

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF THE HIGH ACHIEVERS OF TOEFL JUNIOR TEST IN AN INDONESIAN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: This study investigates the language learning strategies (LLSs) employed by high-achieving students in the TOEFL Junior Test within the context of an Indonesia Islamic boarding school. Motivated by Indonesia's lower rankings in literacy, particularly in English, as highlighted by the 2022 PISA results, this study aims to address the gap in understanding how students in this specialized educational setting approach LLSs. This study focuses on six high-achieving female ninth-grade students from SMP Al Izzah Islamic Boarding School Batu, identified as high achievers based on their superior TOEFL Junior Test scores and exceptional performance on the school's English final test. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) 7.0, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal that high achievers predominantly employ metacognitive strategies, such as goal setting and self-monitoring, as well as compensation strategies to overcome language barriers. Cognitive strategies, particularly engaging with English media, play a significant role in their language acquisition, while memory strategies are moderately used for vocabulary retention. This research highlights the importance of self-discipline, time management, and a supportive learning environment with its accessible teachers and nurturing community, significantly enhances continuous learning and overall students' well-being. The study recommends for future research to expand the sample size to other Islamic boarding schools from various regions with more samples and explore the long-term impact of these strategies on academic and professional achievements.

Keywords: *Language learning strategies; high achievers; TOEFL Junior test; Islamic boarding school.*

INTRODUCTION

As global demand for English proficiency continues to rise, understanding the strategies utilized by high achievers in English language learning becomes increasingly important. English has solidified its role as the lingua franca in fields like business, science, and education, making mastery of the language essential for accessing higher education and global career opportunities (Chang, 2022). Despite its significance, a notable disparity exists in English language learning outcomes, particularly between low achievers and high achievers (Cheng et al., 2019). This contrast prompts a critical question: what strategies do

high achievers employ that set them apart in their language learning journey?

Language learning strategies (LLSs) have been a focal point to educational research since the 1970s for their role in improving language teaching and learning (Zhang et al., 2019). These strategies help learners regulate their learning and are closely linked to linguistic achievements (Cong-Lem, 2019). Rubin (1975) initially proposed that successful language learners might use unique strategies that others could emulate. These strategies serve as a blueprint for learners, guiding them through the complexities of language acquisition (Rahman, 2020). Wood

(2020) reinforces this view by describing LLSs as deliberate actions taken by learners to optimize their language learning experience. Eng et al. (2022) further support this, showing that effective use of LLSs correlates with greater success in language learning.

The body of literature on LLSs underscores the need for ongoing research to fully understand the factors that contribute to successful language learning. Demographic variables—such as age, gender, language proficiency, educational level, motivation, and grade level—have been found to influence how students use LLSs (Nasihah & Cahyono, 2017; Saefurrohman, 2021). In recent years, scholarly interest in LLSs has expanded across diverse educational settings, including primary education (Bayuonng et al., 2019; Ji et al., 2021; Jirin, 2023), high school education (Choong & Tan, 2023; John et al., 2021; Kamiri et al., 2022), and higher education (Agustin, 2021; Dahmash, 2023; Hapsari, 2019; Rianto, 2020; Sukying, 2021). Studies also explore the relationship between LLSs and other variables such as motivation (Dwinalida & Setiaji, 2020; Srisopha, 2022), personal traits (Eisenberg & Lee, 2020), learning styles (Atika, 2020; Salam et al., 2020), gender differences (Kheder & Rouabhia, 2023; Sumarni & Rachmawaty, 2019), and age differences (Nhem, 2019).

Despite the wealth of research on LLSs, there remains a gap in the investigation of their use in specialized educational settings like Islamic boarding schools. These institutions, known as *pesantren*, offer a unique educational landscape where students live in dormitories and engage in a curriculum that integrates religious and academic subjects (Hafidzoh & Widiyanto, 2022; Irman et al., 2023; Shiddiq et al., 2024). This communal living and holistic education environment may shape the ways in which students adopt and implement LLSs differently from those in mainstream educational settings. Yet, little empirical research has been conducted to examine LLSs in such culturally specific settings, leaving a gap that this study seeks to address.

