
**PREFERENCE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES (LLS) OF
THE STUDENTS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MUHAMMADIYAH
JEMBER**

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims at investigating the patterns of language learning strategy use employed by the sixth semester students of English language education program at the University of Muhammadiyah Jember. To achieve this objective, Oxford's Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) (1990) along with a background questionnaire (a modified version of Oxford's background questionnaire) were administered to the participants. The findings indicate that the research participants use language learning strategies at a high rate (more than 60%), but with differences in type and frequency of the individual learning strategies. The students reported a high frequent use of metacognitive and cognitive strategies. Other types of language learning strategies are also used by the students, although the frequency is lower than the previous two strategies. Based on the findings of the present study, some pedagogical implication were suggested to encourage students to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses in skills and content courses and self-regulate learning so as to make progress with teachers' assistance.

Keywords: *Language learning strategies (LLS), Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL)*

INTRODUCTION

In learning English, there are many factors that must be considered so that the learning objectives can be achieved, among others; effectiveness of learning methods, completeness of learning tools, learning media, teacher competencies, classroom management, communication patterns, and several factors related to the implementation of the teaching and learning process. Related to the effectiveness of the learning method, it is necessary to know that each student has a different learning strategy. Therefore, there is a need for an analysis of the preferences of the learning strategies of English Language which is owned by each student so that later the lecturer can choose the right learning method for the students.

Over the years, building specific instructions based on student needs has been the main focus of learning educators and designers (Summerville, 1999; Raven et.al., 1993). Basically,

this comes from a very simple logic, logic based on the fact that each individual must be different in every aspect of their profile as a student. There are many studies and theories about differences in individual learning. Felder and Brent (2005) specifically show three aspects of student diversity; learning styles, learning approaches and learning orientations, and intellectual development.

Learning styles have been associated with various student differences. Some students prefer to study in a quiet environment while others can fully digest the material with headphones in their ears. Some students like to present information visually and others rely more on verbal explanations. However, a learning style can never be superior to another, nor is it preferred over other styles. Simply put, they are only different, with different weaknesses and strengths.

Entwistle (1988) Expresses the view that learning approaches can be classified into three ways; a surface approach, where students tend to only copy information with little or no effort to understand material (reproductive orientation), an in-depth approach, where students investigate, question and explore material (meaning orientation), and strategic approaches, which effectively apply two previous approaches to get the highest score.

In intellectual development, students are considered to have different levels of progress, skills and knowledge. Teachers, in this case, must systematically construct instructions that provide opportunities for students to reach their highest level of proficiency and knowledge. Ideally, the teacher needs to consider every aspect of their student profile when designing instructions. On a logical basis, there is no compelling reason to deny that student differences lead to different needs and, accordingly, require a variety of different treatments.

People learn English in different situations. Some may learn English formally and others can learn it informally. Students can also study it in English-speaking countries such as Australia, the United States, Canada or England. As a result, students may get a lot of language exposure because English is used in every aspect of people's lives: education, daily conversation, trade, business, law, politics, etc. Most English language learners learn this language in non-English countries.

In countries such as Malaysia, India, Mexico, Singapore and so on, people use English as a second language. Some schools (or certain levels in some schools) use English as a language of instruction. In some countries, such as Nigeria, people from various ethnic groups can use English to communicate with each other. Whereas in some countries such as Indonesia, Vietnam and China, English is considered a foreign language; Therefore, it is common to consider the context of learning English in these countries as EFL (English as a

Foreign Language). People do not use it as a lingua franca or means of communication in some formal situations such as educational activities, activities and government law. In studies of learning English, ESL and EFL are considered to have the same context, because, to some extent, they share similar situations. In Indonesia English has become a compulsory subject taught in middle and high school in Indonesia. English is considered as one of the important foreign languages that Indonesian people must obtain for many reasons, such as for education and economic development.

