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Gender and Language Learning Strategy Use among University EFL Learners: Evidence from Karakoram International University, Gilgit-Baltistan

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Abstract

Language learning strategies (LLSs) are the conscious or potentially conscious actions, techniques, and mental processes learners employ to understand, retain, retrieve, and use a second or foreign language. Although strategy research has repeatedly examined gender as a learner variable, findings have not been consistent across contexts. The present paper revisits a small-scale study conducted among undergraduate English learners at Karakoram International University (KIU), Gilgit-Baltistan, with particular attention to gender and the reported use of cognitive, metacognitive, affective, compensatory, and memory strategies. The study employed a quantitative survey design and a modified form of Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The study employed simple random sampling and from thirty-eight participants twenty participants were selected (ten males and ten females) through simple random sampling. The analyzable dataset presented in the original tables consists of ten male and ten female respondents. Responses to 15 strategy items were grouped into five strategy categories and summarized through frequency factors and percentages. The results show a highly similar pattern for the two groups across metacognitive, affective, and compensatory strategies. Females showed a slightly higher share of cognitive strategy use (50.85%) than males (49.15%), whereas males showed a substantially higher share of memory strategy use (60%) than females (40%). Thus, the data do not support a simple claim that one gender generally uses more LLSs than the other. Instead, gender differences appear to be strategy-specific. The paper argues that this pattern is consistent with

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research cautioning against treating gender as a universal predictor of strategy choice. Pedagogically, the findings support strategy instruction that expands learners' repertoires rather than assigning particular strategies to men or women. The paper also identifies methodological limitations in the original study, including the small sample, reliance on self-report, absence of inferential statistics, and inconsistencies in the reported sample size. These limitations are important when interpreting the findings and designing future research in Pakistani university contexts.

Keywords: language learning strategies, gender, EFL, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, memory strategies, Pakistan

1. Introduction

Successful second-language learning is not explained only by exposure, classroom instruction, or linguistic aptitude. Learners also differ in what they do with the opportunities available to them. Some learners deliberately organize new information, monitor their progress, review vocabulary, infer meanings from context, use memory associations, manage anxiety, or seek assistance when communication becomes difficult. These actions are commonly discussed under the broad construct of language learning strategies. Oxford (1990) describes strategies as specific actions undertaken by learners to make language learning more effective, enjoyable, self-directed, and transferable to new situations. O'Malley and Chamot (1990), working from a cognitive information-processing perspective, similarly emphasize the role of special thoughts and behaviors that facilitate comprehension, learning, and retention.

The study on which this article is based was conducted in a Pakistani university setting and was motivated by the observation that English has substantial educational and social value in Pakistan. The original research notes that English proficiency is associated with educational and professional opportunities and therefore makes the question of how learners approach English learning particularly important. The source study also argues that language learning strategy research has received comparatively limited attention in the Pakistani context. The present article retains this contextual emphasis but reformulates the original study as a research article with a more cautious interpretation of gender.

Gender has been one of the most frequently examined individual-difference variables in LLS research. Earlier studies often reported that female learners used a wider range of strategies or reported more frequent strategy use than male learners. Oxford and Nyikos (1989), for example, investigated strategy choice among a large sample of university students and demonstrated that strategy selection was associated with variables including motivation and other learner characteristics. Green and Oxford (1995) likewise reported differences in strategy use associated with gender, although their work also illustrates the importance of proficiency and context. More recent research has questioned whether broad gender categories can adequately explain strategy preferences. Liyanage and Bartlett (2012), using data from Sri Lankan English learners, found that some individual strategy preferences were

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associated with gender whereas others were not. Such evidence suggests that gender should not be treated as a deterministic explanation for how learners learn languages.

The original KIU study offers an interesting contribution because its results do not reproduce the most common pattern reported in parts of the earlier literature. The aggregate data show very similar levels of strategy use for males and females in three categories, a small female advantage in cognitive strategies, and a more noticeable male advantage in memory strategies. This makes the dataset valuable not because it proves that male learners are generally more strategic, but because it illustrates how gender differences may be localized to particular strategy types.

The article therefore asks a more precise question than the original claim that one gender "uses more" language learning strategies. It asks which strategy categories differ, which remain similar, and what contextual explanations can reasonably be considered without turning descriptive differences into unsupported causal claims.