In the context of an Islamic boarding school, the study of high achievers—particularly those who excel in rigorous standardized tests like the TOEFL Junior test—offers a unique opportunity to explore how these learners employ LLSs. Managed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the TOEFL Junior test is a globally recognized assessment of English proficiency (Golubovich et al., 2018). These assessments offer a consistent method for evaluating English

language ability and enjoy international recognition (Madya et al., 2020).

This issue is particularly relevant in the Indonesian context, where the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results indicate lower levels of Indonesian students' proficiency in reading, mathematics, and science, including English proficiency compared to global standards, with the 2022 PISA report showing a decline in average scores despite a slight improvement in ranking (Nugroho, 2024). These findings indicate that while progress has been made, substantial improvement is needed in literacy and overall academic performance (Kartini, 2024).

This gap in research is further emphasized by policy changes in Indonesia's education system. In 2021, the Ministry of Education and Culture eliminated the national exam for primary and high schools, leading individual schools to adopt their own standards for measuring student proficiency. In response, SMP Al Izzah Islamic Boarding School implemented the TOEFL Junior test as a measure of English proficiency for its final-year students. This decision reflects the school's commitment to maintaining high academic standards while providing its students with an internationally recognized benchmark for language proficiency. Karimullah and Mukminatien (2022) highlight the importance of the TOEFL exam, emphasizing its role as a prerequisite for university admission, career advancement, and certification for teachers and lecturers in Indonesia.

The TOEFL Junior test is mapped to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), providing scores that indicate students' proficiency levels. The highest scores correspond to CEFR Level B2, which aligns with the standards set by the Indonesian Ministry of Education's national curriculum (Decree No. 032/H/Kr/2024). This alignment ensures that Indonesian students are prepared to meet international benchmarks for English proficiency, equipping them with the skills needed for academic and professional success.

By examining the LLSs used by high achievers in an Islamic boarding school setting, this study aims to address gaps in existing research and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how a specialized educational environment influences language learning. Therefore, the primary objectives of this study are to analyze the specific LLSs employed by high achievers of the TOEFL Junior test in an Islamic boarding school

and to identify the factors contributing to their success. The research questions guiding this study are as follows: (1) What specific language learning strategies are employed by high achievers of the TOEFL Junior test in an Islamic boarding school? (2) What factors contribute to their success of high achievers of TOEFL Junior test in an Islamic boarding school?

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study. The method is selected for its ability to conduct an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon (here, high achievement in TOEFL Junior) within its real-world context (the Islamic boarding school). The case study method, as outlined by Yin (2018), allows for a deep exploration of the phenomenon within its real-world context, providing insights into the strategies and contextual factors that influence high performance. The instruments utilized for data collection are an adapted version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) 7.0 (Oxford, 1990), semi-Structured interviews, and documents analysis.

This research was conducted at SMP Al Izzah Islamic Boarding School Batu, an educational institution exclusively for female students. The students reside on campus, engaging in both dormitory and school-based activities. Following the removal of the national exam in 2021, the school established its own graduation criteria, which includes the TOEFL Junior test to assess English proficiency. This initiative ensures that students are well-equipped to face global challenges.

The researchers targeted a group of 98 ninth-grade female students, all of whom had previously taken the TOEFL Junior Test during the 2023-2024 school year. To ensure the selection of high achievers, rigorous criteria were applied, including: (a) achieving a "Superior (865–900)" or "Accomplished (785–860)" score level on the TOEFL Junior Test; (b) attaining at least a B2 level in two out of three sections of the TOEFL Junior Test; and (c) scoring above 92 on the English final test administered by the school where a score of 80 is the passing grade, and score above 92 earns an A. After a thorough screening process, eight students met all the criteria and were chosen as research participants. However, only six students were willing to participate in the interviews. Additionally, one English teacher was interviewed to provide

insights into the students' learning processes and classroom environment.

