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Social language learning strategies across macro skills: The role of gender among Iranian EFL learners

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Abstract

Owing to the fact that language learning is a complex process, learners are supposed to employ a variety of strategies, including social, meta-cognitive, and cognitive strategies, to overcome the learning challenges. Social strategies, which are concerned with the learners' interactions with each other, are consequential in fostering language learning success. Despite the studies conducted concerning the significance of social strategies, a tangible need is felt to address the social strategy use across four macro skills of language. In that light, the present study attempted to explore the social strategy use across four skills of language learning among 202 Iranian upper-intermediate language learners selected via purposive sampling due to the particular focus on upper-intermediate learners. The data was collected utilizing the Language Learning Strategy Questionnaire (LLSQ) introduced by Setiyadi (2016) and analyzed quantitatively using ANCOVA with gender as the covariate. The findings highlighted the predominant social strategy used in listening skills, followed by speaking, reading, and writing (mean scores of 3.81, 3.22, 3.18, and 3.11, respectively). However, it should be noted that the number of questionnaire items was unequal across skills (5 items for speaking and three items for others), which may influence the comparative ranking of these skills. Additionally, gender ($F(1, 202) = 21.981$, $p < 0.001$) turned out to have a statistically significant effect on the participants' choice. These findings are hoped to assist the educators and material developers to shed light on the skills that need to be strengthened as far as the social strategies are concerned.

Keywords: EFL learners, gender, Iranian context, language learning strategy questionnaire (LLSQ), macro skills, social strategies

1. Introduction

Language learning is a multifaceted process that requires learners to utilize a variety of language learning strategies, including cognitive, meta-cognitive, and social strategies, to surmount the potential challenges ahead of them (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). Recent syntheses also emphasize that strategy use is not static; instead, it is increasingly conceptualized as context-sensitive, dynamic, and shaped by learners' goals, tasks, and learning environments (Hajar & Karakus, 2025). Defined another way, learning strategies are the mental or physical actions learners engage in at particular

points during the broader journey of acquiring or using a language (Ellis, 1994). These strategies can make learning “easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). There exists much taxonomy introduced by different scholars regarding language learning strategies, shown in the Appendix 1. Among these, social strategies are especially vital, as they emphasize the importance of interaction within the learners' sociocultural environment—enabling them to create a supportive space where collaboration and communication flourish in pursuit of shared goals (Coyle, 2007; Donato & McCormick, 1994). Such strategies focus on interaction with other people in the process of learning, including requesting assistance from peers or the teacher, working in groups, and conversing to improve language learning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Looking at it from another angle, "Language is a form of social behavior that manifests itself in the form of communication, and this communication naturally takes place among people" (Oxford, 1990, p. 144). In both Oxford’s and O'Malley & Chamot’s definition of social strategies, the elements such as interaction and cooperation are present, which essentially convey the same idea.

Importantly, however, contemporary strategy research increasingly acknowledges that social strategies rarely operate in isolation: learners’ interactional moves (e.g., requesting clarification, negotiating meaning, or seeking feedback) often co-occur with cognitive and metacognitive regulation such as attention control, inferencing, monitoring, and evaluation. In this sense, social strategy use can be viewed as intertwined with other strategy families rather than entirely separable from them (Hajar & Karakus, 2025; Li et al., 2024). In addition, recent empirical work continues to document robust relationships between strategy use and learner variables (e.g., self-efficacy), reinforcing that strategy deployment is multifactorial and linked to broader learner psychology and learning conditions (Saez-Zevallos et al., 2025).

