

Evolving Speaking Strategies in Arabic Learning: Insights from Oxford's Strategy Inventory in Indonesia

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Abstract:

This study aims to examine the learning strategies used by students of the Arabic Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah, State Islamic Institute of Kediri in the *maharah kalam* course using the language learning strategy classification verified by Rebecca Oxford. The results of this study can provide an overview for language learners, teachers, and practitioners about the learning strategies that are widely used in learning *maharah kalam*. This study employs a mixed-method approach with a sequential explanatory design. Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire adapted from the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), while qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews with selected respondents to explore the concrete forms of learning strategies employed. The results of the study indicate that students use various learning strategies, both direct (such as cognitive and compensatory strategies) and indirect (such as metacognitive and social strategies). Metacognitive strategies, such as planning and self-evaluation, and social strategies, such as collaborating with friends, are the most dominant strategies used. The researcher also found a lack of understanding and application of affective strategies among students, which impacts their low self-confidence in speaking Arabic in public.

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelaah strategi pembelajaran yang digunakan oleh mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Arab, Fakultas Tarbiyah, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kediri dalam mata kuliah *maharah kalam* dengan menggunakan klasifikasi strategi pembelajaran bahasa yang dikembangkan oleh Rebecca Oxford. Hasil penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan gambaran bagi para pembelajar bahasa, pendidik, dan praktisi mengenai strategi pembelajaran yang paling banyak digunakan dalam pembelajaran *maharah kalam*. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan campuran (*mixed method*) dengan desain penjelasan berurutan (*sequential explanatory design*). Data kuantitatif dikumpulkan melalui angket yang diadaptasi dari *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)*, sedangkan data kualitatif diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam dengan responden terpilih untuk menggali bentuk konkret penerapan strategi pembelajaran yang digunakan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa menggunakan berbagai strategi pembelajaran, baik strategi langsung (seperti strategi kognitif dan kompensasi) maupun strategi tidak langsung (seperti strategi metakognitif dan sosial). Strategi metakognitif, seperti perencanaan dan evaluasi diri, serta strategi sosial, seperti kerja sama dengan teman, merupakan strategi yang paling dominan digunakan. Peneliti juga menemukan kurangnya

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Introduction

The growing demand for Arabic proficiency in Indonesia, particularly among students in Islamic higher education, highlights a critical gap between institutional goals and student outcomes, especially in speaking skills (*maharah kalam*). Despite significant curriculum investments—such as dedicating twenty credit hours to speaking proficiency—many students in the Arabic Language Education program at institutions like the State Islamic Institute of Kediri still report low confidence and poor performance in real-world communication, a concern echoed by partner schools during student internships (Afyuddin et al., 2023). This disconnect underscores a pressing need to investigate how learners themselves engage with the learning process, moving beyond the traditional focus on teaching methods and resources. Research indicates that learner autonomy and the conscious application of language learning strategies—such as metacognitive planning and social collaboration—are pivotal in fostering effective skill acquisition (Chen, 2022). For instance, studies by Larry Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) demonstrate that students guided in using strategies like monitoring and evaluation significantly outperform those who are not. By applying Rebecca Oxford's comprehensive Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), this study aims to identify the specific strategies employed by Indonesian students, thereby providing actionable insights to bridge the theory-practice divide and empower a new generation of confident Arabic speakers.

Research into language learning strategies has long been informed by influential frameworks, notably Rebecca Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which provides a comprehensive taxonomy that distinguishes between direct strategies, such as cognitive and memory-related techniques, and indirect ones, including metacognitive and social strategies. Previous studies, including those by Larry Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010), have empirically demonstrated that learners who receive explicit instruction in these strategies—such as planning and self-evaluation—significantly outperform those who do not, underscoring the role of strategic awareness in language acquisition. Similarly, scholars such as Ellis (2015) and Nation (2013) have emphasized that frequent practice and the strategic use of one's native language can facilitate initial comprehension and vocabulary retention. However, a conspicuous gap remains in how these generalized strategies are applied in specific linguistic contexts, particularly for Arabic-speaking skills (*maharah kalam*) in non-Arabic-speaking environments, such as Indonesia (Jauharoh et al., 2021). Existing literature often focuses on receptive skills or provides broad overviews, leaving the nuanced, on-the-ground application of strategies in *maharah kalam* underexplored. For instance, while social and

metacognitive strategies are widely acknowledged as beneficial, their practical implementation and the specific challenges learners face—such as a lack of confidence or underutilization of compensatory techniques—are not thoroughly documented in the Indonesian Arabic learning context. This study, therefore, positions itself to build upon Oxford's foundational work by providing contextualized, empirical insights into the actual strategy use among Indonesian learners, aiming to bridge the gap between theoretical strategy classification and their practical, localized application in developing Arabic oral proficiency.