The decision to focus solely on female students stems from the nature of the school, which is exclusively for female students. This should be considered when interpreting the findings, as they reflect the experiences of female students within this specific educational setting. The small sample size of six students and one teacher is acknowledged as a limitation, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Nevertheless, the study aims to offer in-depth insights into the language learning strategies of high-achieving students within this context.

This study employs Yin's (2018) explanation-building technique to integrate quantitative and qualitative findings, forming a coherent narrative on the implementation of LLSs among high-achieving students. Explanation building iteratively links data with theoretical concepts to uncover underlying processes. The initial proposition was that high achievers in the Islamic boarding school use specific LLSs contributing to their success on the TOEFL Junior Test. Quantitative data from the SILL questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS, with mean scores categorized based on Oxford's (1990) framework of high, medium, or low strategy use. Following this, thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process, revealing key themes about the students' learning strategies. This dual approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the strategies employed by the students.

Before data collection, the researchers verified the validity and reliability of the instruments to ensure accurate and consistent results since neglecting validity and reliability can undermine the credibility of the study and eventually lead to misleading outcomes (Setyowati et al., 2023). This process includes consulting an expert for content validity, conducting pilot tests to identify and fix ambiguities, construct validity through Pearson Product-Moment and using Cronbach's alpha to check internal consistency. Validity tests confirmed that all items exceeded the critical value for Pearson's correlation coefficient, indicating strong construct validity. Reliability scores ranged from 0.70 to 0.90, demonstrating high reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall strategy use

Table 1 highlights the overall strategy use by high-achieving students, revealing a broad range

of employed strategies. Metacognitive strategies are the most prominent, enabling students to plan, monitor, and adjust their learning, contributing significantly to their success. Compensation strategies are also widely used, showcasing their ability to overcome language gaps and communicate effectively. Cognitive strategies, such as repetition and visualization, play a crucial role in active learning and information retention,

while memory strategies are moderately employed for storing and retrieving information. The moderate use of affective strategies indicates that these students occasionally manage their emotions. Social strategies are the least utilized, suggesting a preference for self-directed learning, possibly influenced by the Islamic boarding school environment, which fosters independence as students live away from their parents.

Table 1. Overall strategy use by high achievers

Strategies	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Memory Strategies	8	3.28	.583	Medium
Cognitive Strategies	8	3.51	.461	High
Compensation Strategies	8	3.90	.387	High
Metacognitive Strategies	8	3.95	.357	High
Affective Strategies	8	2.92	.471	Medium
Social Strategies	8	2.69	.360	Medium

Goal setting

In exploring the narratives of participants striving for TOEFL Junior success, goal setting emerges as a critical factor. Setting specific, measurable, and challenging targets influences their study habits, motivation, and overall attitude toward

learning English. Table 2 highlights the metacognitive strategies used by high-achieving students in their English language learning journey. Goal-setting is a top-rated strategy in metacognitive strategies, providing direction and motivation for achieving linguistic milestones.

Table 2. Metacognitive strategies use by high achievers

No	Strategies	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
37	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	8	4.25	.463	High

Semi-structured interviews with students revealed that, despite their diverse backgrounds and ambitions, a common theme is their strong commitment to achieving their goals. Their approach is marked by a deliberate and strategic mindset in preparing for this critical academic milestone. AHS, for instance, set a specific target of 845, indicating a focused objective to achieve a defined level of proficiency. Likewise, FAN aspires to surpass a competitive threshold with a goal just over 850. FAR and HNA, on the other hand, demonstrate high levels of ambition by targeting a perfect score of 900. The following excerpts are taken from the semi-interviews with these participants.

