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Language Learning Strategies in the Writing Process: A Qualitative Inquiry of Senior High School Students' Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) presents persistent cognitive and metacognitive challenges for Indonesian senior high school students. Despite growing evidence that Language Learning Strategies (LLS) mediate writing performance, the specific strategies students employ across different stages of the composing process remain underexplored at the secondary level in Indonesia. This qualitative case study investigates the LLS employed by six purposively selected Grade XI students (two per achievement level: high, mid, and low) in Jambi City during the English writing process and examines their perceptions of the role those strategies play in supporting writing development. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase framework and Oxford's (1990, 2017) LLS taxonomy. Results reveal differentiated strategic profiles across participants: higher-achieving students deployed broad, metacognitively orchestrated repertoires across all writing stages, while lower-achieving students relied predominantly on compensatory and translation-based strategies with limited metacognitive engagement. The study underscores the critical role of metacognitive strategy use in EFL writing and calls for explicit, contextualized strategy instruction integrated into the process writing curriculum at the Indonesian secondary level.

1. Introduction

Writing in a foreign language is widely acknowledged as one of the most cognitively demanding skills that learners must develop in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Unlike receptive skills, writing requires learners to coordinate multiple cognitive processes simultaneously: generating and organizing ideas, selecting contextually appropriate vocabulary, applying grammatical

knowledge accurately, and attending to discourse-level coherence and textual conventions (Graham, 2019; Hyland, 2019). For Indonesian senior high school students, these challenges are compounded by the structural constraints of the national English curriculum, limited exposure to authentic English writing contexts, and instructional environments that have historically prioritized grammar accuracy and product quality over the recursive, exploratory nature of the composing process (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Dewi and Muslim, 2024; Kurniasih et al., 2020).

Language learning strategies (LLS) are recognized as a key factor influencing learners language achievement across the four language skills. Since Oxford, (1990) foundational taxonomy, extensive empirical work has established that learners who deploy a broad, flexible, and consciously managed repertoire of strategies tend to outperform those whose strategic engagement is narrow, reactive, or implicit (Chamot, 2005; Dalman and Plonsky, 2025; Tseng et al., 2006). In the domain of writing specifically, research has demonstrated that LLS support learners at each stage of the composing process: metacognitive strategies facilitate planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation; cognitive strategies enable effective use of language resources; compensation strategies allow learners to navigate lexical gaps; and social strategies harness collaborative feedback to improve drafts (Ardila et al., n.d.; Hilmi and Rozimela, 2025; Li, 2023).

Despite the growing body of research on LLS in EFL writing, qualitative studies examining how Indonesian secondary school students employ LLS throughout the writing process remain scarce. The majority of available studies have relied on questionnaire-based surveys, which provide aggregate data on strategy frequency but fail to capture the dynamic, contextualized, and individually differentiated nature of strategic engagement (Idaryani et al., 2020; Suryanto and Sari, 2021). This reliance on quantitative instruments means that critical questions about why students choose particular strategies, how they perceive the effectiveness of different strategic approaches, and what affective or contextual factors shape their strategic decisions remain largely unanswered.

Language learning strategies have been defined in multiple ways across several decades of applied linguistics research. The most widely adopted framework remains Oxford's taxonomy (Oxford, 1990), which classifies LLS into two superordinate categories: direct strategies encompassing memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies that directly involve the target language, and indirect strategies encompassing metacognitive, affective, and social strategies that support language learning without directly involving target language processing. Oxford, (2017) later revised this framework through the Strategic Self-Regulation (S²R) Model, which repositions LLS within a broader architecture of self-regulated learning and connects strategic behavior to the goal-directed, recursive nature of the composing process (Rose et al., 2018; Zimmerman and Bandura, 1994). Recent theoretical developments have emphasized the situated and sociocultural dimensions of strategic behavior, noting that the effectiveness of any given LLS depends on learners' metacognitive awareness to select, implement, monitor, and adjust strategies in response to feedback (Suprpto et al., 2022; Teng and Zhang, 2018).