Despite the fair amount of research concerning the interplay between the learning strategies and the context in which the learning transpires, not much reference has been made as to how social strategies are utilized across four skills of language, altogether, not just skill by skill, in different contexts. Admittedly, the studies conducted by Samiyan (2015) and Harish (2014) provide valuable insights into strategy use within specific cultural and educational contexts, but they do not fully address the cross-skill dimensions of strategy use. Moreover, existing research often focuses on general strategy use without delving into the specific social strategies that learners employ to enhance listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This limitation has also been indirectly echoed in recent large-scale mappings of the field: bibliometric evidence suggests that language learning strategy research has expanded substantially, yet remains methodologically and topically fragmented, with recurring emphases on particular constructs/instruments and many studies concentrating on specific skills, settings, or outcomes rather than systematically comparing strategy deployment across multiple language skills within the same learner cohort (Hajar & Karakus, 2025). Accordingly, the present study positions its contribution at the intersection of (a) social strategy use and (b) cross-skill comparison, while acknowledging that social strategies may interact with cognitive/metacognitive strategies even when the analytic focus is placed on social strategies. This focus is warranted because social strategies uniquely foreground the interactional resources through which learners mobilize support, feedback, and collaboration—resources that are especially salient across communicative tasks and classroom ecologies (Hajar & Karakus, 2025). Identifying the learners’ strengths and weaknesses

in each skill regarding the social strategy use could dramatically assist the material developers and teachers to maximize those strengths and simultaneously minimize the weaknesses as far as the social strategy use is concerned.

2. Literature review

2.1. Empirical Studies and Macro Skills

Various factors, such as the environment, technological tools, and sociocultural norms, shape the use of social strategies. Chen et al. (2021), in an attempt to establish a relationship between the context and social strategy use among distance learners, revealed how different learning contexts—self-directed study, assessment tasks, and synchronous classes—prompted the adoption of specific strategies by the learners. The findings of the study highlighted the importance technological tools in facilitating the interaction among students which in turn led to the improvement of social strategy use. in the same vain, the study conducted by Alzubi and Singh (2018) demonstrated that the use of smartphone-mediated social strategies among Saudi learners strikingly fostered self-regulation and sociocultural autonomy stressing the interplay between technology and social strategy use. As for the sociocultural context of language learning strategies, Samiyan (2015) further investigated the relationship between learning strategies, gender, and achievement among Iranian EFL learners. The results suggested gender-based differences in strategy use among the learners, such that male learners mainly used social and affective strategies while female learners showed a tendency toward the use of cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. This underscores the role of gender and sociocultural norms in strategy use in different contexts.

Additionally, studies such as Tawfiq (2020) and Ozfidan et al. (2014) highlight the role of sociocultural factors, such as attitudes, motivation, and peer interaction, in shaping learners' use of strategies. Tawfiq (2020) identified attitude as a crucial determinant in second language learning, while Ozfidan et al. (2014) emphasized the role of peer feedback and self-efficacy in fostering strategy use. These findings suggest that social strategies are not only tools for linguistic interaction but also vehicles for cultural integration and identity formation. Looking at the literature regarding the social strategy use across four language skills, the following results are observable. Because technology and sociocultural factors are central only insofar as they shape opportunities to enact social strategies across skills, they are treated here as mediating conditions (e.g., platform affordances, norms of face-saving, and trust), not as a separate tangential theme (Van Le et al, 2025; Waluyo & Panmei, 2024).

Importantly, the literature is not fully consistent: while social interaction is often theorized as beneficial for receptive skills, earlier strategy surveys sometimes reported comparatively low social-strategy use in listening. More recent classroom-based and online-collaborative studies suggest that whether social strategies are enacted in listening depends on task design, peer dynamics, and available tools, which can either enable or suppress interactional moves (Dan et al, 2024; Van Le et al, 2025).

2.1.1. Listening

Listening comprehension, long regarded as one of the most important language skills, is boosted immensely through different types of strategies (Vandergrift, 1999). Research has proven that learners involved in peer interactions or requesting clarifications with instructors performed well in listening tests (Jones, 2013). In addition, Carrier (2003) discovered that learners involved in strategies such as requesting clarification, checking with peers, or discussing challenging content with

instructors exhibited enhanced listening comprehension. In its study, it highlights social interactions in reengineering listening into an active problem-solving activity. Likewise, Liu et al. (2018) in a study discovered that learners involved in group discussion or group listening activity exhibited deeper listening comprehension of materials. The learners could interpret and remove ambiguities through discussion of materials with fellow learners. This observation conforms with the general theory that peer interaction enables a more participative and active form of listening, enhancing audio material retention and comprehension (Philp et al., 2010; Webb, 1989)

