

Language Learning Strategy Deployment Among English and Non-English Majors: A Comparative Analysis at A Vietnamese University

Duc V. Le

Thu Dau Mot University, Vietnam

ABSTRACT: This study investigates the systemic divergence in Language Learning Strategy (LLS) deployment between specialist and non-specialist undergraduate cohorts within the regional higher education landscape of Vietnam. Grounded in Oxford's (1990) six-dimensional strategy taxonomy, the research utilizes a quantitative, cross-sectional comparative design to examine an exploratory sample of $N = 100$ students ($n = 50$ English majors; $n = 50$ non-English majors) at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Data were generated using a localized, 18-item version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) administered via a digital interface. Independent samples t-tests reveal statistically significant strategic stratifications across five analytical dimensions ($p < .001$). English majors display high-frequency usage of indirect metacognitive ($M = 3.85$) and social ($M = 3.75$) strategies, reflecting proactive, autonomous, and communication-driven language management. Conversely, non-English majors rely predominantly on reactive compensation ($M = 3.78$) and memory ($M = 3.55$) mechanisms to address immediate vocabulary and comprehension gaps within exam-oriented environments. Descriptive analyses show that target language proficiency (76%) and academic specialization (70%) act as the primary structural drivers mediating strategy deployment. While both groups engage heavily with informal digital media, explicit pedagogical interventions remain critically underutilized among non-majors. These findings underscore the urgent necessity for differentiated instructional design, advocating for the systematic integration of explicit metacognitive strategy training such as the CALLA framework and the creation of low-risk, extracurricular immersion spaces to foster long-term communicative competence and learner autonomy among non-specialist tertiary students.

KEYWORDS: Oxford's taxonomy; SILL questionnaire; EFL pedagogy; learner autonomy; metacognitive training; tertiary education policy; CALLA framework

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background to the Study

In the contemporary landscape of globalized higher education, English proficiency functions as an indispensable catalyst for academic mobility, knowledge dissemination, and cross-border professional integration. Within the Vietnamese socioeconomic framework, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has consistently prioritized foreign language competence through macro-level policies such as the National Foreign Languages Project. Consequently, tertiary institutions are mandated to produce graduates who possess not only specialized disciplinary knowledge but also robust communicative capabilities in English. This institutional mandate is vividly exemplified at Thu Dau Mot University (TDMU), a prominent multidisciplinary institution situated in Ho Chi Minh City. At TDMU, English language training is structurally embedded across diverse curricula, serving as an essential metric for both scholastic validation and graduate employability.

However, the efficacy of language acquisition is significantly mediated by the distinct academic trajectories of the learners. Undergraduate students at TDMU exhibit highly heterogeneous approaches to language learning, primarily dictated by their choice of major. English majors undergo an immersive, highly structured curriculum focused on advanced linguistics, literature, and pedagogy. This specialized track naturally fosters a deeper cognitive engagement with the language, a heightened degree of intrinsic motivation, and a sophisticated repertoire of language learning strategies (LLS). Conversely, non-English majors typically engage with English as a compulsory general education requirement or through localized English for Specific Purposes (ESP) modules. For this demographic, language acquisition is frequently instrumental, exam-oriented, and restricted by constrained curricular exposure, often resulting in a reliance on more localized or less systematic learning strategies.

To navigate these divergent learning behaviors, educational research has increasingly shifted from teacher-centric paradigms to learner-centered frameworks, emphasizing the pivotal role of LLS. Defined as specific, deliberate actions or behaviors deployed

Language Learning Strategy Deployment Among English and Non-English Majors: A Comparative Analysis at A Vietnamese University

by learners to enhance their target language acquisition, LLS are critical determinants of linguistic success (Oxford, 1990; Chamot, 2005). Grounded in the foundational taxonomies of Rubin (1975) and systematically operationalized by Oxford (1990), these strategic interventions ranging from direct cognitive and memory processing to indirect metacognitive and social-affective management not only optimize language performance but also cultivate learner autonomy. In the context of regional Vietnamese universities, where classroom sizes are frequently large and autonomous self-regulation is paramount, understanding the exact nature of strategy deployment is vital to bridging the proficiency gap between different student populations.