Instructions for English as a foreign language can occur in any country, whether it is an English speaking countries or not. EFL students study English for various purposes: passing exams, career development, pursuing their education, etc. In most countries, English is a foreigner. Language is part of the education curriculum, especially in public schools. In Indonesia, English is a compulsory subject in high school and junior high school. At the lower level, as in elementary school and in kindergarten, English is not a compulsory subject but can also be taught to students as subjects of local content.

Because English in Indonesia is taught as a foreign language and is learned primarily in classrooms, the role of teachers is very important because they are the main source and facilitator of this language knowledge and skills. An English teacher is expected to play two roles at the same time: (i) teaching English and (ii) making the learning process as attractive as possible to involve students in learning (Kassing, 2011). In the EFL context, students' exposure to English is limited, and classrooms are usually the only place they have the opportunity to use English. Thus, the instruction and explanation of the teacher may be the only language exposure during which students learn to use language for communication (Suryati, 2013).

SILL is the most widely used data collection instrument in investigating second / foreign language learning in several countries. Green and Oxford (1995) note that in 1995, SILL was used as the main instrument in more than forty studies, including twelve dissertations and theses. This includes almost 8,000 students worldwide. Relying on its extensive use and the fact that SILL includes a large number of language learning strategies, the authors decided to use it as a research tool in this study to assess the general use of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) for semester six students and to increase their awareness of the existence and use of strategies in learning a language.

SILL Oxford consists of four parts: questionnaire, answer sheet, result profile sheet, and strategy classification description sheet. SILL was created to be able to identify Language learning strategies in six strategy groups, which are categorized according to the following

original Oxford identification; Memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies.

According to Sewell (2003) the interest in language learning strategies stems from the desire to understand the characteristics of good language learners. The concept emphasizes the active role of students in learning languages. The use of appropriate language learning strategies certainly plays an important role in success in mastering the language.

Based on the arguments stated above, the writer feels that there needs to be an in-depth analysis related to the preference of learning strategies in English in the environment where the writer serves. It is expected that the results of this study in the form of information about student learning strategies can be a basic consideration in determining learning methods that support the potential of every student in the English Language Education Program both at Muhammadiyah Jember University and also in other universities.

The research problems formulated in this study are as follows:

- a. What is the general pattern of language learning strategies used by the sixth semester students in the English language study program FKIP Muhammadiyah Jember University?
- b. What is the frequency of using language learning strategies of the sixth semester students in the English language study program FKIP Muhammadiyah Jember University?

Related to the formulation of the research problem above, this study aims to:

- a. Clearly describes the general pattern of language learning strategies used by the sixth semester students in the English language education program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education program, University of Muhammadiyah Jember.
- b. Reveal the frequency of language learning strategies used by the students of the sixth semester of the English language education program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education program, University of Muhammadiyah Jember.

METHOD

Research Design

This research is included in a type of case study research that aims to uncover a phenomenon that exists in a particular unit or group (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, Razavieh, 2010:454). The phenomenon associated with this research are (1) Language Learning Strategies (LLS), and (2) the frequency of strategies used by students when learning English.

To get answers to the two phenomena above, the research method applied is a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Quantitative research methods related to the use of numbers in analyzing a phenomenon, while qualitative methods are more related to the description through words to explain the nature of a phenomenon (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998, 2003).

Broadly speaking, the steps taken in this study are as follows:

1. Determine the research subject
2. Distribute SILL questionnaires to the research subjects
3. Analyze the results of the SILL questionnaire
4. Make conclusions from the results of the study

Research Context

This research involves the students of sixth semester from the English language education program, University of Muhammadiyah Jember. There are 14 students in total and most of them are in the age of 20-21 years old. They have been studying English since they were in Junior High School.

Therefore, these students have gone through a lengthy process in the process of learning English and should have mastered enough strategies to deal with English materials. From here, this research provides an overview related to their use of language learning strategies when learning English.

Data Collecting Method

The data obtained from this study is in the form of answers to the questions in SILL which will later provide answers about the use of dominant language learning strategies. In addition, additional data will also be obtained about the background of the study participants through the use of background questionnaires before SILL was applied. This is intended to gain a deeper understanding related to the learning habits of the study participants.