2.1.2. Speaking

The role played by social strategies in speaking skill development is perhaps most explicit and tends to require learners to manage complex social interactions, including negotiation of meaning, solicitation of clarification, and feedback loops (Parks & Raymond, 2004). Perhaps one of the most documented studies in this field is that of peer interaction in developing speaking accuracy and fluency (Li & Hu, 2024; Sato & Ballinger, 2012; Sato & Lyster, 2012). In a study conducted by Gorham et al. (2024), students participating in ongoing sessions of peer feedback, conversation partners, or language exchange programs exhibited significant improvement in speaking fluency and confidence. Learners utilized such sessions to practice language production in real-life scenarios, with immediate corrective feedback and continued communicative development. Apart from peer interaction, social strategies in language practice, such as the use of language learning software for conversation practice, have also been proven to promote speaking capabilities. For example, in a study conducted by Lai (2020), learners who participated in a language exchange platform and video chat developed increased fluency and could use a larger variety of vocabulary and expressions in speaking performance (Rahimi & Fathi, 2022; Sevy-Biloon & Chroman, 2019). Such platforms enable learners to receive immediate feedback from native speakers, providing a more naturalistic language practice environment.

2.1.3. Reading

Social strategies are not just restricted to the functional area of spoken language but also extend to the functional area of reading, where collaboration and discussion help in improving comprehension (Vaughn et al., 2001). It has been proven that group discussions and peer review can enhance, to a great extent, learners' reading comprehension and interpretation skills. For instance, Jin et al. (2022) investigated how collaborative reading practices, such as group discussions and peer feedback, assisted English learners in the development of a more complex understanding of academic discourse. The study showed that through social interaction, learners were able to clear their misunderstandings, share their ideas, and gain different perspectives from their peers, which in turn increased their understanding and memory of the reading material. Another related study by Gasmi (2022) investigated how learners engaged in the use of online collaborative tools to engage in group discussions to analyze their readings. They observed that the students who engaged in online forums or chat groups were more engaged with the content since they were able to share their interpretations and discuss the difficult parts of the texts. This peer-mediated social strategy not only assisted in the improvement of reading comprehension but also promoted critical thinking and active engagement with the learning material. For reading, peer-supported collaborative work on academic texts has been shown to shape learner engagement and confidence, highlighting how social support can function as a bridge from receptive processing to participation and meaning negotiation (Jin et al., 2022).

2.1.4. Writing

Writing is yet another area in which the importance of social strategies comes to the fore (Lenski & Nierstheimer, 2002). Peer review, group work in writing, and teacher guidance are all part of enhancing writing competency. According to studies, students involved in peer review processes and group work in writing exhibit significant improvement in accuracy, fluency, and style in writing (Crossman & Kite, 2012). Tai et al. (2015) examined the impact of a combination of teacher feedback and peer review (TF + PR) and a single TF in improving the writing performance of EFL university students in a collaborative web-based learning environment. In the findings, the TF + PR group showed larger improvements compared to students who received TF alone in terms of overall writing competency and the content, organization, grammar, mechanics, and style subscales. In addition, current studies have further examined the contribution of web-based collaboration tools in developing writing competencies. Hsieh (2019) examined, through a study, how language learners interact with one another with the use of web-based resources to accomplish a collaboration writing activity and how these resources helped learners in meaning creation. The findings show that the availability of online resources leads to different kinds of interaction properties among learners with different collaboration orientations. It also enhanced their writing quality because it encouraged them to think critically and get more viewpoints on how to solve the given writing task.

For writing, recent research has moved beyond whether peer feedback "works" to examine engagement trajectories and the conditions under which providing feedback becomes a learning opportunity; for example, longitudinal evidence shows growth in affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement when peer feedback is repeated and scaffolded (Zhang et al., 2023). Meta-analytic evidence also indicates that peer feedback yields small-to-moderate positive effects overall, with outcomes moderated by instructional design and what is being assessed (Vuogan & Li, 2023).