While numerous studies have explored language learning strategies globally, a distinct gap persists regarding the specific application and effectiveness of Rebecca Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) in the context of Arabic speaking skills (*maharah kalam*) within Indonesian Islamic higher education. Previous research, such as that by [Larry Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari \(2010\)](#), has demonstrated the general benefits of strategy instruction; however, its direct application to the unique socio-cultural and pedagogical environment of institutions like the State Islamic Institute of Kediri remains underexamined. For instance, initial evidence from this study reveals a distinctive reliance on social and metacognitive strategies among students. In contrast, compensatory and affective strategies are critically underutilized—a pattern that has not been thoroughly documented in other contexts. This gap is significant because, as [Brown and Chen \(2022\)](#) suggest, effective self-regulated learning hinges on a balanced and context-aware application of diverse strategies. Therefore, this research provides a unique contribution by not only mapping the nuanced strategy profile of these specific learners but also by uncovering the concrete, localized methods they employ, such as translating from Indonesian or maintaining vocabulary notebooks. These insights provide a critical, evidence-based foundation for developing more tailored pedagogical interventions that address the confidence and fluency issues prevalent in this educational setting, ultimately enriching the global understanding of how learning strategies manifest and can be optimized in diverse cultural and institutional contexts.

Despite the critical role of speaking proficiency (*maharah kalam*) as a primary indicator of Arabic language competence, many students in Indonesian higher education, including those at the State Islamic Institute of Kediri, continue to demonstrate low self-confidence and inadequate speaking skills even after several semesters of study, a concern echoed by partner schools during student internships ([Afyuddin et al., 2023](#)). This persistent gap highlights an urgent need to move beyond evaluating external factors, such as curriculum or teaching materials, and instead investigate the internal learning processes of students themselves. Specifically, understanding the learning strategies they employ—or fail to employ—is crucial, as research confirms that conscious strategy use is a key component of self-regulated learning, enabling students to organize and monitor their learning processes more effectively towards achieving their goals ([Rahimi and Katal 2012](#); [Fasikhah & Fatimah 2013](#)). For instance, studies by [Larry Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari \(2010\)](#) empirically demonstrated that students who were explicitly taught learning strategies significantly outperformed those who were not. Therefore, by systematically examining the speaking learning strategies used by students through the comprehensive framework of Rebecca Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), this research provides indispensable insights. It identifies not only which strategies are dominant, such as social and metacognitive strategies, but also critical weaknesses, like the minimal use of compensatory techniques, thereby offering a foundational evidence base for

designing targeted pedagogical interventions to empower learners and directly address the root causes of poor spoken Arabic proficiency.

This study aims to investigate the specific language learning strategies employed by students in developing their Arabic speaking skills (*maharah kalam*), utilizing Rebecca Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) as the primary framework. The motivation for this research stems from initial observations and stakeholder feedback indicating that students in the Arabic Language Education program often struggle with speaking proficiency and lack confidence in public communication, despite advanced academic standing. For instance, partner schools reported concerns about the practical speaking abilities of student interns, highlighting a gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application. Therefore, this study aims to systematically identify the direct strategies—such as memory, cognitive, and compensatory techniques—and indirect strategies—including metacognitive, affective, and social approaches—that are most commonly used by learners. Evidence from the preliminary quantitative survey already reveals a dominant use of social strategies, such as practicing conversations with peers, and metacognitive strategies, including self-evaluation, while indicating a notable underutilization of affective strategies for managing anxiety. By clarifying these strategic preferences and their correlations with learning outcomes, the research ultimately aims to provide actionable insights for educators to design more effective instructional guidance, helping students bridge the gap between classroom learning and fluent, confident spoken Arabic.

Method

This study uses a mixed-method approach with a sequential explanatory design, which involves collecting quantitative data followed by qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 2014). The researcher chose the sequential explanatory design to obtain a general overview (generalization) of the research object, namely by continuing to collect quantitative data and incorporating qualitative data to reveal a more in-depth understanding. The researcher employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem than would be possible by conducting them separately or individually (Creswell & Creswell 2018; Sugiyono 2017).

Researchers first collected quantitative data using a questionnaire adapted from the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The data was then followed up with in-depth interviews with several selected respondents, based on the highest questionnaire scores, to explore in greater depth how they used language learning strategies in learning *Maharah Kalam*.

This learning strategy questionnaire was developed by adapting the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), verified by Rebecca Oxford, using a dichotomous scale model that requires respondents to answer "yes" or "no" to several indicators of language learning strategy application. The dichotomous scale does not provide neutral answer options for respondents, making it faster to identify the use of specific strategies by students (Pranatawijaya et al., 2019). Before answering the questionnaire, students received an initial treatment that included listening to recordings of Arabic conversations by native speakers, practicing Arabic conversations, and giving brief presentations on simple topics in Arabic. This was done as a

warm-up to help students recall their learning strategies for completing *maharah kalam* learning.

