|---|
| RMCEMQ1 I usually study in a place where I can concentrate on my coursework. | 4.3 |
| RMCEMQ2 I make good use of my study time for the courses in this program. | 3.9 |
| RMCEMQ3 I have a regular place set aside for studying. | 3.9 |
| RMCEMQ4 I make sure that I keep up with the weekly readings and assignments for the courses. | 4.1 |
| RMCEMQ5 I attend the classes regularly in this program. | 4.8 |

Table 8 portrays the Mean for Environment Management that consists of 5 items. The highest mean is 'I attend the classes regularly in this program'. Secondly with mean 4.3, 'I usually study in a place where I can concentra on my course. Next, with mean 4.1, "I make sure that I keep up with the weekly readings and assignments for the course. The lowest mean with merely 3.9 are "I make good use of my study time for the courses in this program' and I have a regular place set aside for studying.

Table 9

*Mean for Effort Management (4 items)*

| ITEM | MEAN |
|---|---|
| RMCEMQ1 I have a regular place set aside for studying. | 4.0 |
| RMCEMQ2 I work hard to do well in the classes in this program even if I do not like what we are doing. | 4.2 |
| RMCEMQ3 When coursework is difficult, I either give up or only study the easy parts. | 2.8 |
| RMCEMQ4 Even when course materials are dull and uninteresting, I manage to keep working until I finish. | 4.1 |

Table 9 shows the mean score for Effort Management which consists of 4 items. The highest mean is 4.2 for 'I work hard to do well in the classes in this program even if I do not like what we are doing', followed by 4.1 for 'Even when course materials are dull and uninteresting, i manage to keep working until I finish and item 1 with 4.0 for 'I have a regular place set aside for studying'. The lowest mean score is 2.8 for 'When coursework is difficult, I either give up or only study the easy parts' indicating respondents disagree with this statement.

Table 10

*Mean for Help-Seeking (2 items)*

| ITEM | MEAN |
|---|---|
| RMCHSQ1 When I cannot understand the material in a course, I ask another student in the class for help. | 4.4 |
| RMCHSQ 2 I try to identify students in the classes whom I can ask for help if necessary. | 4.5 |

Table 10 indicates the mean score for help-seeking which consists of 2 items. The second item, 'I try to identify students in the classes whom I can ask for help if necessary' scores the highest mean with 4.5 and followed closely by the first item 'When I cannot understand the material in a course, I ask another student in the class for help' with mean score 4.4.

*Findings for Relationship between all language learning strategies.*

This section presents data to answer research question 4- Is there a relationship between all language learning strategies? To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between metacognitive, effort regulation, cognitive, social and affective strategies data is analysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in table 11, 12 and 13 below.

Table 11

*Correlation between Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies*

**Correlations**

| | | COGNITIVE | METACOGNITIVE |
|---|---|---|---|
| COGNITIVE | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .760** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | <.001 |
| | N | 167 | 167 |
| METACOGNITIVE | Pearson Correlation | .760** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | <.001 | |
| | N | 167 | 167 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 11 shows there is an association between cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between cognitive and metacognitive strategies (r=.760**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

Table 12

*Correlation between Metacognitive and Resource Management Strategies*

**Correlations**

| | | METACOGNITIVE | RESOURCEMANAGEMENT |
|---|---|---|---|
| METACOGNITIVE | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .716** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | <.001 |
| | N | 167 | 167 |
| RESOURCEMANAGEMENT | Pearson Correlation | .716** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | <.001 | |
| | N | 167 | 167 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 12 shows there is an association between metacognitive and resource management strategies. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between

metacognitive and resource management strategies (r=.716**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between metacognitive and resource management strategies.

Table 13
*Correlation between Cognitive and Resource Management Strategies*

**Correlations**

| | | COGNITIVE | RESOURCEMANAGEMENT |
|---|---|---|---|
| COGNITIVE | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .626** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | <.001 |
| | N | 167 | 167 |
| RESOURCEMANAGEMENT | Pearson Correlation | .626** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | <.001 | |
| | N | 167 | 167 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 13 shows there is an association between cognitive and resource management strategies. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between cognitive and resource management strategies (r=.626**) and (p=.000). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between cognitive and resource management strategies.

## Conclusion

*Summary of Findings and Discussions*

The findings on cognitive components suggest that students employ diverse study strategies, with an emphasis on memorization, organization of key ideas, relating new information to existing knowledge, and engaging in critical thinking by questioning and developing personal ideas. This is consistent with the results of previous research that examined the relationship between learning styles and learning strategies, particularly by Shi (2011) who reported that cognitive learning styles predominantly affect learners' choice of learning strategies. Thus, this multifaceted approach underscores a holistic engagement with course materials, promoting a deeper understanding and application of knowledge.

On another note, the findings suggest that students generally employ effective metacognitive strategies, such as identifying and addressing areas of confusion and actively engaging with the material through methods like questioning, thinking through topics, and organizing notes. The challenge of distraction during study sessions emphasizes the importance of cultivating concentration skills to enhance metacognitive self-regulation. Thus, finding corroborates the idea of Blummer & Kenton (2014) who suggested that metacognitive knowledge plays an important role in the problem-solving process, by encouraging the planning, regulating, and

monitoring the process. In conclusion, students demonstrate a strong inclination towards metacognitive awareness and control in their study habits, but addressing distractions may further optimize their learning outcomes.

Students also generally exhibit positive resource management behaviours, as reflected in the mean scores. Resource management findings suggest a generally positive attitude towards academic challenges, with room for improvement in persisting through difficult coursework. The high scores in help-seeking behaviours indicate a proactive approach to overcoming academic hurdles by seeking assistance from peers, reflecting a supportive learning environment. This is aligned with findings of previous studies that show resource management learning is an important predictor of learning achievements (Waller & Papi, 2017). To conclude, the data suggests a need for interventions that promote resilience in the face of challenging coursework while also acknowledging and encouraging the positive trend of seeking help when needed.

Additionally, this study provides evidence of strong positive correlation between cognitive, metacognitive and resource management strategies. These characteristics are critical factors in enhancing learners' language learning strategies and may foresee success at higher levels of education, in their careers, and in life.

*Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research*

It is suggested that future research to employ qualitative research methods, such as interviews or focus groups, could provide deeper insights into students' perspectives on effective study habits, challenges faced, and the perceived impact of interventions. More research should look into the importance of refining concentration skills as findings on metacognitive strategies suggest a potential area for targeted interventions to enhance metacognitive self-regulation. The positive trend in seeking help from peers indicates a supportive learning environment. Future research could also explore the effectiveness of collaborative learning environments in facilitating academic support. By addressing these suggested areas of future research, educators and policymakers can gain a deeper understanding of effective learning strategies, leading to the development of targeted interventions that support students in achieving their academic goals.

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