3. Research Questions

Taken together, recent findings point to two under-explored issues:(1) cross-skill comparisons are still relatively rare—especially for reading and writing when social strategies are operationalized in parallel—and (2) inconsistencies across older survey findings and newer classroom/online studies have not been systematically reconciled. Accordingly, the present study's skill-by-skill mapping is positioned to clarify where (and for whom) social strategies are more or less visible across listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

To this end, the present study intends to approach the aforementioned existing gap in the literature by the following research questions:

How often do Iranian second language learners at the upper intermediate level use social strategies across the four language skills, and what are the differences in strategy use among these skills?

What is the role of gender in social strategy use across the four skills?

4. Method

4.1. Design

The present study adopted a survey introduced by Setiyadi (2016), aiming at exploring and describing the amount of social strategy use across the four skills of language learning, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing, among the Iranian upper-intermediate EFL language learners.

4.2. Participants

Two hundred two language learners were selected among different language learning institutes in Tehran, Iran. These language learners (103 male and 99 female) were all at the upper-intermediate level (verified via IELTS exam as the baseline) and were selected through purposive sampling.

4.3. Material and Instrument

The instrument applied for this study is the Language Learning Strategy Questionnaire (LLSQ) introduced by Ag. Bambang Setiyadi (2016). The original questionnaire contains 80 items distributed across four language learning skills. Each skill includes 20 items assessing the use of metacognitive, cognitive, and social strategies. In the present study, only the social strategy–related items were selected, resulting in a total of 14 items (5 items for speaking and three items for listening, reading, and writing).

The decision to focus exclusively on social strategy items was theoretically motivated by the primary aim of the study, which was to examine patterns of social strategy use across the four macro language skills rather than to provide a comprehensive profile of overall strategy use. However, it should be acknowledged that this adaptation represents a substantial modification of the original instrument and introduces important methodological considerations.

The predictive validity of the original LLSQ was established by Setiyadi (2016), who reported a strong positive relationship between overall strategy use and language proficiency. The internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for the complete 80-item questionnaire was reported as 0.92. In the present study, the internal consistency reliability for the selected social strategy items yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70.

Although a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 is generally considered acceptable for exploratory research, particularly when the number of items is relatively small, the reduction from the original reliability coefficient indicates that the adapted version does not retain the same level of internal consistency as the full instrument. This reduction may be attributable to both the limited number of items and the skill-specific subdivision of social strategies.

Another important consideration concerns the unequal distribution of items across skills, with speaking represented by a greater number of items than listening, reading, and writing. This imbalance may affect the precision of cross-skill comparisons and should therefore be taken into account when interpreting mean differences across skills. Accordingly, the results related to cross-skill variation are interpreted with caution, and emphasis is placed on overall patterns rather than fine-grained comparisons.

It should also be noted that no separate pilot study or re-validation procedure was conducted for the adapted 14-item version of the questionnaire. This constitutes a limitation of the present study and restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future research is therefore strongly encouraged to either develop a balanced, skill-specific social strategy scale or conduct confirmatory factor analysis and pilot testing to establish the psychometric properties of adapted instruments prior to large-scale data collection.

Despite these limitations, the adapted instrument was deemed appropriate for the exploratory purpose of the present study, which aimed to provide an initial, skill-based examination of social strategy use among Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learners. The findings are thus presented as indicative rather than definitive, serving as a foundation for further research employing more rigorously validated measurement tools.

4.4. Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed online, with participants accessing it through a provided link. A two-month interval elapsed between its initial administration and the completion of data collection. All participants were fully informed about the nature and implications of their involvement, and informed consent was obtained from each individual. Furthermore, they were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and were made aware of the importance of their input in shaping the study's findings.

4.5. Data analysis

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using SPSS (Version 27). Descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize learners' social strategy use across the four language skills. To examine differences in social strategy use across skills and the role of gender, a mixed-design ANOVA was performed, with language skill (speaking, listening, reading, writing) as the within-subjects factor and gender as a between-subjects fixed factor. This analysis allowed for the investigation of the main effects of skill and gender, as well as their interaction.