B. Research Problem

While the broader literature on LLS is extensive, a noticeable empirical gap persists regarding comparative strategy usage within expanding regional universities in Vietnam. Existing research heavily favors elite, metropolitan institutions in major hubs like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, leaving the unique socio-educational dynamics of provincial tertiary institutions under-examined. Furthermore, contemporary shifts in digital learning environments have altered student autonomy, meaning that historical assumptions regarding how English majors versus non-majors deploy learning strategies require urgent empirical updating.

At TDMU, despite the unified institutional objective of raising English proficiency, educators face a pedagogical disconnect due to the lack of empirical data contrasting how majors and non-majors manage their learning processes. Without a granular understanding of the specific internal and external factors such as academic orientation, motivational variables, and target proficiency expectations that dictate strategy selection, instructional design remains largely undifferentiated. This lack of tailored pedagogical intervention risks leaving non-majors under-equipped to meet graduation benchmarks while failing to maximize the strategic potential of English majors. There is a pressing need for empirical inquiry that systematically cross-examines these two distinct participants within the same institutional system.

C. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to systematically investigate and compare the frequencies and dimensional typologies of LLS deployment experienced by English majors and non-English majors at TDMU. The study also seeks to isolate and analyze the primary underlying factors specifically focusing on academic orientation, motivational sub-types, and perceived language proficiency that influence the strategic configurations of these two groups. By achieving these objectives, the study intends to provide an empirical diagnostic tool to formulate targeted instructional strategies that foster enhanced linguistic competence and autonomous learning behavior across different academic disciplines.

D. Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study enriches the ongoing discourse surrounding learner-centered pedagogy in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts by expanding the empirical application of Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) within regional Vietnamese higher education. It contributes a nuanced comparative dataset that highlights how academic specialization intersects with strategy choice, thereby refining existing conceptual models of learner variance in developing educational systems.

Practically and pedagogically, the findings offer immediate utility to multiple stakeholders. For language instructors at TDMU and similar regional institutions, the data provide an empirical roadmap to design differentiated, strategy-based instruction that aligns with the distinct needs of both specialist and non-specialist learners. For curriculum designers, the study yields actionable insights necessary for reforming general English and ESP syllabuses to incorporate explicit metacognitive and social-affective strategy training. Finally, for educational administrators, this research offers a localized baseline to optimize institutional resource allocation, refine language proficiency graduation benchmarks, and support systemic policies aimed at improving overall graduate employability.

E. Research Questions

To address the research problems and achieve the stated objectives, this study addresses the following research questions: How do the frequencies and dimensional typologies of Language Learning Strategy (LLS) deployment significantly diverge between undergraduate English majors and non-English majors at TDMU?

1. What primary internal and external mediating factors specifically proficiency, specialization, and motivation shape the strategic configurations of these two student cohorts?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Theoretical Framework: Taxonomy of Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

To systematically analyze the strategic behavior of language learners, this study adopts the foundational taxonomy developed by Oxford (1990), who conceptualizes LLS as specific, conscious actions, behaviors, or techniques deployed by learners to optimize their target language acquisition, retention, and production. This framework remains the most comprehensive operational model for analyzing learner variance within Second Language Acquisition (SLA) literature (Chamot, 2005). Oxford's model splits

Language Learning Strategy Deployment Among English and Non-English Majors: A Comparative Analysis at A Vietnamese University

strategies into two overarching operational categories including direct strategies and indirect strategies, which are further subdivided into six specific dimensions.

II.A.1 Direct Strategies

Direct strategies involve the immediate cognitive processing of the target language.

- **Memory Strategies:** Structural mechanisms utilized to store and retrieve new linguistic information via meaningful associations, contextual groupings, or visual-auditory imagery.
- **Cognitive Strategies:** Direct manipulation of the target language through practicing, naturalistic processing, analyzing, synthesizing, and note-taking, enabling a deeper structural comprehension of the linguistic system.
- **Compensation Strategies:** Strategic workarounds such as contextual guessing, circumlocution, or gestural cues designed to sustain communication despite existing proficiency gaps.

II.A.2 Indirect Strategies

Indirect strategies provide the executive management and socio-affective scaffolding necessary to support language acquisition without directly manipulating target linguistic data.

- **Metacognitive Strategies:** High-level executive functions that involve planning, regulating, prioritizing, self-monitoring, and evaluating one's own language-learning trajectory.
- **Affective Strategies:** Internal self-regulation mechanisms used to govern emotional states, reduce performance anxiety, and maintain optimal motivational levels.
- **Social Strategies:** Interpersonal behaviors directed toward increasing target-language exposure through collaboration, clarification requests, and authentic communication with empathetic interlocutors.