The researcher selected five students as interview respondents based on recommendations from the lecturer teaching the *masrahiyah* course. The lecturer's authority in this case helped the researcher to find students who could provide a wealth of information related to the use of Arabic learning strategies in *maharah kalam*, as the lecturer was able to identify each student's *maharah kalam* abilities. Additionally, the selection of these five students was due to the subjectivity of assessing speaking skills (*maharah kalam*). This means that *maharah kalam* is performance-based, making it difficult to identify students with high proficiency through surveys or tests. Instead, non-test assessments conducted by instructors are more effective.

Result and Discussion

Result

Data from the *Maharah Kalam* Learning Strategy Questionnaire

The findings from the questionnaire distributed to fifty respondents studying Arabic language education at the Faculty of *Tarbiyah*, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kediri, in their seventh semester are as follows:

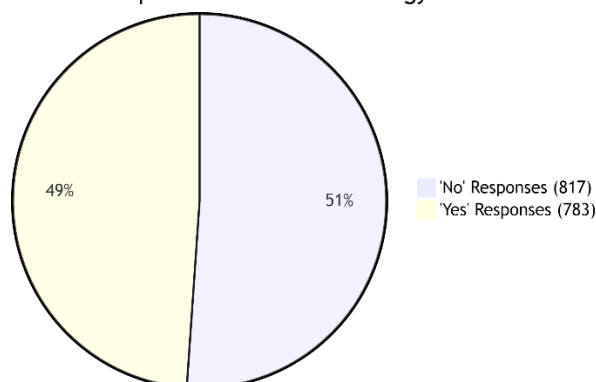
Table 1

Findings from the SILL questionnaire distributed to 50 respondents studying Arabic language education at Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kediri

	Yes	%	No	%
Item 1	37	74	13	26
Item 2	3	6	47	94
Item 3	10	20	40	80
Item 4	5	10	45	90
Item 5	12	24	38	76
Item 6	32	64	18	36
Item 7	10	20	40	80
Item 8	20	40	30	60
Item 9	37	74	13	26
Item 10	39	78	11	22
Item 11	24	48	26	52
Item 12	3	6	47	94
Item 13	6	12	44	88
Item 14	16	32	34	68
Item 15	13	26	37	74
Item 16	12	24	38	76
Item 17	43	86	7	14
Item 18	36	72	14	28
Item 19	47	94	3	6
Item 20	22	44	28	56

Item 21	22	44	28	56
Item 22	42	84	8	16
Item 23	13	26	37	74
Item 24	35	70	15	30
Item 25	10	20	40	80
Item 26	2	4	48	96
Item 27	5	10	45	90
Item 28	46	92	4	8
Item 29	46	92	4	8
Item 30	47	94	3	6
Item 31	39	78	11	22
Item 32	49	98	1	2
Total	783		817	

l 'Yes' vs. 'No' Responses Across All Strategy Items



Note. Table 1 presents the raw findings from the SILL questionnaire, showing the frequency and percentage of "Yes" and "No" responses from 50 students for each of the 32 strategy items. The total "Yes" score (783) is slightly lower than the "No" score (817), indicating that, overall, students reported using learning strategies less frequently than not in their *maharah kalam* development. This general trend suggests a limited overall application of structured learning strategies among the participants.

Table 2

Mapping of Learning Strategies and Questionnaire Data

Item	Questionnaire Statements	Strategy Codes	Score
1	To remember and expand/enrich my Arabic vocabulary, I always memorize new words I encounter, both in written form and those I hear in oral texts.	Direct Strategy – Memory Strategy	37
2	I remember information in new words based on their sound.	Direct Strategy – Memory Strategy	3
3	I associate the sound of Arabic with images and their meanings.	Direct Strategy – Memory Strategy	10

4	I remember new words or idioms by writing them down in a special notebook for those words or idioms.	Direct Strategy – Memory Strategy	5
5	I try to physically act out new words or statements that I read or hear.	Direct Strategy – Memory Strategy	12
6	I very often review (re-study) Arabic lessons.	Direct Strategy – Memory Strategy	32
Total Score			99
			12.6% (99/783*100)

Item	Questionnaire Statements	Strategy Codes	Score
7	I try to listen to new Arabic words repeatedly.	Direct Strategy – Cognitive Strategy	10
8	I practice the pronunciation and intonation of unfamiliar Arabic words over and over.	Direct Strategy – Cognitive Strategy	20
9	I always use phrases that are commonly used or heard.	Direct Strategy – Cognitive Strategy	37
10	I try to practice Arabic words I find in written texts or hear in spoken texts by having dialogues with friends.	Direct Strategy – Cognitive Strategy	39
11	I try to translate new Arabic words I hear and read into Indonesian to understand their meaning.	Direct Strategy – Cognitive Strategy	24
12	I make summaries of the passages I read or listen to.	Direct Strategy – Cognitive Strategy	3
Total score		: 133	
		17% (133/783*100)	