5. Results

The results of the analysis are shown tabularly below. Before delving into details of results, it is incumbent upon us to report that the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was conducted, and the results indicated p-values of 0.101 for speaking, 0.137 for listening, 0.09 for reading, and 0.204 for writing, signifying that the results are not due to chance. Further, the homogeneity of variances assumption was checked using Levene's test before conducting the major analyses, and the results highlighted no significant violation of this assumption, as revealed by a Levene Statistic of 1.454 and $p = 0.208$.

Table 1 demonstrates the frequency of responses provided by learners, which acknowledges that 72.09 % of the responses have been toward "Usually true of me, Somewhat true of me, and Always or almost always true of me" in total. This indicates that the amount of social strategy use among the students has been at a high level. Of course, this percentage is reported descriptively and should not be interpreted as high use in absolute terms, as no external benchmarks were employed.

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Learners' Responses to Social Strategy Items

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never or almost never true of me	327	11.6	11.6
Usually not true of me	440	15.6	15.6
Somewhat true of me	699	24.7	24.7
Usually true of me	754	26.7	26.7
Always or almost always true of me	608	21.5	21.5
Total	2828	100.0	100.0

Perhaps the most important finding of the study lies in the table 2. In this table, we see the mean scores and standard deviations of each language learning skill in comparison with other language skills in terms of social strategy use. As we can see, the social strategies utilized by students are predominantly towards the listening skill (M = 3.81). Speaking, reading, and writing take the next places respectively. The standard deviation from the mean for each skill is more than 1, which suggests that the variation of students' responses is either below the mean score of each skill or above it.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social strategies for speaking	202	3.22	1.130
Social strategies for listening	202	3.81	1.046
Social strategies for reading	202	3.18	1.219
Social strategies for writing	202	3.11	1.284

The results of the ANCOVA, as shown in Table 3, revealed a statistically significant interaction between gender and the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) regarding the use of social strategies. The interaction effect was significant, $F(1, 202) = 21.981$, $p < 0.001$, with a Partial Eta Squared value of 0.052, indicating a small effect size. This suggests that gender plays a small role in shaping the application of social strategies across different language skills in the real population. These differences should be interpreted with caution, as the number of social strategy items was not equally distributed across skills (five items for speaking and three items for the other skills), which may have influenced mean comparisons.

Table 3

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Skills*gender	34.464	21.981	.000	.052

Table 4 provides further insight into this interaction effect of gender across each skill by presenting the mean scores and confidence intervals for social strategy use across the four skills for male and female participants. These findings indicate that, overall, females tend to employ social strategies more frequently than males, except in speaking, where males slightly outperform females.

Table 4

Mean Scores and Standard Errors of Social Strategy Use across the Four Language Skills by Gender

Participants' gender	Four skills of language learning	Mean	Std. Error
Male	Speaking	3.235	.055
	Listening	3.796	.071
	Reading	3.013	.071
	Writing	2.926	.071
Female	Speaking	3.170	.056
	Listening	3.835	.073
	Reading	3.360	.073
	Writing	3.300	.073

6. Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the social strategy use across four skills of language learning to see the distribution of these strategies across each skill. The results revealed that the social strategies regarding listening and speaking were used by participants more than those of reading and writing. This may be attributed to the interactive nature of listening and speaking, which often requires real-time engagement and collaboration with others, leading learners to utilize social strategies more effectively (Vandergrift, 1997). This interpretation is consistent with more recent evidence showing that interaction-rich tasks—particularly in online and blended settings—tend to stimulate help-seeking, peer negotiation, and clarification behaviors that map closely onto "social strategy" use (Chen, Wang, & Rodway, 2021; Rahimi & Fathi, 2022).

More specifically, recent classroom- and technology-mediated studies indicate that when listening tasks are embedded within collaborative or synchronous learning environments, learners are more likely to activate social strategies such as peer clarification and joint meaning negotiation (Dan et al., 2024). The predominance of listening-related social strategies in the present study, therefore, extends these findings to the Iranian EFL context and supports the view that social engagement in listening has become increasingly normalized rather than exceptional.