B. Empirical Literature Review: Comparative Strategy Deployment

The intersection of academic specialization and LLS deployment has been a major point of discussion in SLA research. Early global explorations established that academic orientation and target language proficiency are primary catalysts for strategy selection. For instance, Green and Oxford (1995) demonstrated a significant correlation between higher language proficiency and the frequent deployment of metacognitive and social strategies. This indicates that successful learners do not merely practice more; they manage their learning more actively.

This line of inquiry was further contextualized within Asian higher education by Wong and Nunan (2011), who observed distinct strategic variations based on academic focus. Their comparative analysis revealed that English majors utilize significantly more direct cognitive and indirect metacognitive strategies, whereas non-English majors demonstrate a strong reliance on localized memory and rote-memorization techniques to fulfill exam-driven metrics.

Within the Vietnamese tertiary system, this dichotomy has grown increasingly pronounced due to shifting educational mandates. The strategic disparity is firmly rooted in foundational language learning strategy theory. A localized contextual study by Nguyen, Phan, and Le (2019) established that language majors consistently demonstrate greater strategic adaptability, whereas non-specialist student populations require structured, top-down curricular intervention to successfully develop autonomous habits. Their empirical work underscores a critical pedagogical mandate because non-majors facing restricted instruction hours do not instinctively deploy these diverse frameworks, institutions must implement direct, explicit strategy training to bridge the tactical gap and systematically foster communicative proficiency across general university tracks.

Recent localized empirical evidence offers a more nuanced view of how language learning strategies are deployed under modern Vietnamese curricular constraints. A large-scale comparative inquiry conducted by Phan, Huynh, and Vo (2023) at Nong Lam University Ho Chi Minh City evaluated strategy deployment among 1,746 undergraduate students. Their findings demonstrated that while English majors utilized learning strategies with a significantly higher overall frequency than non-majors, both student groups exhibited a synchronized structural preference for direct strategies over indirect frameworks. Specifically, both sets of learners applied direct mechanisms encompassing memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies at a substantially higher rate than indirect mechanisms, which include metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. This shared strategic profile highlights that regardless of specialization, tertiary learners prioritize immediate mental linguistic processing and compensation tools over broader self-regulatory or interpersonal systems.

This baseline provides an essential point of comparison for the empirical evidence presented by Vo, Phan, and Huynh (2023), who investigated the same institutional environment under a different pedagogical framework. In their study, which focused on non-majors navigating a blended learning context at the university, students preferred memory and compensation strategies but scored critically low in social and metacognitive strategy engagement. When these two datasets within the same university are compared, the divergence reveals that undergraduate strategic behavior is not static, even within a single tertiary sector; instead, shifting from traditional learning spaces to a blended learning modality creates highly varying, context-dependent strategy profiles. Consequently, these contrasting findings underscore a critical administrative mandate, higher education language reforms must

Language Learning Strategy Deployment Among English and Non-English Majors: A Comparative Analysis at A Vietnamese University

reject rigid, one-size-fits-all frameworks and instead adapt pedagogies to the specific instructional delivery modes and learning contexts that shape student autonomy.

For English majors, contemporary research indicates a shifting focus toward autonomous digital tool use. Tham (2020) noted that first-year English majors frequently leverage resource-management strategies such as organizing digital learning spaces and utilizing online tools alongside cognitive strategies. However, actual self-regulation remains inconsistent.

Thao and Long (2020) discovered that while Vietnamese undergraduate students regularly demonstrate help-seeking and localized monitoring behaviors, they lack broader, internalized self-regulated learning awareness. This lack of critical self-evaluation is further supported by Ngoc and Nhung (2022). Their investigation into English majors' reading strategies showed that while students were competent in planning and problem-solving, they were largely unable to critically evaluate their own comprehension.

To mitigate these systemic deficiencies, recent studies have explored targeted classroom interventions. Huynh (2024) demonstrated that implementing a Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) instructional model yielded measurable gains in metacognitive reading strategies among non-English majors. This confirms that pedagogical scaffolding can actively restructure a student's strategic repertoire.

C. Mediating Factors Influencing Strategy Choices

Drawing from the theoretical assertions of Ellis (1994) and Chamot (2005), a learner's selection of LLS is not an isolated event but is instead mediated by an array of internal and external variables (see Table 1).