2. Problem Statement

Language learning strategies are important because they place learners in an active role in the learning process. However, strategy use is not uniform across learners, and research findings concerning gender have been contradictory. Some studies have found greater strategy use among females, while others have reported limited or context-dependent gender differences. The problem is particularly relevant in contexts such as Pakistan, where English is widely used for higher education and employment but where systematic research on learner strategies remains comparatively limited.

The original KIU study attempted to address this problem by comparing male and female undergraduate learners. Its findings, however, are difficult to interpret if "overall strategy use" is treated as a single construct. The data show that male and female respondents were almost identical in three categories, while the direction of difference changed according to strategy type. In addition, the original document contains an inconsistency concerning sample size: its abstract refers to 38 participants, whereas the methodology and the presented group tables contain ten male and ten female respondents, making 20 respondents the analyzable sample represented in the results. A rigorous article must therefore distinguish between what the available data demonstrate and what cannot be established from them.

The present paper addresses this problem by reanalyzing and reframing the reported descriptive data. Rather than treating gender as a fixed cause of strategy choice, the study examines whether the two groups display different profiles of strategy use.

3. Objectives

The study has four objectives:

1. To identify the reported use of cognitive, metacognitive, affective, compensatory, and memory strategies among male and female university English learners.
2. To compare the strategy profiles of male and female learners.

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3. To determine which strategy categories show the clearest gender-related difference in the available data.
4. To discuss the pedagogical implications and contextual factors that may help explain strategy variation without making unsupported causal claims.

4. Research Questions

1. What language learning strategies are reported by male and female undergraduate English learners at KIU?
2. How do male and female learners compare in their reported use of cognitive, metacognitive, affective, compensatory, and memory strategies?
3. Which strategy category shows the clearest difference between the two groups?
4. What contextual and pedagogical factors may plausibly contribute to differences in strategy use?

5. Literature Review

5.1 Conceptualizing Language Learning Strategies

The concept of language learning strategies has developed through several traditions. Most studies reveal female students' strategy use surpassing male students' in terms of quantity, frequency, and quality. With respect to the quantity, either from the point of view of the overall strategy use, specific strategy groups, or specific individual strategies, studies demonstrate that female students use or tend to use more strategies than male students do (Catalán, 2003; Lan & Oxford, 2003; Liu, 2004; Nguyen, 2008). Rubin (1975) drew attention to the behaviors of successful language learners, encouraging researchers to ask what effective learners do differently. Wenden (1985) emphasized learner strategies as part of a broader movement toward learner autonomy. Ellis (1994) later characterized strategies as mental or behavioral activities associated with particular stages of language acquisition or language use. Although definitions differ, a common feature is learner agency: strategies describe what learners do to facilitate learning or communication.

The application of learning strategies can be construed as a mechanism to expedite the assimilation and fortification of knowledge (Nesbit & Shuck smith, 2017). These strategies embody a wide spectrum of techniques, incorporating elements such as note-taking (Salame & Thompson, 2020), memorization (Oanh & Hien, 2006), self-assessment (Nesbit & Shuck smith, 2017).

Oxford's (1990) framework has been particularly influential in applied linguistics. It distinguishes direct strategies—memory, cognitive, and compensatory—from indirect strategies—metacognitive, affective, and social. Direct strategies involve interaction with the target language itself, whereas indirect strategies help manage the conditions under which learning occurs. The original KIU instrument used a modified SILL but selected five categories: cognitive, metacognitive, affective, compensatory, and memory. Social strategies were not represented in the reported five-category analysis.

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O'Malley and Chamot (1990) offer another influential classification, distinguishing cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective strategies. Their cognitive perspective is useful for understanding why strategy use is not simply a matter of preference. Strategies are linked to how learners attend to information, organize it, monitor their performance, and regulate their learning. Strategy use can therefore be understood as part of the learner's approach to processing and controlling linguistic information.

5.2 Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies are concerned with manipulating or transforming language-learning material. Examples include practicing, analyzing, summarizing, taking notes, reasoning, and using linguistic knowledge to understand new information. In language learning, cognitive strategies can help learners make connections between new material and existing knowledge.

The KIU data indicate that cognitive strategy use was remarkably similar across the two groups. The male frequency factor was 29 and the female frequency factor was 30. When the two groups are expressed as shares of their combined frequency factors, males account for 49.15% and females for 50.85%. The difference is therefore small and should not be interpreted as evidence of a broad gender effect.