When we take a look at the previous studies regarding the distribution of social strategies across four skills in one study, we cannot see many. In a study, Serri et al. (2012) investigated the role of cognitive, meta-cognitive, and social strategies on students' listening comprehension and found that although cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies, prompted by motivation, were effective on students' listening comprehension, the social strategies were rarely used by students to boost their listening comprehension. This could indicate a lack of awareness or training in the effective use of social strategies among students at that time. In the present study, however, we found that of all skills of language learning, the social strategies relevant to listening skills were used more frequently than other skills. This shift may suggest an evolving understanding of the importance of social interaction in language acquisition among learners. One way to reconcile (rather than simply "contrast") these findings is to treat social strategy use in listening as context-dependent: more recent research on

online/distance learning shows that learners strategically increase interactional moves (e.g., asking for clarification, peer checking, collaborative problem-solving) when the learning context explicitly affords or requires it (Chen et al., 2021). In other words, Serri et al.'s low social strategy finding may reflect an instructional ecology where listening was largely individual, whereas contemporary environments often embed listening inside interactive tasks (e.g., collaborative discussion around input). This interpretation is further supported by recent sociocultural analyses suggesting that task design and platform affordances, rather than the receptive nature of listening itself, determine whether learners enact social strategies during listening activities (Van Le et al., 2025; Waluyo & Panmei, 2024).

At the same time, the contradiction may also be partially methodological: the present study relied on a skill-based questionnaire where the number and wording of items can shape mean differences across skills. Because the speaking subscale contained more social-strategy items than the other skills (5 vs. 3), item-number imbalance remains a plausible rival explanation for some skill differences, and future work should use fully balanced subscales or apply item-response/measurement checks to ensure cross-skill comparability.

In line with the findings of this study, Raoofi et al. (2017), in an investigation of the strategies that university students applied to enhance their writing skills, realized that the social strategies were least frequently used by students, while meta-cognitive strategies were most common. This finding could indicate that writing is often perceived as a solitary activity, leading to less reliance on social strategies compared to more interactive skills (Raoofi et al., 2017). Likewise, in the present study, the writing skill had the lowest mean score (3.11) among other skills of language learning. However, recent peer-feedback and collaborative-writing research complicates this "writing-as-solitary" explanation: studies increasingly show that when collaborative feedback is structured, learners display meaningful social engagement and can improve writing performance—suggesting that low reported social strategy use may reflect limited opportunities/uptake rather than low usefulness (Chen, Liu, & Lin, 2023; Guo et al, 2024). Thus, the present pattern (lowest social strategy use in writing) can be interpreted as evidence of an implementation gap: learners may benefit from social writing practices, yet they may not spontaneously adopt them unless classroom routines normalize peer feedback and collaborative revision.

Social strategies, as investigated by Shawer (2016), are very important predictors of students' achievement in language learning skills. The frequency of social strategies among 202 participants in the current study (72.09%) corroborates Shawer's findings and illustrates that this type of strategy is a determining factor in students' academic and scholastic outcomes. The high percentage of social strategy use may reflect a growing recognition of the benefits of collaborative learning environments in educational settings (Chen et al., 2018). Taheri et al. (2020) similarly pointed out that high and low-performing students differ in frequency and type of strategy use across speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, meaning that the more learning strategies—social strategies included—are used by students, the more desirable the learning outcomes will be. This highlights the importance of teaching students to incorporate a variety of strategies to enhance their overall learning experience. In addition, recent work focusing on social strategies in online language learning suggests that strategy frequency may rise when learners perceive interaction as necessary for comprehension and task completion

(Chen et al., 2021). This supports the idea that strategy use is not only a learner trait but is also strongly shaped by how tasks are designed and how interaction is positioned within instruction.