My TOEFL target was 845. (AHS)

My target was more than 850. (FAN)

I targeted 900. (FAR)

Actually, my goal setting is 900. I want a perfect score. (HNA)

The English teacher's (SWB) perspective provides essential context to the students' approach to goal setting for the TOEFL Junior test. According to SWB, students are encouraged to establish goal settings for all prerequisite exams, including the TOEFL Junior test. This

practice is a deliberate strategy aimed at fostering a mindset of realistic and achievable goal setting among students. SWB highlights the importance of writing down these goals, which serves as a tangible reminder of their objectives and a motivational tool to keep them focused and committed. By advising students to set realistic and achievable goals, the teacher ensures that students are not only ambitious but also practical about their capabilities and the steps needed to reach their targets.

Yes, we usually motivate students to create goal settings for all student prerequisite exams, including the TOEFL Junior test. We advise students to write down their goal settings in a realistic and achievable. For TOEFL Junior, the school's target for all students is to get a minimum score of 750. (SWB)

Research supports the importance of goal setting in enhancing academic performance. Shih and Reynolds (2018) found that integrating goal setting with reading strategy instruction effectively boosts reading proficiency and learner motivation, promoting greater autonomy and self-efficacy. Similarly, Bai and Wang (2020) demonstrated that the level of goal setting and

planning strategies employed by learners significantly affects the relationship between goal setting and English language learning achievements. These findings underline how clear academic goals and strategic planning can significantly impact students' success and motivation in their language learning endeavors.

Self-Evaluation and Progress Monitoring

Table 3 showcases other metacognitive strategies utilized by high achievers in their pursuit of

English language proficiency. Self-evaluation and progress monitoring are key strategies employed by high achievers. These students emphasize the importance of reviewing their performance, identifying areas for improvement, and making targeted efforts to enhance their language skills. This reflective practice not only helps them understand their weaknesses but also enables them to track their progress over time, creating a more personalized learning experience.

Table 3. *Metacognitive strategies use by high achievers*

No	Strategies	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
31	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	8	3.87	.354	High
38	I think about my progress in learning English.	8	4.38	.518	High

A study by Zhang (2024) notes that continuous progress monitoring and real-time adaptation of learning strategies empower learners to expand their vocabulary and boost overall language proficiency. Similarly, Jamrus and Razali (2019) emphasize that self-assessment in English language learning can foster motivation, promote critical thinking and reflective practices, scaffold knowledge across different language skills, and develop a sense of autonomy. Omare (2020) further suggests that integrating self-evaluation strategies can significantly enhance academic performance in English language learning.

Semi-structured interviews with students reinforce the practice of self-evaluation and progress monitoring. HNA illustrated the significance of this practice through her experience with TOEFL try-outs.

I did the evaluation after I finished. For example, in my first try out, oh no, in the second try out, my score, if I'm not mistaken, was 880 or 890. Anyway, at that time my second try out score was lower than my first try out score. Then I evaluated it, on the same day. (HNA)

This excerpt highlights HNA's immediate reflection on her scores to understand her performance. By evaluating her performance soon after the test, she could identify areas of weakness and implement strategies for improvement before the next try-out, emphasizing the importance of timely and focused self-evaluation. Similarly, FAR shared a methodical approach to self-evaluation by emphasizing the importance of revisiting mistakes to avoid similar errors in future assessments. FAR's strategy involves a

detailed review of errors, repeated practice, and a concentrated effort on misunderstood sections

From there I learned what was wrong, I repeated it again, I understood it again, more focused on the wrong part. (FAR)

PQA added another dimension to this theme by describing their process of monitoring learning progress over an extended period. PQA's approach involves tracking changes and developments in their learning journey, which provides a comprehensive overview of their progress. This long-term monitoring helps PQA to identify trends, recognize growth, and stay focused on their learning objectives.

Sometimes I monitor my learning progress. I see from the previous one to the current one. (PQA)

The English teacher, SWB, provided valuable insight into the structured approach used to encourage self-evaluation and progress monitoring among students.