5.3 Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating learning. They are particularly relevant to learner autonomy because they help learners decide what to learn, how to approach a task, whether a strategy is working, and what should be changed. Oxford (1990) places metacognitive strategies in the indirect category because they manage learning rather than directly manipulate linguistic material.

In the KIU dataset, both male and female learners had a frequency factor of 30 for metacognitive strategies. This exact equality is important because it contradicts a simplistic expectation that one gender will necessarily demonstrate greater self-regulation. At least within this sample and instrument, both groups reported comparable levels of metacognitive activity.

5.4 Affective Strategies

Affective strategies concern emotions, motivation, confidence, and anxiety. Language learning is inherently social and performance-oriented, so learners may experience uncertainty or anxiety when speaking, listening, or being evaluated. Strategy use that helps learners regulate emotions can therefore support continued engagement.

The KIU results show identical frequency factors of 30 for male and female respondents in the affective category. This suggests that the groups were similar in the extent to which the questionnaire captured affective strategy use. It also reinforces the need to examine individual categories rather than assume a single overall gender difference.

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5.5 Compensatory Strategies

Compensatory strategies are used when learners have incomplete linguistic knowledge but need to understand or communicate. Guessing meaning from context, using circumlocution, using gestures, or making an informed inference can allow learners to maintain communication despite gaps in knowledge.

The two KIU groups again recorded identical frequency factors of 30. The finding is pedagogically significant because it suggests that both groups may be drawing on comparable mechanisms for coping with linguistic limitations. It also shows why strategy training should be offered across the whole learner population rather than targeted to a gender category.

5.6 Memory Strategies

Memory strategies help learners store and retrieve new information. They may involve association, grouping, imagery, repetition, or linking new material to prior knowledge. Vocabulary learning is especially dependent on effective encoding and retrieval, making memory strategies particularly relevant in second-language learning.

The strongest gender difference in the KIU dataset occurs here. Male respondents had a frequency factor of 30, while females had a factor of 20. The combined representation is therefore 60% male and 40% female. This is the clearest descriptive contrast in the data.

The result is noteworthy because it runs against several studies that have reported greater strategy use among females. Green and Oxford (1995) found gender-related differences across strategy categories, while Gu (2002) reported that female Chinese EFL learners used significantly more of many vocabulary learning strategies and also performed better on vocabulary and general proficiency measures. The KIU result therefore supports the broader conclusion that gender findings are context-sensitive rather than universal.

5.7 Gender and Strategy Choice

Gender differences in LLS research should be interpreted carefully. A learner's strategy choice can be associated with motivation, proficiency, academic major, cultural expectations, previous learning experiences, personality, task type, and classroom environment. Oxford and Nyikos (1989) showed that strategy choice was influenced by multiple variables, and later research has continued to challenge single-variable explanations.

Liyanage and Bartlett (2012) are especially relevant because they argue for looking beyond broad strategy categories. Their findings with Sri Lankan learners showed that some individual strategies were gender-associated while others were not. This supports an interpretation of the KIU results in which gender is related to selected strategy preferences rather than to a global capacity or tendency to be strategic.

Tercanlioglu (2004) also explored gender effects in adult foreign-language learning strategies and demonstrated the importance of examining the specific context of learners. Ranjan and Philominraj (2020), working in a foreign-language context, similarly examined strategy use alongside motivation and gender, illustrating that strategy research increasingly treats gender as one variable within a wider learner profile.

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5.8 The Pakistani and Gilgit-Baltistan Context

The original study argues that language learning strategy research has been relatively neglected in the Pakistani context. This makes a university such as KIU an important setting for exploratory work. Gilgit-Baltistan has a distinctive multilingual and educational environment, and learners may encounter English alongside local languages and Urdu. Such multilingual experience can shape how learners approach vocabulary, memory, communication, and monitoring.

However, the available dataset does not contain direct measures of learners' home languages, socioeconomic background, English proficiency, motivation, or classroom practices. Consequently, these factors should be considered possible explanations rather than demonstrated causes. Future research should measure them explicitly.

6. Methodology

Methodology: A Revised Framework for Investigating Language Learning Strategies

1. Research Design and Strategic Framework

The present study employs a quantitative descriptive survey design, a framework specifically selected for its efficacy in exploratory research within the burgeoning landscape of Pakistani English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. In the specific context of Karakoram International University (KIU), this design serves as a strategic tool to capture and categorize the self-reported language learning strategy (LLS) patterns of undergraduate students. By utilizing a structured survey, the research provides a systematic overview of how learners navigate the complexities of acquiring English in a region where the language holds significant educational and professional capital.