SILL Oxford consists of four parts: questionnaire, answer sheet, result profile sheet, and strategy classification description sheet. However, in this study, students were only given questionnaires and answer sheets and they were asked to answer the questionnaire and enter the results on the worksheet. Before SILL is implemented, there is a background questionnaire that must be filled in by both groups (a modified version of the Oxford Background questionnaire). The background questionnaire aims to identify the age of the informant, gender, years of learning English, expected skills (self-assessed), and the reason they chose English as their department. Background investigation of participants can provide better information in understanding their learning behavior.

Data Analysis

After the data was obtained from The background questionnaire and SILL questionnaire distribution on the subject of the study, the data was then processed and analyzed to answer the two questions raised in this study. The SILL five level likert scale consists of the following responses:

1. Never true of me,
2. Usually not true of me,
3. Somewhat true of me,
4. Usually true of me, and
5. Always true of me.

However, the options seems to be problematic and time consuming for the subjects of this research. Therefore, a modification of responses is made and the responses will be simplified into three responses, those are:

1. Often (implies that the participant recognizes the use of the strategy and he/she uses it several times)
2. Sometimes (indicates that the participant recognizes the use of the strategy, and he/she uses it on few occasions)
3. Never (implies that the participant does not use the strategy at all)

To analyze the results of this research, descriptive statistics is applied. The statistical analysis consisted mainly of the frequency of use in terms of percentages of subjects' responses to each individual item in the survey. Those percentages of responses were then graphically displayed to allow for a holistic view of the results and were used to draw conclusions about the different points raised in the study. The frequency of LLS groups used by students will then be analyzed and explained descriptively.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Results of Background Questionnaire

- a. Age, Gender, and years of study of English

The first three questions (1, 2 and 3) of the background questionnaire was meant to gain students' personal information such as age, gender and length of time spent in studying English. The responses indicate that the students comprises thirteen females and three males aged between nineteen and twenty. All the subjects belonging to this group studied English for six years before attending university.

b. Students' perceived English Proficiency

In Question 4, students were asked to self-rate their English proficiency compared with other students on a 4 point scale: Excellent, Good, Fair, and Poor. Nevertheless, this self-rating is a perception that students have about their proficiency based on their own perspective. Three proficiency levels out of four were selected by participants, namely, Good, Fair, and Poor. Only four students (i.e. 25%) seem to have confidence in their language proficiency they rated their proficiency level as Good. Additionally, 68.75 % of participants (11 students) consider they have a Fair English proficiency compared to other students, and 6.25 % (1 students) rated their proficiency in English language as poor. The results suggest that only one student who are not confident about his/her English proficiency. Four students out of 16 (i.e. 25%) rated their proficiency as Good, eleven students (i.e. 68.75%) reported to have a fair proficiency in English, and only one students believed that his/her English was poor.

c. Other Studied Languages

In question 5, students were asked about the languages they studied in addition to English. The responses indicated that only two students have studied other languages besides English, one for Japanese language and one for mandarin language. In other words, more that 80% of the students never studied other languages prior to English. The result is somewhat not suprising, considering the fact that English is the most popular foreign language in Indonesia.

d. Reasons for Studying English

There are high similarity of responses given by the students for the reason of studying English. Most of the students (14 students/87.5%) reported to have vocational goals; they "need it for their future career." The other two students (12.5%) state that they studied English because they are interested to the language. Thus, the majority of students seem to have vocational goals.

The SILL Questionnaire Results

In general, the SILL's results revealed significant differences between the types of strategies and the frequency of the strategy by the students. The Sixth semester students reported a high use of LLS, their strategy use can be regarded as high as the percentage of the most often used strategies is above 60%, i.e. 66% (it was decided that a percentage above 60% describes a high strategy use). The table below describes the overall SILL's results obtained by the students, and these results will be later presented in Figure 1 to display the frequency of LLS use.