Every time there is a quiz or try out, we announce the score to students. From there, they can monitor and evaluate their learning progress and compare it with their goal setting. Our hope is that every time they take a quiz and try out, their scores will reach or even exceed their goal setting targets. (SWB)

The excerpt underscores the role of transparent and consistent feedback in learning. By promptly announcing scores, students get immediate data to assess their progress, aligning with their self-

evaluation strategies. Comparing scores with personal targets helps them stay on track to meet their objectives and make adjustments if needed. This process encourages students to continuously strive for achieving their goals. SWB's approach also fosters a culture of continuous improvement. The hope that students' scores will reach or exceed their targets every time they take a quiz or try-out. This expectation of progress and improvement reinforces the idea that learning is an ongoing process, encouraging students to regularly reflect on their performance and make necessary adjustments. The calm and serene environment of the Islamic boarding school, away from the hustle and bustle, enhances the practice of self-evaluation and reflection.

Adaptability and Creative Problem-Solving

Table 4 presents compensation strategies employed by high achievers. One of the most

widely used strategies, with an impressive mean score of 4.50, involves making educated guesses to comprehend unfamiliar English words. This method allows them to infer meanings based on contextual clues, which is crucial for expanding their vocabulary and maintaining the flow of conversation without being hindered by every unfamiliar word. In addition to making guesses, high achievers employ gestures when they struggle to recall a specific word during a conversation. This non-verbal communication technique helps bridge gaps in their vocabulary which reflects their resourcefulness and their ability to keep conversations flowing smoothly without interruption. It showcases their practical problem-solving skills and their commitment to maintaining effective communication in real-time situations.

Table 4. *Compensation strategies use by high achievers*

No	Strategies	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
24	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	8	4.50	.535	High
25	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures	8	3.75	.707	High

Based on the interviews, participants provided insightful strategies to navigate language challenges during English language learning, supported by their own experiences. FAR exemplified a practical adaptation strategy by using gestures to convey meaning when encountering unfamiliar English words.

If I don't know, for example, the English word is cat. So, I demonstrate what a cat looks like. (FAR)

Furthermore, PQA's reliance on gestures as a communication tool when precise English words elude her further underscores the diversity of language learning strategies. This adaptive strategy not only aids in comprehension but also enhances communicative clarity, demonstrating an effective approach to overcoming linguistic barriers. A study by Seo (2021) found that gestures can facilitate mutual understanding in conversation tutoring sessions, particularly during word search sequences initiated by ESL learners. Additionally, Radley et al. (2021) demonstrated that incorporating gestures in second language acquisition can alleviate the cognitive load associated with learning a new language. By reducing the mental effort required to process and produce language, gestures help create a more

effective and less stressful learning environment. This evidence collectively suggests that gestures are a valuable tool in language learning, aiding both in immediate communication and long-term language acquisition.

Sometimes I make gestures if I don't know the appropriate English word. (PQA)

In the structured environment of boarding school, students show creativity under strict rules. An amusing yet insightful example comes from SWB, who shared how students, prohibited from bringing cooking utensils, ingeniously use an iron to heat noodles instead of a stove. This anecdote not only highlights the students' ability to adapt to constraints but also underscores their resourcefulness in finding unconventional solutions to everyday challenges. Just as they creatively adapt to the restrictions on cooking, students like FAR and PQA employ innovative methods to overcome language barriers. The students' ability to creatively adapt to various situations, both in daily life and in their studies, highlights their resilience and ingenuity.