The process approach to writing conceptualizes writing as a recursive, multistage cognitive activity, with each stage, pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing, placing distinct demands on learners' cognitive and strategic resources. Dewi and Muslim, (2024) emphasized that systematic pre-writing planning within the process approach supports better content development and organisational coherence. During drafting, Resmini et al., (2024) found rereading to be the most frequent monitoring strategy, while (Sophomore et al., (2023) argued that writing tools mainly reduce anxiety related to linguistic accuracy. At the revising stage, Baharudin et al., (2023) found that lower-proficiency learners focused revision on surface-level corrections rather than content, reflecting limited metacognitive engagement. Empirical research since 2020 further shows that metacognitive strategy use is the strongest predictor of writing quality, while cognitive strategies relate most closely to lexical richness (Hilmi and Rozimela, 2025; Prihandoko et al., 2024) In the Indonesian context, Ardila, (2020) documented wide variation in Indonesian EFL learners' writing-strategy repertoires across proficiency levels, while Anam and Stracke, (2016) demonstrated that declarative knowledge of a strategy does not guarantee its productive use unless learners hold sufficient self-efficacy. Prihandoko et al., (2024) similarly found significant positive relationships between metacognition, self-efficacy, and academic writing performance, while Teng and Zhang, (2018) showed that explicit, structured strategy instruction improved both writing quality and strategic engagement.

Despite these documented benefits, research consistently identifies challenges that impede effective strategy deployment. Affective challenges, including writing anxiety, low self-efficacy, and fear of negative evaluation, have been identified as barriers to strategic engagement (Prihandoko et al., 2024). In the Indonesian secondary context, (Dewi & Muslim, 2024) noted that the limited weekly contact hours for English in Indonesian secondary schools constrain the classroom time available for process-oriented writing instruction, while Bulqiyah et al., (2021) found that limited vocabulary and lexico-grammatical control were among the most commonly reported obstacles to essay writing, a gap that plausibly drives compensatory strategy use such as machine translation. Beyond the writing-specific literature reviewed above, recent Indonesian secondary-level research has extended strategy-based instruction to related skill domains, including reading (Astuti et al., 2026; Sulistyoningrum, 2026), speaking (Situmorang et al., 2026), writing pedagogy through technology-assisted media (Syamsi, 2026), and learner autonomy more broadly (Hutapea, 2019), underscoring the growing regional interest in strategy-based EFL instruction across skill areas.

The present study addresses this gap by conduct a qualitative case study examination of six students at one of senior high school in Jambi, focusing on their reported LLS use across the pre-writing, drafting, and revising stages of the writing process. Six participants were purposively selected to represent three contrasting academic profiles high-achieving, mid-achieving, and low-achieving to maximize analytical richness by illuminating how strategic repertoires differ across learner types within the same instructional context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study is guided by two research questions: (1) What language learning strategies do senior high school students employ during the English writing process? (2) What

challenges do students face when applying language learning strategies in their writing process?

2. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically a case study approach, which is epistemologically appropriate for generating in-depth, contextualized, and theoretically grounded accounts of complex phenomena within bounded real-life settings (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018; He, 2024). The case study approach was selected because it enables the researcher to explore the particularity and complexity of individual participants' experiences with LLS use during the writing process, and to develop analytical insights grounded in the specific social, cultural, and educational contexts in which those experiences are situated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research Participants

Six eleventh-grade students at a state senior high school in Jambi City, Indonesia, were selected as participants through purposive sampling (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015). The selection criteria required that participants were: (1) enrolled in Grade 11 with at least two academic semesters of exposure to English writing instruction; (2) willing to participate voluntarily in an extended interview; and (3) representing three contrasting academic writing profiles high-achieving, mid-achieving, and low-achieving with two students per profile level. All six participants received instruction from the same English teacher, ensuring institutional and pedagogical conditions were held relatively constant. All participants provided written informed consent; parental consent was also obtained. Table 1 presents the participant profiles. Writing scores were derived from two descriptive writing tasks administered prior to participant selection and scored using an analytical rubric adapted from (Holly et al., 1981), which evaluated content, organisation, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics on a 100-point scale. Each task was independently assessed by the class English teacher and the first researcher; inter-rater reliability was verified through Cohen's kappa (kappa = .83), indicating strong agreement. The final score for each participant was the mean of the two task scores, and the High/Mid/Low categorisation thresholds were set at greater than or equal to 80 (High), 65-79 (Mid), and less than 65 (Low). This rubric-standardised, dual-rater procedure was adopted to minimise subjectivity in profile classification and to ensure that the contrasting-profiles design rested on a transparent, replicable criterion.