Table 1. SILL's overall results obtained by the students

Level of Frequency	Often	Sometimes	Never
Percentage	66%	16 %	18%

In relation to the the SILL's six categories, the results obtained indicate that memorizing Strategies are the least used strategies with a percentage of 36%. In addition, the results also reveals that the sixth semester students' second least used type of LLS is Type E (Affective strategies) with a percentage of 40%. Metacognitive strategies is placed in first position with 62% overall percentage and is followed by Cognitive Strategies in the second position with a percentage of 48%. The third position is occupied by social strategies with 43% percentage.

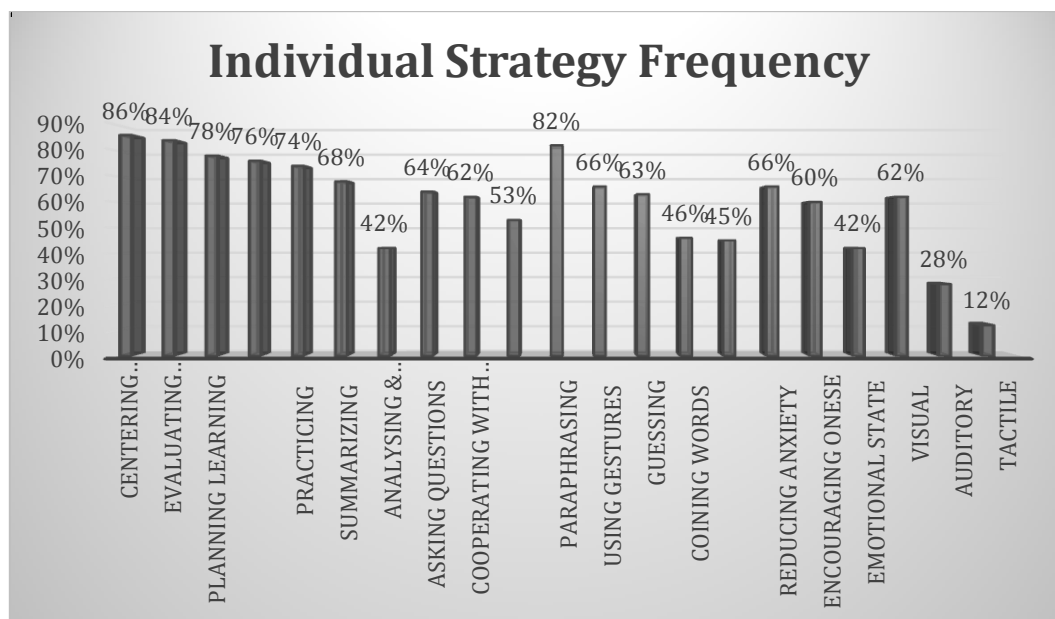
Table 2. Classification of LLS types used by students according to their frequency of use

Rank	Type of Strategy	Strategy Categories	Overall Percentage	
1	<u>Type D</u> Metacognitive Strategy	Centering Learning	86%	62%
		Evaluating learning	84%	
		Planning learning	78%	
2	<u>Type B</u> Cognitive Strategies	Skimming & Scanning	76%	48%
		Practicing	74%	
		Summarizing	68%	
		Analysing & Reasoning	42%	
3	<u>Type F</u> Social Strategies	Asking Questions	64%	43%
		Cooperating with others	62%	
		Cultural Awareness	53%	
4	<u>Type C</u> Compensation Strategies	Paraphrasing	82%	41%
		Using gestures	66%	
		Guessing	63%	
		Coining words	46%	
		Adjusting the information	45%	
5	<u>Type E</u> Affective Strategies	Reducing Anxiety	66%	40%
		Encouraging onese	60%	
		Emotional state	42%	
6	<u>Type A</u> Memory Strategies	Visual	62%	36 %
		Auditory	28%	
		Tactile	12%	

In addition to their individual learning strategies, the results indicate that the most used language learning strategies by the sixth semester students are : (1) Centering learning (86%), (2) Evaluating learning (84%), (3) Paraphrasing (82%), (4) Planning learning (78%), (5)

Skimming & Scanning (76%), (6) Practicing (74%). The complete visual description of students' preference in individual learning strategies is displayed in the following diagram.