Table 1. Theoretical Framework of Internal and External Factors Mediating LLS Selection

Factor	Primary Mechanism of Influence
Motivation	Highly motivated learners deploy a more diverse, frequent, and interconnected matrix of LLS to achieve communicative or professional goals (Chamot, 2005).
Academic Specialization	Curriculum intensity dictates exposure. English majors operate in high-immersion environments that demand indirect strategies, whereas non-majors face constrained instructional hours, forcing a reliance on instrumental, exam-oriented strategies.
Language Proficiency	Advanced linguistic proficiency correlates positively with sophisticated metacognitive and affective strategies, whereas lower proficiency leads to a reliance on basic memory and compensation strategies (Green & Oxford, 1995).
Learning Environment	Regular exposure to institutional language systems such as English clubs or interactive seminars stimulates the organic cultivation of social and compensation strategies.
Individual Learning Style	The sensory and cognitive preferences of individual students directly shape which strategies feel accessible and effective during independent study (Ellis, 1994).

D. Synthesis and Research Gaps

While the existing literature provides a helpful foundation for understanding language learning strategies, three distinct empirical gaps remain which serve as the primary focus of this study. The first prominent issue is a systemic regional and institutional bias. The vast majority of contemporary LLS research within Vietnam remains heavily concentrated in elite, tier-one universities located within major metropolitan hubs such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Consequently, there is a distinct scarcity of empirical investigations focused on fast-growing regional universities such as TDMU, despite the fact that these regional institutions serve a unique student demographic characterized by highly varied socio-educational backgrounds and distinct secondary-school preparation.

Compounding this geographical limitation is a widespread problem of methodological over-generalization within the current body of work. Most previous studies rely heavily on presenting aggregate, macro-level mean scores for the six broad SILL categories. Very few empirical accounts dig deeper into item-level analyses of specific questions, which leaves researchers unable to fully unpack how and why these unique strategic actions manifest within specific learner populations.

Finally, the literature must account for recent temporal and curricular evolution. The widespread academic shift toward hybrid, technology-driven educational models has fundamentally altered learner autonomy and real-time strategy use. As a result, historical assumptions regarding how English majors versus non-majors approach language learning have become outdated and require fresh empirical verification. By conducting a detailed, comparative item-level analysis of LLS usage and its underlying drivers within the unique regional environment of TDMU, this study directly addresses these critical gaps in the existing literature.

Language Learning Strategy Deployment Among English and Non-English Majors: A Comparative Analysis at A Vietnamese University

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional, comparative research design to examine the differences in LLS deployment between English majors and non-English majors. A quantitative approach was deemed most appropriate as it allows for the systematic operationalization of strategic behaviors, statistical comparison between independent learner cohorts, and the identification of significant mediating variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

B. Research Context and Participants

The investigation was contextualized at TDMU, a multi-disciplinary, regional tertiary institution located in Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam. TDMU provides an ideal ecological framework for this study because its student population is highly diversified across specialized linguistic tracks and general academic programs.

To explore these dynamics, a non-probability purposive sampling technique was utilized to recruit an exploratory cohort of N = 100 undergraduate students. To ensure statistical comparative validity, the sample was equally partitioned into two distinct groups. The first cohort consists of fifty English majors who are actively enrolled in intensive, four-year philological and pedagogical language curricula. The second cohort comprises fifty non-English majors drawn from various technical and economic disciplines who engage with English exclusively as a general education mandate or a localized ESP requirement.

C. Research Instrument

The primary data generation instrument consisted of a structured digital survey adapted from Oxford's six-dimensional strategy taxonomy. The modified instrument comprised a total of twenty-one items divided into two separate operational segments. The first segment focused on demographic profiling through items one to three, which documented key independent variables including the participants' academic major, current year of undergraduate study, and self-reported length of prior English language exposure. The second segment, spanning items four to twenty-one, utilized a compressed, eighteen-item psychometric scale mapping directly onto the established strategy taxonomy (see Table 2). All strategy-related statements within this inventory were measured using a standard five-point Likert scale ranging from one, signifying never or almost never true of the participant, to five, indicating always or almost always true of the participant.