Table 1. Participant Profiles

Code	Gender	Class	Writing Score	Profile Level	Strategic Orientation
S1	Female	XI F3	89 (High)	High-Achieving	Broad & Metacognitive
S2	Male	XI F3	85 (High)	High-Achieving	Broad & Cognitive

Code	Gender	Class	Writing Score	Profile Level	Strategic Orientation
S3	Female	XI F3	74 (Mid)	Mid-Achieving	Selective & Emerging
S4	Male	XI F3	71 (Mid)	Mid-Achieving	Selective & Mixed
S5	Male	XI F3	62 (Low)	Low-Achieving	Narrow & Compensatory
S6	Female	XI F3	58 (Low)	Low-Achieving	Narrow & Avoidant

Research Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol developed based on Oxford's LLS taxonomy (Oxford, 1990), Holly et al., (1981) process writing model, and the specific research questions. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they combine the systematic thematic coverage of a structured instrument with the flexibility to pursue emergent topics and respond to participants' unique perspectives (Kvale, 1996). The interview protocol comprised open-ended questions organized around three stages pre-writing, drafting, and revising as well as perceptions and challenges. Table 2 presents the interview guide.

Table 2. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Stage	Interview Questions
Pre-Writing	What do you do before you begin writing an English essay? Do you plan or make an outline? How do you decide what to write about? What resources do you use at this stage?
Drafting	How do you develop your ideas into sentences and paragraphs? What do you do when you don't know an English word or phrase? Do you use any tools or resources while writing? How do you manage anxiety or difficulty during writing?
Revising	What do you do after completing your first draft? How do you check or improve your writing? Do you ask for feedback from others? How do you evaluate whether your writing is good enough?
Perceptions & Challenges	Do you think using strategies helps your writing? Which strategies do you find most useful and why? What challenges do you face when trying to apply strategies? How do time, vocabulary, and emotions affect your writing?

The instrument was reviewed by two expert validators prior to data collection and piloted with a Grade 11 student not included in the study. Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. Interviews were conducted primarily in Indonesian to ensure participants could express themselves fully; all relevant excerpts were translated into English and back-translated by a bilingual colleague to verify accuracy.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a dual analytical approach aligned with the two research questions. For Research Question 1, each participant's transcript was systematically coded using Oxford's six strategy categories, and codes were mapped onto the three writing stages to construct a stage-by-strategy matrix for each participant. For Research Question 2, reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006), six-phase framework was employed to identify the challenges participants

reported encountering when applying strategies. Analytical memos were maintained throughout to document interpretive decisions and support reflexive awareness. Member checking was conducted by sharing written summaries of preliminary themes with all six participants, who confirmed the summaries accurately reflected their intended meanings.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis produced two overarching thematic structures corresponding to the two research questions. Table 3 provides an overview of themes and subthemes before the detailed discussion.

Table 3. Overview of Themes and Subthemes

Research Question	Theme	Subthemes	Description
RQ1: LLS employed during writing	Theme 1: Metacognitive Planning and Self-Regulation	Pre-writing Planning; Metacognitive Monitoring During Drafting; Self-Evaluation and Feedback Seeking	High-achieving students used outlining, mind mapping, monitoring, self-evaluation, and peer feedback across all writing stages.
	Theme 2: Selective and Emerging Strategic Engagement	Partial Planning; Circumlocution & Dictionary Use; Vocabulary Development; Surface-Level Revision	Mid-achieving students used informal notes, dictionaries, vocabulary notebooks, and focused mainly on grammar during revision.
	Theme 3: Reactive and Compensatory Strategy Use	Limited Pre-writing; Machine Translation; Avoidance Strategies; Minimal Self-Revision	Low-achieving students began without planning, relied heavily on Google Translate, avoided difficult sections, and depended on teacher feedback.
RQ2: Challenges in applying LLS	Theme 1: Structural and Temporal Constraints	Examination Time Pressure; Insufficient Class Time	Time pressure restricted planning, monitoring, and revision; limited class time prevented full process writing practice.
	Theme 2: Linguistic Resource Limitations	Lexical Gaps During Drafting; Machine Translation as Compensatory Response	Vocabulary deficiencies triggered varied compensatory responses across proficiency levels, from contextual dictionary use to over-reliance on translation tools.
	Theme 3: Affective and Motivational Barriers	Writing Anxiety; Avoidance of Social Strategies; Motivational Variability	Anxiety caused cognitive interference and social strategy avoidance; motivational investment varied by topic relevance.