In the boarding school environment, there are several policies and rules that regulate what students can and cannot do. With the limitations

that exist in boarding schools, they tend to be creative in innovative. For example, they are not allowed to bring cooking utensils because the food has been provided by the boarding school so they can focus on studying. Well, here's something funny and interesting. When they want to cook noodles, they use an iron as a heater, not a stove. (SWB)

The role of authentic media

The integration of data from the SILL questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with students, and insights from the English teacher provides a comprehensive understanding of the

cognitive strategies utilized by the high achievers, particularly focusing on their engagement with watching English-language TV shows and movies. Table 5 presents the findings of cognitive strategies used by high achievers, based on SILL questionnaire. Their most significant engagement is with watching English-language TV shows and movies. This strategy reflects their preference for exposure to the language in authentic contexts, which aids in improving listening skills and provides them with real-world examples of pronunciation, intonation, and cultural context.

Table 5. *Cognitive strategies use by high achievers*

No	Strategies	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
15	I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English.	8	4.50	.535	High

Interviews reveal that early exposure to English movies was pivotal in shaping the learners' linguistic development. For instance, NAM's recount of how movies sparked her interest and sustained her motivation highlights the intrinsic value of this strategy. Movies provide learners with contextualized language use that textbooks alone cannot offer, thereby enriching vocabulary and honing listening and comprehension skills. This finding underscores the importance of integrating authentic language contexts into language learning. Mahmoudi and Tasnimi (2023) demonstrated that authentic audio and video materials positively influence the speaking fluency. Their study underscores the benefits of engaging with genuine language inputs, highlighting the effectiveness of audiovisual materials in improving language proficiency.

I usually watch English movies, and then I get excited to learn English again. (NAM)

Moreover, a participant noted that regular exposure to English movies from a young age played a pivotal role in their language development. HNA attributed her early mastery of English to consistent viewing of animations and English animated films on television. This exposure not only enriched her vocabulary but also cultivated her listening and comprehension skills, as she absorbed language nuances and expressions in a natural, context-rich environment.

I was able to master English from a young age because I was taught to watch it more often,

films like animations on TV, more often English animated films, I think. (HNA)

To support this educational approach, the school implements rules regarding the use of films for learning purposes. This approach ensures that films used in educational settings not only enhance language skills but also align with appropriate content standards, reinforcing the educational value of these audiovisual resources. By selecting films with educational elements and avoiding those with inappropriate content, teachers can create a safe and constructive learning environment. The focus on pronunciation helps students improve their listening skills and pronunciation accuracy, while summarizing film content encourages comprehension and critical thinking.

In the school, there are rules regarding showing films for learning. Teachers must be selective in choosing films that contain educational elements and do not contain scenes of violence or adult content. Usually, I ask my students to pay attention to pronunciation and I ask them to make a summary of the film contents." (SWB)

The data highlights the educational value of movies in language learning. The SILL questionnaire's finding that watching English-language content is a highly engaged strategy is echoed in the students' testimonials and the teacher's practices. The integration of movies into educational settings, with a focus on pronunciation and comprehension, provides a practical application of language skills. The teacher's emphasis on selecting appropriate films and incorporating activities that promote

pronunciation and summarization reflects a holistic approach to language education.

Self-discipline and time management

Achieving success in TOEFL Junior test requires a combination of seriousness, effective time management, and disciplined effort, as highlighted by NAM and AHS. According to NAM, the "seriousness factor" plays a crucial role in achieving optimal results. She believes that when students are serious about their studies, they are more likely to put in the necessary effort, which leads to the best outcomes.

Maybe, the seriousness factor. If you are serious, you should be able to make an effort and get the best results. (NAM)

Navigating the demanding schedules of Islamic boarding schools requires exceptional time management and a strong sense of intention. NAM emphasizes the significance of time management in their TOEFL Junior preparation. NAM acknowledges that despite a busy schedule, managing time effectively and having a clear intention to study English are pivotal. This perspective aligns with the idea that effective time allocation, coupled with a focused intent, enhances one's ability to meet and exceed learning targets.