Item	Questionnaire Statements	Strategy Codes	Score
13	To understand Arabic words I do not know, I try to guess their meaning.	Direct Strategy - Compensation Strategy	6
14	I use keywords to guess the meaning of Arabic, whether spoken or written.	Direct Strategy - Compensation Strategy	16
15	I use context, situation, and pictures or maps to guess the meaning of spoken or written Arabic.	Direct Strategy - Compensation Strategy	13
16	If I encounter new words in Arabic for which I don't know the exact terms, I try to guess them.	Direct Strategy - Compensation Strategy	12
Total Score			47
			6% (47/783*100)

Item	Questionnaire Statements	Strategy Codes	Score
17	I try to focus my full attention on the discourse I read, hear, express, and write.	Indirect Strategy - Metacognitive Strategy	43
18	I try to understand the message I hear, read, express, and write before I work on it.	Indirect Strategy - Metacognitive Strategy	36
19	I try to find out how Arabic should be learned by reading books, asking questions, and listening.	Indirect Strategy - Metacognitive Strategy	47
20	I try to remember the mistakes I made in learning Arabic and utilize those mistakes for improvement.	Indirect Strategy - Metacognitive Strategy	22
21	I note and remember the mistakes I made in learning Arabic and utilize those mistakes for improvement.	Indirect Strategy - Metacognitive Strategy	22
22	I try to practice Arabic in real-life situations.	Indirect Strategy - Metacognitive Strategy	42
Total score			212
			27.1% (212/783*100)

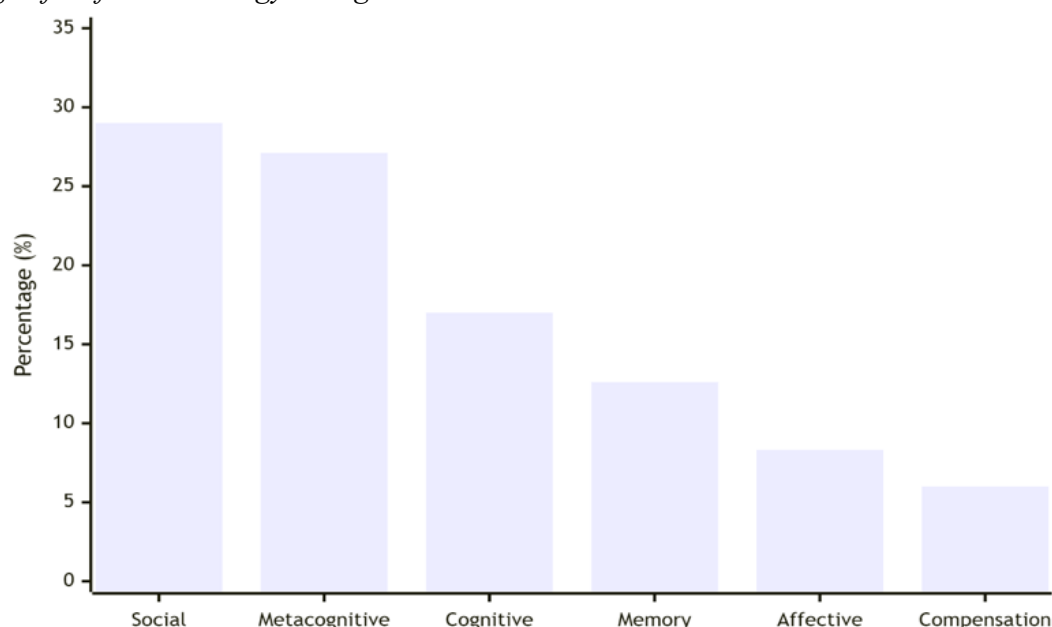
Item	Questionnaire Statements	Strategy Codes	Score
23	I try to listen to good music in Arabic or other languages to overcome my tension and practice Arabic.	Indirect Strategy - Affective Strategy	13
24	I try to speak Arabic even with the risk of making mistakes.	Indirect Strategy - Affective Strategy	35
25	I try to praise myself and feel satisfied when I complete Arabic exercises well.	Indirect Strategy - Affective Strategy	10
26	I try to write down special things that interest my feelings in a diary about learning Arabic.	Indirect Strategy - Affective Strategy	2
27	I talk or discuss with others (friends, teachers, parents) about my feelings when learning Arabic.	Indirect Strategy - Affective Strategy	5
Total Score			65
			8.3% (65/783*100)

Item	Questionnaire Statements	Strategy Codes	Score
28	If I cannot complete my Arabic language tasks, I ask others for help.	Indirect Strategy – Socio Strategy	46

29	I ask friends or teachers for help to correct my mistakes or overcome my difficulties in Arabic.	Indirect Strategy – Socio Strategy	46
30	I practice my Arabic, especially conversation, with other people.	Indirect Strategy – Socio Strategy	47
31	I try to understand the culture of the people whose language I am learning.	Indirect Strategy – Socio Strategy	39
32	I ask for help from someone more fluent than me in Arabic.	Indirect Strategy – Socio Strategy	49
Total Score			227
			29%
			(227/783 * 100)

Figure 1

Usage of Oxford's Strategy Categories



Note. Table 2 maps the questionnaire items to Oxford's six strategy categories and provides the total usage score and percentage for each category. It reveals that Social Strategies (29%) and Metacognitive Strategies (27.1%) are the most frequently used, while Compensation Strategies (6%) are the least employed. This breakdown highlights a strong reliance on interactive and self-regulatory approaches, but a significant gap in strategies for overcoming language knowledge limitations during communication.