As for the role of gender in social strategy use among students, the results of the study have shown that it has a statistically significant effect on the students' social strategy use, although the size of the difference is small. This suggests that while gender may influence strategy choice, other factors such as individual personality traits and social context might also play crucial roles. This finding has been shown in the study carried out by Oxford et al. (1988), which demonstrated that females use a wider collection of learning strategies, specifically social strategies, compared to males in the path to improve their language learning abilities. Similarly, in the present study, the female participants outperformed the male ones in listening, reading, and writing skills as far as social strategies were concerned, and only in speaking skills were they outperformed by male participants. This could be due to socialization patterns where females are often encouraged to engage in collaborative and communicative behaviors from a young age, fostering a greater reliance on social strategies in their learning processes (Ptacek et al., 1992). To deepen this explanation (and avoid over-speculation), it is also plausible that gender differences reflect differential comfort with specific interaction formats (e.g., peer clarification vs. public speaking), classroom participation norms, or confidence patterns that vary by skill. Recent technology-mediated speaking research indicates that interactional conditions (e.g., partner type, feedback mode, and task design) can influence willingness to communicate and participation intensity—factors that may interact with gender rather than being reducible to gender alone (Rahimi & Fathi, 2022).

Recent research, however, cautions against treating gender as a primary explanatory variable, suggesting instead that gender effects are mediated by interactional conditions, confidence, and task format (Dan et al., 2024; Rahimi & Fathi, 2022). In this sense, the small effect size observed in the present study is best interpreted as evidence of a real but bounded association shaped by context-sensitive participation norms rather than stable gender-based differences.

Accordingly, the small effect size in the present findings is best interpreted as evidence of a real but bounded association: gender differences exist, but they likely operate through context-sensitive mechanisms (task affordances, participation norms, and interactional confidence). Future studies should triangulate questionnaire outcomes with observation/interview evidence to clarify how gendered participation translates into reported social strategy use across the four skills.

7. Conclusion and Implications

The present study intended to measure the distribution of social strategy use across the speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills with an eye toward the effect of gender on the participants' choice among upper-intermediate Iranian language learners. The findings revealed that the students used social strategies regarding listening skills more than speaking, reading, and writing, respectively, and gender had a statistically significant impact on students' choices of strategies, although the effect size of this impact is not that strong. Further, the frequency of students' responses acknowledged 72.09 use of social strategies, to varying degrees, which means that students are aware of the significance of these strategies on their way to mastery of language.

The results of this study hold significant value for language teachers and material developers. First, the more use of social strategies in the listening and speaking tasks implies that the teachers

should place more emphasis on these strategies in their teaching, promoting group work and other activities that would help improve the students' oral communication skills. Second, the lower use of social strategies in reading and writing indicates a need for targeted interventions to integrate these strategies into all language skills, thereby promoting a more balanced approach to language learning. Moreover, educators are encouraged to engage both males and females in using social strategies across four skills to the same degree so that they can benefit from these strategies equally without a tendency toward specific skills and leaving out others. That being said, the present study addressed only the use of social strategies across four language skills within the Iranian context. Future studies are invited to take one step further and investigate the use of other strategies, such as cognitive and metacognitive across four skills in other contexts using triangulation of data such as interviews and journals to dilute the limitations of this study such as Iranian context boundedness and using only questionnaires to collect the data adding a more comprehensive view to the existing literature.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors have conducted the study, collected data, analyzed and interpreted the data, and written up the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Appendix 1

Classification of Language Learning Strategies, adopted from Shi, (2017)

Scholar	Classification					
Stern (1975	Planning strategy	Active strategy	Empathic strategy	Formal strategy	Experimental strategy	
	Semantic strategy	Practice strategy	Communication strategy	Internalization strategy		
Naiman et al (1978)	Active task approach	Realization of language as a system	Realization of language as a means of communication	Management of affective demands	Self-monitoring	
Rubin (1987)	Direct strategies		Indirect strategies			
	Learning strategies		Communication strategies	Social strategies		
	Cognitive strategies	Metacognitive strategies				
O'Malley & Chamot (1990)	Cognitive strategies		Metacognitive strategies	Social strategies		
Oxford (1990)	Direct strategies			Indirect strategies		
	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Wenden (1991)	Cognitive strategies			Self-management strategies		

Appendix 2

Please click the link below to access the questionnaire. https://repository.lppm.unila.ac.id/8847/2/isi%20buku.pdf