Table 2. Structural Blueprint of the Adapted SILL Questionnaire

Strategy Category	Macro-	Item Distribution	Operational Indicators
Memory Strategies		Items 4–6	Use of acoustic mnemonics, visual-spatial imagery, and structured reviews.
Cognitive Strategies		Items 7–9	Direct sentence construction, target-language media consumption, and note-taking.
Compensation Strategies		Items 10–12	Contextual inference, circumlocution, and gestural/non-verbal communication cues.
Metacognitive Strategies		Items 13–15	Executive goal-setting, seeking active interaction opportunities, and self-assessment.
Affective Strategies		Items 16–18	Anxiety reduction techniques, emotional self-encouragement, and intrinsic reward systems.
Social Strategies		Items 19–21	Peer-to-peer collaboration, semantic clarification requests, and sociocultural immersion.

To ensure instrument validity and appropriate localization, specific measures were taken to minimize cognitive bias and secure a comprehensive conceptual understanding among the non-English major cohorts. The original English instrument was translated into Vietnamese utilizing a rigorous forward-translation and expert-panel review method (Brislin, 1970). This systematic adaptation process verified that the survey items maintained strict linguistic equivalence and face validity when contextualized within the regional Vietnamese socio-educational environment.

D. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was executed digitally over a four-week period via a secured Google Forms interface, progressing chronologically through a series of structured phases. The initial phase involved obtaining administrative clearance, during which institutional approval was formally acquired from the relevant academic department coordinators at TDMU. Following this clearance, the digital deployment phase commenced with the distribution of survey hyperlinks and corresponding QR codes through formal institutional communication channels, institutional class management groups on Zalo platform and targeted student social networks. The final phase centered on rigorous data cleansing; upon the official closure of the online survey window, all electronic responses were compiled into a centralized spreadsheet repository. To maintain dataset integrity, automated verification

Language Learning Strategy Deployment Among English and Non-English Majors: A Comparative Analysis at A Vietnamese University

criteria were pre-programmed into the digital interface to identify and reject incomplete profiles, a mechanism that ultimately secured a 100% completion rate for the 100 submitted responses used in the final analysis.

E. Data Analysis Matrix

The collected raw data were exported from the spreadsheet format into professional statistical software for descriptive and inferential computation. The analytical pipeline was structured as follows:

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Frequency distributions, percentages, Arithmetic Means (M), and Standard Deviations (SD) were calculated for each of the six LLS categories. Mean scores were interpreted via Oxford's (1990) standardized LLS frequency profile: High Usage ($M \geq 3.5$), Medium Usage ($2.5 \leq M \leq 3.49$), and Low Usage ($M \leq 2.49$).
- **Inferential Statistics:** To answer the primary research questions, independent samples t-tests were conducted to determine whether differences in strategy usage between English majors and non-English majors were statistically significant ($\alpha = .05$).
- **Influencing Factors Synthesis:** Item-level analyses and variances across demographic baselines were cross-examined against external factors such as motivation and proficiency to contextualize the driving forces behind the students' strategic configurations.

F. Ethical Considerations

In accordance with international institutional review standards, participation in this study was entirely voluntary. The opening page of the digital instrument featured an informed consent form detailing the scope, objectives, and academic nature of the inquiry. Participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without academic penalty. To ensure complete anonymity and confidentiality, no identifying personal credentials such as student names or identification numbers were collected.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

IV.A.1 English Learning Strategies Used by English and Non-English Majors

The quantitative data generated from the adapted SILL indicate that both undergraduate cohorts at TDMU utilize a diverse spectrum of LLS. However, as illustrated in Table 3, distinct and statistically significant variations emerge when comparing the mean frequencies and specific typologies favored by each group.

Table 3. Comparative SILL Profile between English Majors and Non-English Majors

Strategy Macro-Category	English Majors (n=50)M (SD)	Non-English Majors (n=50)M (SD)	t-value (df=98)	p-value	Interpretation (Frequency Domain)
Metacognitive	3.85 (0.55)	2.90 (0.62)	8.11	$p < .001$	High vs. Medium
Social	3.75 (0.60)	2.35 (0.58)	11.86	$p < .001$	High vs. Low
Cognitive	3.68 (0.48)	3.12 (0.54)	5.48	$p < .001$	High vs. Medium
Compensation	3.25 (0.58)	3.78 (0.61)	-4.45	$p < .001$	Medium vs. High
Memory	3.10 (0.52)	3.55 (0.50)	-4.41	$p < .001$	Medium vs. High
Affective	2.85 (0.65)	2.80 (0.68)	0.38	$p = .705$	Medium vs. Medium

Note: SILL frequency thresholds based on Oxford (1990): High ($M \geq 3.50$), Medium ($2.50 \leq M \leq 3.49$), Low ($M \leq 2.49$). Significance level $\alpha = .05$.