The "quantitative descriptive" nature of this study is fundamental to its objective of comparing strategy frequency factors between male and female learners. This approach allows for the transformation of subjective learner behaviors into quantifiable data points, facilitating a clear, comparative analysis of gender-based tendencies. It is important to note, however, that this design is intended to serve as a foundation for exploratory findings—identifying observed profiles within a specific cohort—rather than a basis for universal generalizations across all Pakistani EFL contexts. This framework provides the necessary rigor to document local learner behaviors while maintaining a cautious stance regarding broader applicability.

The following sections detail the specific setting and participant pool that form the basis for this descriptive investigation.

2. Setting and Participant Selection

The research was conducted within the Department of Linguistics and Literature/Modern Languages at Karakoram International University (KIU), located in the Gilgit-Baltistan region. This setting is of particular strategic importance due to its distinctive multilingual environment, where learners frequently navigate local languages, Urdu, and English simultaneously. Such a complex linguistic backdrop shapes the academic relevance of the study, as the strategies employed by these learners likely reflect the unique cognitive and

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social demands of their environment, particularly the necessity of managing multiple linguistic codes in an academic setting.

To ensure methodological clarity and resolve discrepancies in the initial data reporting, the sampling process is here explicitly defined. While the initial pool of potential respondents consisted of 38 students, a "simple random sampling" method was employed to select a final, analyzable sample of 20 participants. This reduction was a deliberate methodological choice to achieve a perfectly balanced gender distribution (10 males and 10 females), thereby allowing for a direct descriptive comparison of frequency shares between the two groups without the skewing effect of unequal group sizes.

The final composition of the participant group used for all subsequent data analysis is summarized in the table below:

Table 1: Composition of the Analyzable Participant Sample

Participant Category	Level of Study	Sample Size (n)
Male Students	BS Level	10
Female Students	BS Level	10
Total		**20**

This balanced cohort of 20 participants provides the primary data source for evaluating the frequency of specific learning strategies through the study's chosen instrumentation.

3. Instrumentation: The Modified SILL

In small-scale research contexts, the strategic adaptation of established tools is often necessary to maintain focus and ensure participant engagement. For this study, Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was distilled into a **Modified 15-item SILL**. The selection criteria for these 15 items focused specifically on high-impact behaviors related to vocabulary acquisition and communicative competence, which are central to the KIU undergraduate curriculum. Notably, the **Social** strategy domain was explicitly excluded from this modified version to maintain a concentrated focus on the cognitive and self-regulative aspects of language learning.

The instrument was structured to ensure representation across five key strategy domains, with three items assigned to each. Responses were collected via a five-point Likert scale (Never to Always). The rationales for including these specific domains in the Gilgit-Baltistan context are as follows:

- **Memory Strategies:** Crucial for the encoding and retrieval of new English vocabulary, which is a primary challenge for learners in a multilingual environment where English is often the third or fourth language.
- **Cognitive Strategies:** Essential for the direct manipulation of language material (e.g., summarizing or analyzing), reflecting the academic rigor required at the BS level at KIU.

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- **Compensatory Strategies:** Vital for learners in this region who may have incomplete linguistic knowledge; these strategies allow them to maintain communication through guessing or circumlocution.
- **Metacognitive Strategies:** Important for fostering learner autonomy in a setting where students must independently plan and monitor their progress across multiple linguistic domains.
- **Affective Strategies:** Necessary for regulating the performance anxiety often associated with English proficiency in the Pakistani professional and social hierarchy.

A noted methodological limitation is the absence of independent reliability reporting (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) for this specific 15-item subset. While the items are derived from Oxford's validated framework, the condensed nature of the tool warrants a cautious interpretation of the data. Furthermore, the reporting of aggregate frequency factors (such as the male cognitive factor of 29) suggests minor variations in response completion or coding that preclude standard psychometric assumptions. Consequently, these results should be viewed as an observed profile of this specific sample rather than a definitive psychometric assessment.