From the questionnaire data above, two conclusions can be drawn: **First**, Arabic language education students at the Faculty of Tarbiyah, State Islamic Institute of Kediri, still have a ‘poor understanding’ of the use of learning strategies in the process of learning maharah kalam. This is confirmed by the data from the dichotomous scale questionnaire, where the total score of students who answered “yes” (score 783 or 48.9%) or acknowledged using learning strategies was lower compared to students who answered “no” (score 817 or 51.1%) or acknowledged not using learning strategies in the process of learning maharah kalam. This should be a concern for teachers/lecturers to provide guidance or socialization regarding effective learning methods

in maharah kalam by referring to several learning strategies that have been codified in the Oxford classification of learning strategies so that the maharah kalam learning process for students can be more effective.

Second, from the processing of the above percentage data, it can be concluded that the memory/remembering learning strategy obtained a score of 99 or 12.6%, the cognitive learning strategy obtained a score of 133 or 17%, the compensation learning strategy obtained a score of 47 or 6%, and the metacognitive learning strategy obtained a score of 212 or 27.1%. the affective learning strategy scored 65 or 8.3%, and the social learning strategy scored 227 or 29%. It can be concluded that the social learning strategy is the most widely used, particularly in the practice of speaking Arabic with others in questionnaire item 30. Meanwhile, the compensatory strategy is the least used, particularly in efforts to guess unknown Arabic vocabulary in questionnaire item 13.

Follow-up Data on Arabic Language Learning Strategies (*Maharah Kalam*) Interviews

This study does not aim to find the best strategy for learning maharah kalam, because basically there is no single best strategy. The researcher wants to look deeply into students' understanding of learning strategies and how they use them in learning Arabic, especially maharah kalam, because several studies have revealed that a good understanding of learning strategies and their application can lead to improved learning outcomes. (Vandergrift, 1997; Chan, 2012; Iskandarwassid & Sunendar, 2011; Zunairoh, 2023; Afyuddin & Maarif, 2023).

There were several interesting points in the interviews that caught the researchers' attention. First, some students admitted to translating, meaning that they first said a short sentence in Indonesian and then translated it into Arabic. They admitted to using this method based on instructions given by their teachers/lecturers, and they felt that it made it easier for them to remember vocabulary because when they spoke in Indonesian, they were simultaneously thinking about the vocabulary of the words they had just spoken in Indonesian. This method is certainly helpful because it is like chunking the large task of speaking directly in Arabic, where a person must think about the content/ideas they want to talk about while simultaneously translating the vocabulary into Arabic and extracting it in the form of fluent and understandable Arabic speech. This is actually an adjustment of one of the direct learning strategies—the cognitive strategy—where someone translates Arabic vocabulary into Indonesian, item 11.

Secondly, some students admitted to using notes in a small pocket book that they always carried with them during *maharah kalam* lessons. When practicing speaking Arabic and encountering difficulties with vocabulary they do not know, they will look it up in a digital dictionary and write it down in their notebook. This method is quite interesting because it is a classic approach that is rarely used by today's students, who are accustomed to doing everything on digital devices rather than in written notebooks.

The student admitted that with the notebook, he could monitor the progress of his new vocabulary. He admitted that as new vocabulary that he had only recently learned, it was very prone to being quickly forgotten, so he needed the notebook to be able to review it at any time. He also admitted that taking notes made it easier for him to remember the vocabulary and practice it when speaking Arabic.

This method of learning is quite interesting, but no matter how many vocabulary words are recorded in a pocket book, they will not help someone become fluent in Arabic unless those

words are practiced in the context of speaking. Someone who speaks Arabic fluently needs more than just knowing and memorizing vocabulary; the vocabulary must already be on their tongue, not in their memory or in their book. As a result, they will be able to speak Arabic fluently, automatically, and without needing to pause frequently to recall vocabulary, because the vocabulary is already on their tongue, not in their memory.

Third, one student admitted to practicing more outside of class independently. He prefers to talk to himself about any theme or topic that interests him. This kind of practice gives the student more opportunities to strengthen his speaking skills, because he can continue talking without needing a friend or conversation partner. As one of the language skills, speaking certainly requires more practice. Language learning in the classroom essentially involves how teachers can encourage students to speak more. This highlights that skill improvement comes from active practice, not theoretical or philosophical approaches that lean toward passive thinking.