Figure 1. Students' preference in individual language learning strategy



Discussion

The first purpose of this study focuses in assessing the students' use of language learning strategies. Therefore, we aimed at answering the following research question: Do students employ language learning strategies? Another questions derived from this research question is meant to describe the participants' overall strategy use, and their strategy use in each of the six strategy types of the SILL (i.e. memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory, social, and affective), also to identify of the participants' most and least used individual language learning strategies. Based on the results of the study, it revealed that participants did used language learning strategies, but with some variances in type and frequency. The SILL's overall results showed the sixth semester students showed a high use of language learning strategies with an overall percentage of 66%. Thus, higher level, sixth semester students made highly frequent use of a large number of language learning strategies.

The strategies typical of higher level (sixth semester) students appeared to be metacognitive self- regulation strategies that help them control and modify their cognitive processes. The findings indicated that the difference in strategy use within this group of students is significant for three strategy types: Metacognitive strategies (Type D), Cognitive strategies (Type B), and Social strategies (Type F). The aforementioned types of strategy have been employed more significantly in comparison to the other remaining strategies.

Furthermore, the overall results also showed that only 18% of the total number of sixth semester students involved in the study reported to never use LLS, 11% of them reported to employ LLS occasionally and more than 60% reported to frequently and extensively use LLSs while learning. These results will be further explained as we discuss the results obtained for each strategy type of the SILL and the different strategy categories.

The sixth semester students have shown a high use of overall LLS and great use of all the categories of the SILL. This outcome is consistent with previous studies (Rubin, 1975, Chamot, 1990, Green & Oxford, 1995, O'malley & Chamot, 1999) in that more proficient learners used more LLS than less proficient learners. The sixth semester students' high use of metacognitive strategies implies that they can "plan for effective and active learning, select proper strategies, monitor their learning process, orchestrate various strategies when performing tasks and finally they would evaluate the process and their strategic use of their language learning" (Anderson, 2000). Additionally, the students also applied high use of cognitive and compensation strategies. This result suggests that they are able to choose proper strategies while learning (metacognitive strategy), and they know how to improve their skills (cognitive strategies). Furthermore, the high use of compensation knowledge entails that they have more vocabulary that enables them to guess intelligently while reading and provide their intended meaning in the productive skills (speaking and writing).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The current research was meant to shed light on the language learning strategies used by a group of sixth semester students of the English Language Education Program at the University of Muhammadiyah Jember. The results showed that University students use LLS but with differences in type and frequency. The study also revealed that high level, sixth semester students made highly frequent use of a variety number of language learning strategies (LLS). The strategies typical of high level students appeared to be complex because they relied more on the metacognitive and cognitive strategies during their learning English. Thus, teachers need to enhance their students' metacognition through a diversity of functions like planning, controlling and monitoring. They need to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses and evaluate their daily learning to be able to progress and find a remedial solution of it through teachers' assistance and their own efforts. In addition, it is also necessary to assess and evaluate the teaching strategies used by teachers to fit the students' needs, in terms of course content, language proficiency and appropriate language learning

strategies that may lead to the development of effective metacognitive knowledge and abilities.

This research is hoped do give a positive contribution to the improvement of the EFL teaching /learning in the University of Muhammadiyah Jember. However, this study has encountered some difficulties and limitations that must be mentioned. First, the sample of 16 students is limited and can be considered as less supportive to get the big picture of language learning strategies applied by students in the university. Therefore, this small sample does not adequately represent all the students of the English language education program. Besides, the perspective of this research is limited with only one group of students in one particular semester participated in this research. Therefore, we encourage further research in the issue of language learning strategies with a vast number of participants from different semester to fill the gap left by this research. Additionally, students' learning styles as a variable that might affect strategy use had not been investigated in the present study. Thus, It is highly recommended for further research to investigate both language learning strategies and students' learning styles to gain better understanding on students effort with their English language study and on how to better facilitate their learning to bring out the best of their language competence.

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