Language Learning Strategies Employed During the Writing Process

Theme 1: Metacognitive Planning and Self-Regulation (High-Achieving Students – S1 and S2)

The high-achieving participants demonstrated the most elaborate and consciously orchestrated strategic repertoires, consistently deploying planning, monitoring, and evaluation behaviors that reflect the metacognitive regulatory functions central to Oxford's (2017) S²R Model. During the pre-writing stage, S1 consistently constructed an outline before writing:

"Before I start, I always write an outline. I list the introduction, the main points I want to discuss, and the conclusion. Without an outline, my writing becomes disorganized in the middle and I lose track of what I wanted to say. The outline is like a map for me. I also read some English articles about the topic first, to get ideas and see how other people write about it. (S1)"

S1's habitual use of outlining as a pre-writing metacognitive strategy is consistent with Dewi and Muslim's (2024) observation that structured pre-writing planning supports text coherence and elaboration. S2 similarly engaged in structured pre-writing planning, emphasizing idea mapping over linear outlining:

"I draw a mind map first. I put the topic in the center and write all my ideas around it. Then I choose the best ideas and number them in order. This helps me not forget good ideas when I am writing. I also think about the vocabulary I will need and write a few key words so I can use them. (S2)"

S2's deliberate vocabulary anticipation noting key words he expects to need before writing reflects a proactive metacognitive strategy that distinguishes expert-oriented from novice-oriented writing behavior (Graham, 2019; Hilmi & Rozimela, 2025). During the drafting stage, S1 employed incremental self-monitoring, correcting drafts paragraph by paragraph, consistent with Oxford's ((2017)conceptualization of monitoring as a core metacognitive function. In the revising stage, S1 used oral reading as a self-monitoring mechanism, while S2 additionally sought peer feedback as a social strategy, reflecting collaborative dimensions of strategic writing documented by Li, (2023).

Theme 2: Selective and Emerging Strategic Engagement (Mid-Achieving Students – S3 and S4)

The mid-achieving participants occupied a strategically intermediate position, characterized by selective use of metacognitive and cognitive strategies that was less consistent and less elaborated than the high-achieving group. S3 described a partial pre-writing process in which she generated a brief list of ideas but did not construct a formal outline:

"I write some ideas before I start. Like bullet points, not a real outline. I know the outline is supposed to help, but sometimes when I try to make a detailed plan, I am not sure yet what I want to say, so the outline becomes more confusing than helpful. I prefer to write a few notes and then start. (S3)"

S3's ambivalence about outlining reflects the tension between strategic knowledge and strategic competence identified by Anam and Stracke, (2016). During drafting, she employed compensation strategies including dictionary use and circumlocution when her lexical resources were insufficient consistent with Oxford's (1990) compensation strategy of paraphrasing. S4 demonstrated a more developed strategic profile through a deliberate vocabulary-building habit: maintaining a vocabulary notebook and attempting to incorporate new vocabulary into writing, reflecting a memory strategy associated with longer-term lexical development (Oxford, 1990). In the revising stage, both S3 and S4 engaged in limited self-revision focused primarily on surface-level errors, reflecting the proficiency-related revision pattern documented by Baharudin et al., (2023).