This method of learning by speaking on one's own has its drawbacks because there is no one to guide or provide feedback on performance. However, the student claims that he already has a good command of basic Arabic language skills (*qawaid* and *uslub Arabic*), so the problem he faces is more likely to be vocabulary that he does not know. However, he acknowledges that this issue can be addressed with the availability of a digital dictionary installed on his smartphone. He simply needs to pause his speaking practice briefly when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary and resume it after looking it up in the dictionary.

According to researchers, this practice is part of good vocabulary repetition. When speaking freely, students will naturally repeat some of the vocabulary they know over and over again. The more often they practice speaking on their own, the more often they will repeat their vocabulary. This will have an impact on the automation of these vocabulary words in the context of speaking. Students who only memorize many vocabulary words and do not practice using them tend to think longer when speaking in order to recall the vocabulary and construct them into proper Arabic sentences. Students who practice frequently tend to be able to use vocabulary more quickly in constructing good conversations. Simply put, repeated practice places vocabulary in the mouth, not in the memory, so it can be spoken more quickly without prolonged thinking.

Theoretical Discussion of Findings on Maharah Kalam Learning Strategies

Briefly, the research findings can be grouped into the following two points:

First finding: dominance of social and metacognitive learning strategies. Social learning strategies are the most widely used by students (29%). These strategies involve collaboration with friends or teachers and practicing Arabic conversation with others. Metacognitive strategies are also quite dominant (27.1%), indicating that students actively monitor and evaluate their learning processes through reflection on mistakes and seeking information about better learning methods. Second, low use of compensation strategies. Compensation strategies have the lowest score (6%), indicating that students are not utilizing techniques to overcome limitations in vocabulary or knowledge in Arabic. However, these strategies are important for maintaining smooth communication, especially when facing linguistic difficulties. (Chamot, 2004)

The dominance of social learning strategies (29%) indicates that students rely heavily on interactions with others, such as friends, teachers, or native speakers, to improve their language

skills. According to Vygotsky's theory, social interaction is an important component of learning because it creates a zone of proximal development (ZPD), where students can learn better with the help of more proficient individuals (Vygotsky et al., 1978). This also shows that students feel more confident and motivated when learning in a collaborative environment, compared to learning individually.

In addition, the use of social strategies emphasizes the importance of direct practice in language mastery, especially speaking skills (*maharah kalam*). This strategy often reflects communication-based learning, where students take advantage of opportunities to speak with others to improve their fluency and correct their mistakes.

The use of metacognitive strategies (27.1%) indicates that students have good reflective awareness of their learning processes. These strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating the learning process. Students who use these strategies tend to have a systematic approach to learning, such as noting mistakes, seeking additional resources, and utilizing learning experiences to develop skills.

Another indication of the dominance of metacognitive strategies is that students may focus more on long-term results than quick results, because reflection and self-improvement take time. The dominance of this strategy also indicates that teachers have provided guidance or training that helps students understand the importance of self-evaluation in language learning.

The low score for compensation strategies (6%) indicates that students are less skilled at overcoming linguistic limitations, such as unknown vocabulary or difficult grammatical structures. Compensation strategies, such as using synonyms, guessing meaning from context, or using nonverbal cues, are crucial for maintaining communication fluency (Chamot, 2004). The low use of these strategies may indicate that:

1. Students tend to hesitate to try to communicate if they do not fully understand the necessary vocabulary or grammar.
2. There is a lack of training or encouragement from teachers to use compensation strategies in the context of language learning.
3. Students may rely too much on other strategies, such as social strategies, so that they are not accustomed to trying to overcome their own limitations independently.

The combination of social and metacognitive strategy dominance with low compensation strategies indicates that students tend to rely on the learning environment and reflection rather than improvisation in spontaneous communication. This suggests that their language learning is more structured but less flexible, especially in direct communication situations without guidance.

To address this imbalance, instructors can encourage the use of compensatory strategies through exercises designed for real-life communication situations, such as simulated conversations with unfamiliar words. This approach will help students improve their language fluency despite linguistic limitations. The low use of compensation strategies highlights the need to develop communication flexibility. By improving the balance between social, metacognitive, and compensation strategies, students can become more confident and efficient in using Arabic in various contexts.

The second finding is that there are several interesting learning strategies (methods) used by students, namely 1) composing short sentences in Indonesian first and then translating them

into Arabic, 2) noting down unknown vocabulary in a pocket book, 3) practicing speaking Arabic on any theme/topic around them.

The second finding regarding the various learning strategies demonstrated by students is summarized as follows:

a) Composing Short Sentences in Indonesian and Translating Them into Arabic

This strategy describes the use of a translation-based approach, in which students begin with their native language (Indonesian) before translating it into the target language (Arabic). This approach supports chunking, or breaking information down into smaller, more manageable pieces (Sweller, 1988). This strategy also reflects the process of interlingual transfer, which involves leveraging existing language knowledge to understand and produce a new language.