4. Ethical Procedures and Data Integrity

Maintaining ethical transparency is a cornerstone of professional academic research, ensuring both the protection of participants and the validity of the collected data. The study's ethical framework was built upon three primary pillars:

1. **Anonymous Administration:** No identifying information was collected, ensuring that students felt empowered to report their actual habits without fear of academic repercussion.
2. **Informed Consent:** Participants were fully briefed on the nature of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate before the questionnaire was administered.
3. **Confidentiality Assurances:** Learners were explicitly informed that their responses would be used exclusively for research purposes and would not be accessible to departmental faculty for evaluative purposes.

This briefing process was vital in mitigating "social desirability bias," where students might otherwise report strategies they believe their instructors prefer rather than the strategies they actually employ. By establishing a transparent environment, the study sought to secure the highest possible level of data integrity, providing the foundation for the subsequent technical analysis.

5. Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel, a choice dictated by the need to process frequency-based survey data in a context where individual-level respondent scores were not retained in the final aggregate reporting.

The primary metric utilized is the **"Frequency Factor."** In this study, the frequency factor represents the aggregate count of reported strategy occurrences within a category. Each response option on the Likert scale was assigned a value, and these were totaled by category for each gender group. These aggregate totals were then converted into "frequency shares,"

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expressing the use of a strategy as a percentage of the total reported use across both genders. This allows for a proportional comparison of strategy preferences between male and female participants.

Analytical Limitations and Scope

It is imperative to state that this analysis is strictly **descriptive** rather than **inferential**. As a researcher, I must acknowledge the following constraints:

- **Absence of Individual-Level Data:** Because the source data was processed as aggregate category totals, it is not possible to calculate the variance or standard deviation required for inferential tests. This precludes the use of independent-samples t-tests or chi-square analyses.
- **Descriptive Profiles:** The findings represent observed strategy profiles within the KIU sample. The study identifies "what" the differences are in this specific group (e.g., the notable male lead in memory strategies) but cannot statistically confirm the probability of these differences existing in the larger population.
- **Frequency Factor Interpretation:** The reporting of specific factors (e.g., 29 vs 30) is treated as a literal representation of the raw aggregate data provided, with the understanding that these small variations may stem from the specific coding of "Never" responses or omitted items in the original dataset.

In summary, the analytical approach involved:

- Aggregating Likert scale responses into category-level frequency factors.
- Calculating frequency shares to identify proportional differences between genders.
- Utilizing Microsoft Excel for data organization and percentage-based comparison.

These methodological choices provide a rigorous, albeit localized, lens through which to view the specific language learning strategy profiles of male and female students at Karakoram International University.

7. Data Analysis and Results

Table 1 summarizes the reported strategy factors.

Table 1

Gender Comparison of Strategy Frequency Factors

Strategy | Male factor | Male share | Female factor | Female share
Cognitive | 29 | 49.15% | 30 | 50.85%
Metacognitive | 30 | 50.00% | 30 | 50.00%
Affective | 30 | 50.00% | 30 | 50.00%
Compensatory | 30 | 50.00% | 30 | 50.00%
Memory | 30 | 60.00% | 20 | 40.00%

The table demonstrates three patterns. First, the two groups are exactly equal in metacognitive, affective, and compensatory strategy factors. Second, females have a small advantage in cognitive strategies. Third, males have the clearest advantage in memory strategies.

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7.1 Cognitive Strategies

The male factor of 29 and female factor of 30 produce shares of 49.15% and 50.85%, respectively. The difference is only 1.70 percentage points. It is therefore more accurate to describe cognitive strategy use as broadly similar than to characterize it as a meaningful gender difference.

7.2 Metacognitive Strategies

Both groups have a factor of 30, resulting in an equal 50% share. This is consistent with the interpretation that both groups reported comparable planning, monitoring, or evaluation-related behavior within the limits of the instrument.

7.3 Affective Strategies

Again, the groups are identical at 30 and 30. The result suggests no descriptive difference in the category-level measure of affective strategy use.

7.4 Compensatory Strategies

The factor of 30 for each group also produces an equal 50% share. Learners of both genders therefore appear to have reported comparable use of strategies for coping with gaps in linguistic knowledge.

7.5 Memory Strategies

Memory strategies show the most visible difference. The male factor is 30 compared with 20 for females, producing 60% and 40%, respectively. The difference is 20 percentage points. This does not by itself establish statistical significance, because respondent-level variation is unavailable, but it identifies memory strategies as the principal area for further investigation.