The independent samples t-test values demonstrate that the divergence in strategy execution is highly pronounced across five out of the six dimensions. English majors display a clear preference for indirect metacognitive strategies ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.55$) and social strategies ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.60$). This high-frequency usage shows a systemic approach to their language acquisition process, marked by intentional goal-setting, self-monitoring, and active interpersonal interaction.

In sharp contrast, non-English majors show a heavy reliance on compensation strategies ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.61$) and memory strategies ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 0.50$). This dynamic points to a more reactive strategic orientation; non-specialist students tend to prioritize immediate coping mechanisms such as guessing from context or using mental imagery to overcome immediate comprehension or vocabulary blocks during evaluation cycles.

Language Learning Strategy Deployment Among English and Non-English Majors: A Comparative Analysis at A Vietnamese University

Item-level analysis further reveals that media-based digital consumption such as watching English movies, TV shows, or online videos represents a highly frequent strategy shared by both student groups. This confirms that informal digital tools are universally accessible and highly appealing to modern learners.

Conversely, more demanding strategies such as maintaining active vocabulary notebooks in English, participating in English-speaking clubs, and initiating communication with native speakers showed significantly lower mean values. This trend was especially acute among non-English majors, pointing to persistent barriers related to low communicative confidence, restricted access to immersion spaces, and a lack of structured metacognitive awareness.

IV.A.2 Factors Influencing the Selection of Learning Strategies

To determine what drives these strategic choices, students identified and ranked the primary variables shaping their LLS configurations. The data point to a complex interplay of internal student characteristics and external environmental constraints (see Table 4).

Table 4. Perceived Influencing Factors on LLS Selection (N=100)

Rank	Mediating Factor	Frequency of Selection (%)	Primary Strategic Impact Observed
1	Target English Proficiency	76%	Drives shift from basic direct strategies (memory) to executive indirect strategies (metacognitive).
2	Academic Major / Specialization	70%	Dictates daily instructional volume, immersion depth, and curricular performance metrics.
3	Learner Motivation Sub-types	67%	Enhances willingness to deploy high-effort, long-term autonomous practices outside class.
4	Individual Learning Style	61%	Aligns specific SILL items with sensory preferences (visual, auditory, kinesthetic).
5	Institutional Learning Environment	57%	Limits or encourages social strategy use based on peer interaction opportunities.

Language proficiency (76%) and academic major (70%) were identified as the two most critical factors. Language proficiency acts as a foundational gateway as students with lower self-reported proficiency are often restricted to concrete, localized strategies like rote memorization and immediate compensation. Higher proficiency, by comparison, provides students with the cognitive flexibility required to deploy advanced metacognitive planning and interactive social strategies.

Academic specialization works alongside this factor. English majors are situated within an immersive, communication-driven curriculum that naturally rewards diverse strategy use. Non-majors, conversely, deal with restricted general education English modules, which often direct their efforts toward narrower, exam-oriented strategies.

Furthermore, learner motivation (67%) serves as an important internal driver. Highly motivated students across both cohorts were significantly more likely to apply energy-intensive strategies, such as setting long-term linguistic goals, practicing independently in digital spaces, and utilizing affective rewards to manage performance anxiety. Finally, individual learning styles (61%) and institutional environments (57%) create the remaining structural parameters, determining how easily students can access social peer networks or align strategy tasks with their personal learning preferences.

B. DISCUSSION

The empirical results reveal a clear divergence in strategic behavior between English majors and non-English majors at TDMU, contributing valuable data to the broader literature on learner variance in EFL contexts. The high deployment of metacognitive, cognitive, and social strategies among English majors confirms that intense target-language exposure and specialized academic expectations are strong catalysts for active language management. This pattern corroborates the classic findings of Green and Oxford (1995) and matches recent Vietnamese data from Nguyen, Phan, and Le (2019), both of which show that specialized linguistic tracks encourage a more integrated approach to strategy selection.