According to Nation, the use of the native language in the early stages of language learning can accelerate the understanding of new concepts, such as sentence structure and vocabulary (Nation, 2013). However, this strategy has limitations, such as the risk of reliance on literal translation, which can hinder fluency in direct communication in the target language.

b) Record new vocabulary in a pocket notebook

This strategy demonstrates the use of memory strategies in language learning. By recording unknown vocabulary, students not only create a reference source, but also engage in active repetition to improve their memory (Oxford, 2016).

Manual note-taking also reinforces deep processing, where the act of physically rewriting information helps students internalize material better than simply reading or listening (Rescher, 2017). This strategy aligns with the concept of spaced repetition, where students can review vocabulary periodically to ensure long-term information retention (Nation, 2013).

However, the benefits of this strategy will only be optimal if followed by direct practice in speaking or real-world contexts. Without its use in communication, the recorded vocabulary remains at a passive level, not an active one.

c) Practice speaking Arabic on topics around you

Self-talk reflects the application of cognitive and affective strategies. Cognitively, this strategy improves the automation of vocabulary and grammar use in real-life situations, enabling students to gradually build fluency (Ellis, 2015).

From an affective perspective, self-talk helps students reduce anxiety because they are not faced with pressure from listeners or conversation partners (Oxford, 2016). This practice also encourages natural repetition, which, according to research by Robert M. DeKeyser (2007), is crucial for building automatic and spontaneous language skills. (DeKeyser, 2010)

Although effective, this strategy has a weakness, namely the absence of direct feedback. Without correction from teachers or peers, students may repeat the same mistakes. Therefore, combining this strategy with paired or group speaking sessions can increase its effectiveness.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a nuanced landscape of language learning strategy (LLS) use among Arabic education students in developing their speaking skills (*maharah*

kalam). Quantitative data from the SILL questionnaire indicate that students employ a mix of both direct and indirect strategies, but with significant variation in frequency (Afyuddin & Maarif, 2023). Social strategies emerged as the most dominant (29%), followed closely by metacognitive strategies (27.1%), indicating a firm reliance on peer interaction and self-regulated learning processes. In contrast, direct strategies, such as cognitive (17%) and memory (12.6%), were used moderately, while affective (8.3%) and compensation strategies (6%) were notably underutilized (Chen, 2022). The overall data, showing a near-even split between "yes" and "no" responses regarding strategy use, suggests a collective lack of deep, conscious understanding and systematic application of the full spectrum of learning strategies (Pawlak et al., 2022). This paints a picture of students who are socially and reflectively engaged but may lack the tactical tools for independent problem-solving and confidence-building during spontaneous Arabic communication (Torres, 2013).

The predominance of social and metacognitive strategies, alongside the neglect of compensatory and affective ones, can be attributed to several interconnected factors rooted in the academic and socio-cultural learning environment. Firstly, the collaborative nature of the Indonesian educational context, which often emphasizes group work and peer learning, naturally fosters the adoption of social strategies (Rosdiana & Taufiquilloh, 2025). Students find comfort and motivation in learning communities, reducing the perceived risk of making mistakes. Secondly, the structure of the *maharah kalam* curriculum and instructor methodology likely encourages metacognitive practices; lecturers may explicitly train students in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning, leading to its high adoption (Hakim et al., 2025; Umamah & Cahyono, 2020). Conversely, the low use of compensation strategies suggests a pedagogical gap where students are not sufficiently trained or encouraged to utilize context clues or paraphrasing to overcome vocabulary gaps, possibly due to an overemphasis on grammatical accuracy over communicative fluency. The minimal use of affective strategies further reflects a general oversight in addressing the psychological dimensions of language learning, such as anxiety and self-motivation, which are rarely formalized parts of the curriculum.

The consequences of this strategic imbalance have direct implications for the students' communicative competence and fluency (Ayodele, 2020). The heavy reliance on social strategies, while beneficial for practice, may create a dependency on external support, leaving students ill-prepared for situations where they must communicate independently without a safety net. This is compounded by the critical shortage of compensation skills, meaning that when faced with an unknown word mid-conversation, their communication often breaks down instead of being maintained through improvisation (Siti Soleha et al., 2025). Furthermore, the neglect of affective strategies directly impacts their self-confidence, leading to anxiety and reluctance to speak in public, which was initially identified as a problem. Consequently, despite having a reflective awareness of their learning (metacognition), the absence of key tactical and emotional self-management tools results in students who can plan their learning but may still struggle to perform fluently and confidently in real-time, unstructured Arabic conversations, ultimately hindering the achievement of true proficiency (Morris et al., 2019).