8. Discussion

The findings challenge a broad interpretation of gender in language learning strategy research. The original study concluded that male learners used more strategies than females. The detailed data, however, show a more nuanced picture. Females reported slightly more cognitive strategy use, the groups were identical for metacognitive, affective, and compensatory strategies, and males reported more memory strategy use. Consequently, the strongest conclusion supported by the dataset is not that males generally use more strategies, but that the two groups have broadly similar strategy profiles with a notable difference in memory strategy use.

This pattern is consistent with research showing that gender effects can vary across categories and contexts. Gu (2002), for example, found stronger female use of many vocabulary strategies in a Chinese EFL sample. Liyanage and Bartlett (2012) found that gender associations changed depending on the specific learning context and strategy. Such findings caution against transferring conclusions from one population to another.

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The cognitive strategy result is especially close. A difference of 1.70 percentage points is descriptively small. It would be inappropriate to build a substantive theory of gender from this difference alone. At the same time, the female advantage is consistent with the possibility that learners may employ cognitive approaches differently according to task, proficiency, or educational experience.

The memory strategy difference deserves more attention. Memory strategies are strongly connected to vocabulary learning, and the original study repeatedly frames vocabulary as a central component of language learning. One possibility is that the male learners in this particular group had developed stronger preferences for memorization, repetition, association, or related techniques. Another possibility is that the selected questionnaire items happened to capture practices more characteristic of the male respondents. The study cannot distinguish between these explanations.

The role of culture also needs to be considered carefully. The source study proposes cultural background, prior knowledge, proficiency, learning environment, and teachers' roles as possible influences. These are reasonable hypotheses, but the present data did not measure them. Therefore, they should be investigated in future studies rather than presented as established explanations.

The findings also support a learner-centered pedagogical approach. If teachers assume that females naturally prefer social or affective strategies or that males naturally prefer memory strategies, they risk reproducing stereotypes. Strategy instruction should instead make a wide range of strategies available to all learners and allow students to evaluate which strategies are effective for particular tasks.

9. Findings

The study yields five principal findings

1. Both male and female learners reported using the five investigated strategy categories.
2. Male and female learners showed identical category-level frequency factors for metacognitive, affective, and compensatory strategies.
3. Females showed a marginally higher cognitive strategy share than males (50.85% versus 49.15%).
4. Males showed a substantially higher memory strategy share than females (60% versus 40%).
5. The available data do not support a generalized conclusion that one gender uses more language learning strategies overall; rather, the principal difference is strategy-specific.

10. Conclusion

The present study contributes to the discussion of gender and language learning strategies by showing that gender differences are not necessarily uniform across strategy categories. In the KIU dataset, male and female learners were similar in most categories, while males reported more memory strategy use and females reported marginally more cognitive strategy use.

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The most important implication is methodological as well as pedagogical. Gender should be treated as one learner variable rather than a universal explanation for strategy choice. The findings should also be interpreted within the limitations of a small sample and self-report instrument. Because the original document contains conflicting sample-size information and does not provide individual-level responses, the results should be regarded as exploratory.

For teachers, the practical implication is to develop strategic competence across the entire class. Learners should be introduced to memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective, compensatory, and social strategies and encouraged to select them according to task demands. Strategy awareness can help learners become more independent and reflective, but instruction should avoid assigning strategies to students on the basis of gender.

Future research should recruit larger samples from several Pakistani universities and include measures of English proficiency, motivation, academic discipline, multilingual background, age, and learning environment. Mixed-method studies using questionnaires, interviews, learning diaries, and classroom observation would also provide a stronger account of how strategies are actually used. Most importantly, future studies should retain individual-level data so that inferential statistics can test whether observed gender differences are statistically meaningful.

An additional implication concerns the design of instruments. The present study selected only 15 items from the original SILL, which makes the questionnaire manageable but also narrows the range of learner behavior represented. Future researchers should report the exact items used, provide reliability statistics for the modified instrument, and explain how the selected items map onto each strategy category. If vocabulary is the principal focus, the instrument should distinguish vocabulary-specific behaviors from general language-learning behaviors. A vocabulary knowledge test should also be administered so that strategy frequency can be examined in relation to actual learning outcomes. This would allow researchers to determine not merely whether males and females report different strategies, but whether particular strategies are associated with stronger vocabulary knowledge or broader English proficiency. Such an approach would move research in the Pakistani context from descriptive comparison toward explanatory and pedagogically useful evidence.

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