By demonstrating that language majors instinctively adapt to rigorous communicative environments, this finding reinforces the contextual argument established by Nguyen, Phan, and Le (2019) regarding institutional language education reforms. Because non-majors lack this intensive track, their restricted engagement often confines them to narrower, exam-driven habits. This strategic gap validates the call for systematic, top-down curricular modifications that explicitly embed strategy training into

Language Learning Strategy Deployment Among English and Non-English Majors: A Comparative Analysis at A Vietnamese University

general education modules, ensuring that non-specialist learners can develop autonomous language management skills despite limited classroom hours.

Additionally, the high metacognitive performance of English majors aligns with research by Ngoc and Nhung (2022). However, their observation that Vietnamese learners often struggle with self-evaluation remains highly relevant here; while TDMU majors excel at planning and problem-solving, their ability to critically self-assess long-term competence requires further instructional support.

In contrast, non-English majors' strong preference for memory and compensation strategies, combined with low scores in social and metacognitive fields, underscores a persistent structural issue in regional tertiary education. This strategic profile closely mirrors the patterns documented by Wong and Nunan (2011) in their study of Asian EFL learners, as well as the recent findings of Vo, Phan, and Huynh (2023) at Nong Lam University. This consistency across studies indicates that non-specialist students face a common challenge including limited instructional hours and instrumental, test-driven requirements heavily restrict their strategic range, forcing them to rely on short-term coping mechanisms over active communicative practice.

Interestingly, while the strategic limitations of non-majors at TDMU closely reflect broader regional trends, a critical point of contrast emerges when comparing these results to the baseline institutional data established by Phan, Huynh, and Vo (2023). In their large-scale inquiry involving 1,746 students, both English majors and non-majors exhibited a synchronized structural hierarchy, prioritizing direct strategies such as memory, cognitive, and compensation at a substantially higher rate than indirect frameworks like metacognitive, affective, and social. At TDMU, however, this strict major/non-major parallelism breaks down. The novelty of the current research lies in demonstrating that TDMU English majors have successfully broken away from this rigid direct-strategy dominance, showing a sophisticated, proactive mastery of indirect metacognitive and social strategy fields. Conversely, TDMU non-majors remain completely bound to the direct coping mechanisms described by Phan, Huynh, and Vo (2023). This divergence suggests that while specialized academic tracking at TDMU is powerful enough to transform the strategic profile of language specialists, the general curriculum fails to exert the same catalytic effect on non-majors, widening a tactical chasm within the exact same tertiary environment.

The low engagement with interactive tools like English-speaking clubs and structured note-taking at TDMU confirms that while passive digital intake is high, converting that exposure into active, productive strategy use remains a major hurdle, particularly for non-majors. This strategic disconnect aligns with recent empirical work by Gloria and Galvez (2025), who demonstrated that while undergraduate digital media consumption significantly elevates receptive comprehension, it yields a drastically lower impact on active output and speaking confidence. Their findings confirm that independent, passive digital intake remains insufficient for developing comprehensive communication skills unless it is structurally integrated with active, output-driven interactive strategies.

The central role of motivation in driving strategy variety also strongly supports Chamot's (2005) self-regulation frameworks. Highly motivated students at TDMU showed a clear willingness to invest extra effort into independent practice and affective self-encouragement. This behavior mirrors findings by Tham (2020) and Thao and Long (2020), which both highlight how learner autonomy acts as an engine for strategy use. Yet, these studies also reach a sobering conclusion that without explicit strategy training, even highly motivated students often lack the structural awareness to transition from passive help-seeking to systematic self-regulated learning.

Consequently, this study provides clear empirical backing for targeted, strategy-focused pedagogical interventions. The strategic gaps observed among non-English majors at TDMU directly echo the issues addressed by Huynh (2024), who demonstrated that integrating the CALLA into general university courses led to immediate, measurable growth in students' metacognitive capacity.

Ultimately, these findings show that while English majors are well-supported by their immersive curriculum, non-English majors require explicit instructional scaffolding. Higher education institutions must look to modernize general English tracks by directly weaving metacognitive and social strategy training into the syllabus, shifting student behavior from passive, short-term coping to active, autonomous language acquisition.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

A. Conclusion

This study investigated the deployment of LLS and their primary influencing factors among English majors and non-English majors within the regional higher education framework of TDMU in Vietnam. The empirical evidence reveals a clearly stratified divergence in strategic behaviors between the two student cohorts.

English majors demonstrate a proactive, systemic approach to target language acquisition, relying heavily on indirect metacognitive and social strategies. This orientation is driven by their advanced language proficiency, intense curriculum requirements, and regular engagement with authentic English environments.