When compared with prior studies, these findings both align and contrast with existing literature. The dominance of metacognitive and social strategies aligns with a body of research underscoring the role of self-regulation and interaction in language acquisition (Zunairoh,

2023). However, the strikingly low application of compensation strategies presents a point of divergence. For instance, studies in more communicative language teaching environments often report a higher use of such strategies, as learners are compelled to negotiate meaning (Alhaisoni & Alhaysony, 2017). This discrepancy suggests that the specific instructional culture at the institution, which might prioritize accuracy and product over process and fluency, shapes strategic preferences. Similarly, the underuse of affective strategies contrasts with Oxford, (2016) emphasis on their critical role in sustaining motivation and managing the emotional challenges of language learning, indicating a potential cultural or curricular blind spot in addressing the learner's affective domain within this specific context.

To address the identified strategic gaps, a multi-faceted approach integrating conceptual, methodological, and policy-level changes is recommended. The primary recommendation is to systematically integrate explicit strategy instruction, particularly for compensation and affective strategies, into the *maharah kalam* curriculum (Chen, 2022). Compensation strategies are essential for developing flexible and resilient communicators who can maintain conversation flow despite linguistic limitations. Instructors can design tasks such as "communication breakdown" role-plays, where students must convey a message without using specific key vocabulary, forcing them to use synonyms, definitions, or gestures to convey their message. Affective strategy training is crucial for building the self-confidence and resilience needed for spontaneous speaking. This can be implemented through structured activities, such as anxiety-management workshops, maintaining reflective journals on emotional states during learning, and incorporating positive self-talk exercises before speaking tasks. By moving beyond implicit hope and toward explicit, integrated instruction across all strategy domains, the program can empower students to become more autonomous, confident, and effective speakers of Arabic, thereby directly addressing the core issue of low speaking proficiency identified at the outset of the study (Afyuddin et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This study conclusively identifies a distinct strategic profile among Arabic education students, characterized by a heavy reliance on social and metacognitive strategies for developing speaking skills (*maharah kalam*). The quantitative data reveal that interaction with peers and teachers (29%) and self-regulated learning processes, such as planning and self-evaluation (27.1%), are the most dominant approaches. This strategic preference makes sense within the collaborative learning culture of the institution, where group work is everyday, and suggests that students are reflectively aware of their learning journey. However, this profile is markedly unbalanced. The concurrent, critically low use of compensation strategies (6%) and affective strategies (8.3%) points to a significant gap. Students are not equipped with techniques to guess meaning from context or use synonyms when facing unknown vocabulary, and they lack tools to manage the anxiety and fear of making mistakes that plague their speaking confidence. This imbalance, therefore, directly addresses the study's core focus: the root of students' speaking difficulties lies not in a complete absence of strategy use, but in an over-reliance on specific types and a severe neglect of others that are crucial for spontaneous and confident communication. The qualitative interviews further illuminate this by showing concrete, albeit limited, methods, such as translation and vocabulary notebooks, which, while helpful, do not fully compensate for the missing strategic components needed for fluency.

The significance of this study lies in its substantive contribution to both the conceptual understanding and methodological application of language learning strategies in a specific, under-researched context. Conceptually, it moves beyond simply cataloguing strategies to reveal a critical *strategic imbalance*, demonstrating that the mere presence of some strategies is insufficient if others are neglected. This nuanced finding enriches Oxford's taxonomy by showing how its components interact—or fail to interact—in practice, suggesting that strategic competence requires a synergistic balance. Methodologically, the study validates the effectiveness of a mixed-methods approach for uncovering such depth. The sequential explanatory design was crucial; the quantitative data provided the broad, generalizable pattern of strategy distribution, while the subsequent qualitative interviews gave these numbers meaning, uncovering the human reasoning behind the choices, such as the student who meticulously kept a vocabulary notebook. This methodological synergy provides a robust template for future research in similar educational settings, demonstrating that a combination of surveys and in-depth dialogue is necessary to transition from *what* strategies are used to *how* and *why* they are employed, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture for designing effective pedagogical interventions.

Despite its contributions, this study possesses certain limitations that pave the way for fruitful future research. A primary constraint is its relatively limited scope, focusing on a single institution with a specific socio-academic culture, which affects the generalizability of the findings. The strategic imbalance observed here may manifest differently in other Indonesian Islamic universities or in secular language programs. Therefore, future studies should expand this investigation to a multi-site or national scale to see if this profile holds across diverse contexts. Furthermore, the research design was correlational and descriptive in nature, identifying *the strategies* used but not definitively measuring *the extent to which* each strategy contributes to actual speaking proficiency gains. A clear next step would be to conduct longitudinal experimental or quasi-experimental research. For instance, a future study could implement a semester-long training module specifically targeting the underutilized compensation and affective strategies with one group of students. In contrast, a control group continues with the standard curriculum. By measuring the speaking proficiency of both groups pre- and post-intervention, researchers can move beyond identifying strategic preferences to providing causal evidence on which strategy interventions are most effective in boosting fluency and confidence. This, in turn, offers educators empirically validated methods to address the core problem identified in this work.

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