Theme 3: Reactive and Compensatory Strategy Use (Low-Achieving Students – S5 and S6)

The low-achieving participants exhibited the narrowest and least metacognitively oriented strategic profiles, relying heavily on compensation strategies particularly machine translation as the primary mechanism for managing linguistic challenges. Neither S5 nor S6 engaged in systematic pre-writing planning. S5 described his approach as follows:

"I usually just start writing what comes to my mind. I don't make an outline because I find it hard to think of ideas before I actually start. When I write, ideas come by themselves. If I sit and try to plan first, I just sit there with nothing. So I prefer to just start and see what happens. (S5)"

This approach has significant consequences for text quality: research consistently demonstrates that learners who invest in systematic pre-writing planning produce texts with better content development and organizational coherence (Baharudin et al., 2023; Dewi and Muslim, 2024). During drafting, both S5 and S6 relied primarily on machine translation. S6 described additional avoidance behaviors skipping difficult sections and defaulting to syntactically simple sentences which Oxford, (1990) classifies as avoidance-oriented compensation strategies that minimize cognitive engagement and reduce exposure to linguistic challenges. In the revising stage, both reported minimal self-directed revision and relied entirely on teacher feedback, reflecting the cycle of disengagement from the revision process documented by Nicol, (2021). A note on data representation is warranted here. The relative brevity of interview excerpts from low-achieving participants (S5, S6) compared with those from high-achieving participants (S1, S2) reflects the actual character of the data rather than selective reporting. Consistent with documented patterns of metacognitive verbalisation in EFL learners (Anam and Stracke, 2016;

Dalman and Plonsky, 2025), lower-achieving students produced substantially shorter and less elaborated responses when asked to reflect on their strategic behaviour. This asymmetry is itself a substantive finding: the limited self-reflective depth evident in S5 and S6's verbal accounts mirrors the narrow, reactive strategic repertoires documented in their writing behaviour, and should be interpreted as an expression of their strategic profiles rather than an artefact of the reporting process.

Challenges in Applying Language Learning Strategies

Theme 1: Structural and Temporal Constraints

Time pressure emerged as the most universally experienced structural constraint, reported by all six participants as a significant barrier to effective LLS deployment. For the high-achieving participants, examination conditions compressed the time available for the full strategic process they employed in home-based writing tasks. S1 observed:

"When we write in class for an exam, I don't have enough time for everything. I make a shorter outline. I read the draft once but I can't do a full revision. Sometimes I submit something I know could be better if I had more time. The exam format doesn't support the writing process I actually use at home. (S1)"

S1's observation that the examination format is incompatible with her process-oriented writing approach corroborates Hyland's (2019) argument that assessment practices aligned with product rather than process models of writing effectively penalize learners who rely on deliberate, multi-stage strategic engagement. For the low-achieving participants, the impact was more severe examination conditions eliminated even their already minimal pre-writing activities. Beyond examinations, participants also identified insufficient class time as a structural barrier, resonating with (Dewi & Muslim, 2024) documentation of time pressure as a primary structural constraint on LLS deployment in Indonesian secondary EFL writing.

Theme 2: Linguistic Resource Limitations

Vocabulary limitations constituted a second shared challenge reported across all six participants, though the strategies employed to manage this challenge differed significantly by proficiency level. S1 described the challenge from a high-achiever's perspective even with the dictionary, available words sometimes did not fully capture what she wanted to say. S4 described encountering lexical uncertainty when multiple synonymous options were available without knowing their contextual differences, reflecting what Nation, (2001) identifies as an important intermediate-level developmental milestone: the transition from knowing a word's general meaning to knowing its contextual collocations and register constraints. For S5 and S6, vocabulary limitations were more extensive and functioned as the primary trigger for over-reliance on machine translation without systematic post-translation verificational compensatory strategy that addresses immediate text production but does not support underlying language competence development (Suprpto et al., 2022).

Theme 3: Affective and Motivational Barriers

Affective challenges, particularly writing anxiety and low self-confidence, constituted a third significant category of barriers. S6 provided the most detailed account of how writing anxiety interfered with her cognitive processes:

"When I am writing in English, especially for an exam, I feel nervous and my mind goes blank sometimes. I keep thinking that my writing is bad and the teacher will think I am not good at English. I cannot think clearly because I am too worried. Even when I know a strategy, the anxiety makes me forget to use it. (S6)"

S6's description of anxiety-induced cognitive interference is consistent with Prihandoko et al.'s (2024) account of writing anxiety and low self-efficacy as performance-inhibiting affective factors in EFL writing. Both S5 and S6 described how low confidence in their writing ability inhibited their use of social strategies, specifically their willingness to seek feedback from peers or teachers. This pattern of social strategy avoidance is particularly damaging because social strategies are precisely those most likely to generate the targeted, contextualized feedback that could support writing improvement (Anam and Stracke, 2016). Mid-achieving participants reported a further motivational pattern in which strategic engagement was highly context-dependent, with higher investment in personally meaningful writing tasks reflecting Ryan & Deci, (2020) distinction between intrinsically motivated and extrinsically motivated learning behavior.