Conversely, non-English majors adopt a more reactive posture, leaning heavily on memory and compensation strategies. This profile indicates that non-specialist students tend to prioritize immediate coping mechanisms over deep, communicative language

Language Learning Strategy Deployment Among English and Non-English Majors: A Comparative Analysis at A Vietnamese University

processing which would be a trend shaped by restricted instructional hours, lower self-reported proficiency, and test-driven academic environments.

The study further highlights that LLS selection is not an isolated event; rather, it is mediated by a complex matrix of internal student factors and external constraints. Among these, target language proficiency, academic specialization, and learner motivation emerge as the most critical drivers.

While informal digital resources such as English-language media are widely used across both cohorts, high-effort communicative and reflective strategies remain underutilized, particularly by non-majors. This gap emphasizes the need to transition regional tertiary language programs from passive, lecture-driven instruction to structured, learner-centered models.

B. Pedagogical and Institutional Implications

To bridge the strategic divide between specialist and non-specialist learners, TDMU and similar regional universities should move away from one-size-fits-all curricula. The following matrix outlines the recommended targeted interventions based on the study's findings (see Table 5).

Table 5. Differentiated Pedagogical Interventions for Designated Learner Groups

Target Population	Identified Deficit	Strategic Intervention	Pedagogical Outcome
Non-English Majors	Low metacognitive and social strategy deployment; heavy reliance on rote memory.	Integrate explicit, strategy-based models such as the CALLA framework directly into general English and ESP syllabuses; scaffold goal-setting and self-monitoring exercises.	Shift from short-term exam coaching to autonomous, systematic language management.
English Majors	Inconsistent long-term comprehension monitoring and self-critical evaluation.	Introduce advanced reflective portfolios, peer-led critique workshops, and complex research-driven language tasks.	Deepen metacognitive control and refine high-level analytical capabilities.
Universal (Both Groups)	High use of passive media but low participation in active communicative output.	Convert informal media such as films, podcasts into active tasks like guided note-taking, debate tournaments, peer-to-peer conversation exchanges.	Transform passive digital consumption into active, productive language use.

On an institutional level, university administrators must support these classroom changes by investing in low-risk immersion spaces. Expanding extracurricular infrastructure such as English-speaking clubs, cross-disciplinary digital learning platforms, and informal language cafes can help lower affective barriers. Providing these social learning environments gives non-specialist students the space to build communicative confidence and organically develop social and compensation strategies.

C. Methodological Limitations

While this study offers valuable empirical insights into regional Vietnamese EFL learning dynamics, several structural limitations must be acknowledged.

First, a notable constraint exists regarding the geographical and institutional scope, as the data were gathered exclusively from a single regional institution with a modest sample size of one hundred participants. Consequently, the findings may not fully represent the highly diverse student populations across all provincial or metropolitan universities in Vietnam.

Furthermore, the study exhibits a methodological monoculture by relying entirely on quantitative, self-reported survey data generated via an adapted strategy inventory. This design introduces potential response biases, as the students' reported strategy use may differ from their actual behaviors in real-time academic situations.

Finally, the research is constrained by a static temporal horizon; the cross-sectional nature of the data captures strategy deployment at a single point in time, which prevents drawing definitive conclusions about how language learning strategy preferences evolve as students' progress through their respective degree programs.

D. Recommendations for Future Research

To build on these findings and address the identified limitations, future research should consider several distinct directions.

First, investigators should pursue mixed-methods triangulation by adopting exploratory or explanatory sequential designs. Combining quantitative surveys with qualitative instruments such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and direct

Language Learning Strategy Deployment Among English and Non-English Majors: A Comparative Analysis at A Vietnamese University

classroom observations will provide a much deeper look into the underlying reasons why students choose specific strategies and clarify how environmental factors actively influence those choices.

Furthermore, researchers should expand the study's scope by establishing multi-institutional longitudinal scales. Conducting large-scale comparative projects across various universities and tracking student groups longitudinally from their first year through to graduation would reveal exactly how strategy use changes over time in response to ongoing curricular interventions.

Finally, future academic work must account for digital and AI-mediated strategy tracking. Given the rapid growth of hybrid and technology-driven learning spaces, it is essential to explore how digital tools, specialized mobile applications, and AI-driven language platforms affect student autonomy and language learning strategy development, particularly for non-specialist learners who navigate limited classroom hours.

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