Actually, there isn't much free time, but if we are good at managing our time and have the intention, it's possible. (NAM)

In line with this, Adila (2024) highlights a strong link between learning discipline and academic success, emphasizing that fostering discipline early on cultivates self-awareness and responsibility in students, which in turn enhances their academic performance. Similarly, Ramadhana (2023) suggests that creating a supportive environment, encouraging self-reflection, setting achievable goals, and offering guidance on time management can help reduce the risk of burnout. Together, these elements form a comprehensive approach to academic success.

The impact of boarding school environment

The findings from the excerpts highlight the distinctive impact of the boarding school environment on students' educational experiences. Unlike traditional schools where teachers typically leave after their scheduled hours, the boarding school maintains a continuous presence

of educators throughout the day and into the evening. This extended availability of teachers, referred to as "*murobbiyah*" in the context provided by FAR, signifies a commitment to ongoing educational support that transcends conventional school schedules.

It can be like this, if in other schools, the teachers will go home after work hours. But, in boarding school, we have teachers from morning to night. The *murobbiyah* (teachers in boarding school) can also be asked. (FAR)

Furthermore, NAM's perspective provides specific examples of the benefits derived from this extended teacher availability. She emphasizes the supportive nature of this environment, where students can learn together and seek assistance from both teachers and friends whenever needed. Beyond academic support, the excerpt also sheds light on the boarding school's role in nurturing students' well-being. She mentions how the variety of activities offered in the boarding school helps alleviate stress and provides avenues for students to unwind and recharge.

It's actually really good. I mean, there are teachers who focus on us to learn TOEFL, and we can also learn together with our friends if there is something we don't understand or anything like that. It's really supportive. If for example we are stressed, there are a lot of activities in the boarding school, we are definitely encouraged by our friends, the teachers too. (NAM)

Transitioning to HNA's perspective, her reflection offers insight into the positive outcomes derived from perceived limitations in resources within the boarding school context. She sees this as an advantage rather than a limitation. The challenge posed by limited resources thus becomes a catalyst for academic resilience and deeper learning engagement, ultimately contributing to students' overall academic success and self-directed learning skills.

The positive influence is that for me, because the resources are more limited, it helps me to recall lessons more easily. I have to be able to understand more deeply. (HNA)

CONCLUSION

The quantitative findings of this study reveal that high achievers of TOEFL Junior test at the Islamic boarding school predominantly use

metacognitive, compensation, and cognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategies, involving planning, monitoring, and evaluating, are the most frequently utilized, highlighting the students' active engagement in their learning process. Compensation strategies are also common, as students use creative methods like guessing meanings and gestures to manage language gaps. Cognitive strategies, including watching English media, are significant for real-world exposure and active practice. In addition, interviews show that goal setting, self-evaluation, progress monitoring, adaptability, self-discipline, time management, and the supportive boarding school environment are crucial for success. Students set specific challenging targets, frequently evaluate their performance to identify and improve weaknesses. Adaptability and creative problem-solving help overcome language barriers, while self-discipline and time management are essential due to their busy schedules. The boarding school's extended teacher availability and supportive community contribute significantly to their learning and well-being.

The implications of this study extend beyond individual academic success, offering valuable insights into the broader educational landscape. By examining the strategies of high achievers, this research provides a foundation for enhancing English language education, not only within the Islamic boarding school but also in the wider Indonesian context. Integrating LLSs into the curriculum could improve overall student performance and encourage others to adopt successful techniques. Aligning LLSs with PISA competencies may further enhance students' ability to apply language skills in real-world contexts, potentially improving Indonesia's performance in PISA assessments, especially in reading literacy.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the sample size is relatively small and limited to a single Islamic boarding school, which may not provide a comprehensive representation of all high achievers across different Islamic boarding schools. Secondly, the reliance on self-reported information may introduce biases such as social desirability or recall bias. Additionally, the focus on a specific educational setting might limit the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Future research should consider expanding the sample size, including male students and multiple Islamic boarding schools from various regions to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Further studies could explore the long-term

impacts of these learning strategies on students' academic and professional achievements beyond the TOEFL Junior Test.

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