The discussion below first elaborates the stage-specific deployment of language learning strategies across the pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing stages, and then analyses the contextual and individual factors that shaped strategy selection and effectiveness across the three proficiency groups. The findings collectively confirm and extend prior research demonstrating that the quality of students' writing engagement is substantially mediated by the breadth, depth, and metacognitive sophistication of their strategic repertoires (Hilmi and Rozimela, 2025; Oxford, 2017; Zimmerman and Bandura, 1994). A theoretically significant finding is the knowledge-application gap evident in the accounts of mid- and low-achieving participants, reflecting precisely the distinction between declarative and procedural strategic knowledge that Dalman and Plonsky, (2025) identify as a central explanatory variable in LLS research. Examining strategy deployment stage by stage reveals fine-grained patterns that aggregate proficiency-level descriptions can obscure. At the pre-writing stage, high-achieving students (S1, S2) routinely engaged in multi-component planning: S1 constructed a hierarchical outline to impose macro-level structure before drafting, while S2 produced a mind map and compiled a personal vocabulary list of anticipated key terms. Both behaviours exemplify the metacognitive planning and cognitive vocabulary-anticipation functions that Oxford, (2017) identifies as hallmarks of self-regulated writing. Mid-achieving students (S3, S4) engaged in partial pre-writing: S3 generated informal bullet-point notes but resisted formal outlining, attributing this to uncertainty about content rather than strategic unawareness, a pattern consistent with the knowledge-application gap Anam and Stracke (2016) attribute to insufficient self-efficacy. S4

supplemented notes with entries from a maintained vocabulary notebook, reflecting a memory-cognitive integration strategy. Low-achieving students (S5, S6) initiated drafting without any pre-writing activity, a pattern that research consistently associates with weaker content development and organisational coherence (Baharudin et al., 2023; Dewi and Muslim, 2024). During the drafting stage, high-achieving students sustained paragraph-level self-monitoring, pausing periodically to evaluate whether emerging text fulfilled communicative intentions, consistent with Oxford, (2017) metacognitive monitoring function.

Mid-achieving students relied on selective cognitive strategies, principally dictionary consultation and circumlocution, to bridge lexical gaps, while attempting to incorporate vocabulary notebook entries, reflecting emergent but not yet automatic strategic coordination. Low-achieving students defaulted to machine translation as a primary compensatory strategy, which resolved immediate production demands while bypassing the language-processing opportunities essential for competence development (Suprpto et al., 2022). At the revising stage, high-achieving students engaged in substantive revision combining oral rereading for cohesion evaluation with peer-feedback consultation as a social strategy, reflecting the collaborative revision loop documented by Li, (2023). Mid-achieving students confined revision to surface-level error correction, consistent with Baharudin et al., (2023) proficiency-differentiated revision finding. Low-achieving students reported minimal self-directed revision, deferring evaluation entirely to the teacher, thereby forfeiting the internal feedback cycle that Nicol, (2021) identifies as essential for self-regulatory writing development.

At the editing stage, high-achieving students applied systematic proofreading targeting grammatical accuracy and lexical precision; mid-achieving students focused on spelling and punctuation; and low-achieving students reported minimal editing, attributing this to time pressure and low confidence in their ability to detect errors independently. Taken together, these stage-specific patterns confirm that effective LLS deployment is not a static repertoire but a dynamic, stage-sensitive coordination of strategy types that develops progressively with proficiency and metacognitive awareness. Graham, (2019) SRSD framework offers a particularly evidence-based model for bridging this gap in the Indonesian secondary context. Beyond the knowledge-application gap, this study's findings illuminate five interacting factors that shaped strategy selection and effectiveness across proficiency levels.

First, language proficiency operated as the primary enabling condition: higher-proficiency students possessed sufficient linguistic resources to allocate cognitive capacity toward metacognitive regulation, whereas lower-proficiency students' processing resources were consumed by basic linguistic production demands, leaving limited capacity for strategic orchestration (Ardila, 2020; Teng and Zhang, 2020). This is consistent with the threshold hypothesis in LLS research, which posits that a minimum proficiency level is required before learners can effectively deploy higher-order metacognitive strategies (Griffiths, 2018). Second, motivational investment emerged as a significant moderator, particularly for mid-achieving students, whose strategic engagement varied markedly according to topic

relevance. When writing tasks aligned with personal interests, S3 and S4 invested more effort in planning and vocabulary preparation, reflecting Ryan and Deci, (2020) finding that intrinsic motivation amplifies self-regulatory engagement. This suggests that teacher task-design choices, specifically the degree to which topics are personally meaningful, can substantially moderate strategy deployment independently of proficiency level. Third, self-efficacy constituted an influential individual factor, most visibly in the accounts of low-achieving students. S5 and S6 reported that low confidence in their writing ability directly inhibited their willingness to attempt unfamiliar strategies, seek peer feedback, or revise beyond surface corrections. (Prihandoko et al., 2024) similarly documented significant positive relationships between writing self-efficacy, metacognition, and academic writing performance among Indonesian EFL students, confirming that affective and cognitive dimensions of strategy deployment are mutually reinforcing.

Fourth, teacher support and pedagogical environment shaped the ceiling of students' strategy awareness. All participants attributed whatever strategic awareness they possessed primarily to incidental teacher demonstration rather than explicit strategy instruction, resulting in the wide proficiency-correlated variation documented in this study. Dewi & Muslim, (2024) similarly observed that limited class time and predominantly teacher-directed instruction restrict explicit strategy development in Indonesian secondary EFL contexts. Fifth, the broader learning environment, particularly examination-oriented assessment design and large class sizes, constrained strategy deployment at the systemic level. The structural incompatibility between process-oriented strategic writing and timed single-draft evaluation effectively penalised learners relying on multi-stage planning and revision, reinforcing reactive and compensatory strategy use among lower-achieving students (Dewi and Muslim, 2024; Hyland, 2019). Taken together, these five factors indicate that effective strategy instruction at the Indonesian secondary level must address not only declarative strategy knowledge but also the proficiency thresholds, motivational conditions, self-efficacy beliefs, and structural assessment contexts that collectively determine whether strategic knowledge translates into strategic behaviour during actual writing. The structural challenge posed by examination-oriented assessment practices also emerges as a critical finding requiring reform at the systemic level, including assessment designs that allow sufficient time for planning and revision and incorporate process-oriented evaluation criteria.

4. Conclusion

This qualitative case study investigated the language learning strategies used by six Grade XI senior high school students in Jambi City, Indonesia, during the English writing process. The findings reveal three differentiated strategic profiles corresponding to proficiency levels: high-achieving students deployed broad, metacognitively orchestrated repertoires involving planning, monitoring, self-evaluation, and social feedback across all writing stages; mid-achieving students employed selective and emerging strategic behaviors that were less consistent and less elaborated; and low-achieving students relied primarily on reactive

compensatory and machine-translation-based strategies with limited metacognitive engagement.

Three themes characterized the challenges participants encountered: structural and temporal constraints, linguistic resource limitations, and affective and motivational barriers. These findings collectively demonstrate that effective LLS deployment in EFL writing is conditioned not only by individual cognitive capacity but by the interaction of metacognitive awareness, affective readiness, and structural opportunity. The study makes three contributions to the literature: it provides qualitative, process-level evidence of LLS deployment across a range of proficiency levels; it highlights the knowledge-application gap as a central challenge for less strategically developed learners; and it draws attention to affective dimensions and structural constraints as systemic factors that must be addressed alongside individual-level strategy instruction.

Future research should employ multiple data sources including think-aloud protocols, written text analysis, and classroom observation to triangulate and extend these findings. Longitudinal studies following learners through explicit LLS instruction programs would provide evidence on the development of strategic competence over time. Larger-scale qualitative studies incorporating participants from diverse school contexts and regional settings would broaden the contextual basis for understanding LLS use in Indonesian secondary EFL writing.

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