LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES
USED BY JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

Research on language learning strategies has been carried out since the 1990s in Indonesia. These studies have covered the language learning strategies among senior high school and university students. There has been insufficient research that investigates junior high school and primary school students. The main objective of the study was to investigate the language learning strategies of junior high school students in learning English by finding out what learning strategies they employ most frequently according to the four language skills. Data were collected using survey questionnaire distributed to 34 eighth grade students. They responded to the questionnaire adapted from Language Strategy Use Inventory by Cohen, Oxford and Chi (2002). The adapted version of Language Strategy Use Questionnaire consists of 40 statements concerning the four major English language skills. They are listening, speaking, reading and writing. The responses were calculated through statistical analysis in terms of frequency, mean and standard deviation by using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 20 for Windows. The findings revealed that the eighth graders of the junior high school in Bandung were moderate users of strategies in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These students were reported to use reading strategies the most while speaking strategies were used the least. The findings of this study indicate that the students had their own learning preferences and strategies in learning English. It is recommended that research on language learning strategies should not stop from investigation and exploration in order to help the learners to be successful English language learners.

Keywords: language learning strategies, junior high school students, English as a Foreign Language

Introduction

Nowadays, English has a status as an international lingua franca, and it makes scholars and educators have prompted to find out ways or methods to develop successful language learners. Therefore, students need strategies in learning English in and out of classroom activities. Language learning strategies help students to succeed in learning and developing their communicative competency. Oxford (1990) stated that learning strategies are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning, and they are important for language learners because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for

developing communication competency. It means that learning strategies are individual; it will be different from one student to another. Thus, each student has his or her own strategy in learning.

The role of English language in the 21st century is very dominant. In this era, we are prompted to have good English language proficiency. The importance of helping students become more autonomous in their learning has become one of its most prominent themes. Furthermore, in this 21st century, there is a gradual shift of typical classroom context. Teachers are no longer the only source of knowledge. Learners are demanded to be active and self-directed. In line with the purpose of the 2013 curriculum, the teaching and learning process is expected to support students to learn by finding knowledge and information by themselves. It can be concluded that Language Learning Strategies would be important to assist students in learning how to learn.

Language Learning Strategies assist English language learners to master the materials independently, either individually or with others, where successful language learners make use of different types of learning strategies. Fedderholdt (1997) stated that language learners who are capable of using a wide variety of language learning strategies appropriately can better improve their language skills because they are better equipped.

Low proficiency in English among students in Indonesia has been a significant issue in our education system. This issue has become a long debate and a hot topic among researchers. A great number of students are unsuccessful in learning English. They do not know how exactly to learn it. Meanwhile, in the teaching and learning process, language teachers only teach the language. They do not teach the learners how to learn it. In the 21st century, there is a gradual shift in language learning process, where students should be more active, independent or autonomous in language learning. Related to learning English language, students are expected to be more active in learning English by implementing learning strategies. The use of appropriate language learning strategies will help the students to improve their English.

In spite of the increasing popularity of research on learning strategies since the mid- 1970s, the topic of learning strategies is still a new research area in any educational levels in Indonesia. In other words, LLS was not popular and rarely discussed in Indonesian literature. With reference to Indonesian context, there is the insufficiency of research on LLS employed by young learners. Majority of research to date in Indonesia has focused on secondary high school, particularly senior high school students (Mistar, 2010; Mistar & Umamah,2015) and undergraduates, particularly among English major (Lengkanawati, 1997; Djiwandono, 1998; Huda 1998; Bambang,2000; Mistar,2001, 2006; Lengkanawati, 2004; Johari, 2005; Ras 2013). As reviewed above, very few studies have been done on language learning strategies for young learners or junior high school students. Therefore, there are more possibilities to conduct a new research on language learning strategies among young EFL students. It is hoped that this research will shed new lights on the knowledge of language learning strategies. Concerning the issues above, this paper aims to investigate the

language learning strategies of the eighth grade junior high school students in Bandung in learning English.

Before the 1960s, in the field of second language learning and teaching, many researchers had focused on teaching methods or strategies without concerning the learners. Then, research interests shifted from the study of teaching method to the study of learner's characteristics and the effects on second language acquisition.

In the field of language learning, research in language learning strategies began in the 1960s. It was called Good Language Learner (GLL). It was then developed into Language Learning Strategies (LLS). Good Language Learner studies focused only on what a good language learner did and which Language Learning Strategies they chose in their language learning. Since 1970s, the focus and findings of the Language Learning Strategies have developed into a wider dimension such as factors influencing the learners.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) defined LLS as "the special thoughts or behaviors that individual use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (p. 1). This definition tells us that LLS can be either observable (behaviors) or unobservable (thoughts). LLS also help students comprehend and learn new information. Richards and Platt (1992) stated that learning strategies are "intentional behavior and thoughts used by learners during learning so as to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information" (p. 209).

According to Oxford (1990) learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more efficient and more transferable to a new situation. Strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. In addition, Embi (2000) defines LLS as the plans and/or actions that learners take to enhance their process of language learning. Three strategies are established, which are: a) learning strategies, b) communication strategies, and c) production strategies.

Method

This research employed a quantitative descriptive research with survey method. The data collected was to find out the language learning strategies used by eighth grade junior high school students in Bandung. The participants of this study were 34 eighth grade students in one public junior high school in Bandung. They were beginners in learning English.

In this study, a questionnaire was used as an instrument of data collection. Questionnaires are the most frequently used method in current studies on language learning strategies. As mentioned by Embi (2000), most surveys conducted in language learning strategies research are of behavior questionnaires and strategy inventory involving factor analysis. The instrument used in this study was the Language Strategy Use Questionnaire adapted from Language Strategy Use Inventory by Cohen, Oxford, and Chi (2002). There are 40 statements about the strategies in learning English concerning four English major skills in the questionnaire. The subjects responded to the five-scales statements ranging from 1: Never or almost never true of me, 2: Usually not true of me, 3: Somewhat true

of me, 4: Usually true of me, 5: Always or almost always true of me. Thus, the highest mean possible is 5.00, while the lowest possible score would be 1.00. A mean score of 3.00 would be the midpoint.

Statistical analysis to calculate frequencies means and standard deviations are employed to identify the most frequently used learning strategies and the least used one. In this study, the researcher used Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 20 for Windows in analyzing the data. The descriptive statistics help to present the findings of the survey question in a form that is easy to understand. This research used descriptive statistics to analyze these variables. Frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used. To find out the frequency of language learning strategies used, interpretation mean score was used.

The responses from the students were divided into three categories. They are "frequently", "sometimes", and "never" based on the frequency of strategy use. The mean score for each item was then calculated and the frequency of use for each item was determined using the frequency ratings that were adopted from Oxford (1990).

Findings and Discussion

The following section discusses the finding obtained from the study.

Table 1. Listening Strategies

No	Strategy	Mean	Frequency
1	Listen to talk show on the radio, watch TV shows or movies in English	3.1176	Moderate
2	Listening to people who are speaking in English and try to understand what they are saying.	3.2647	Moderate
3	Practice sound in the target language that are different from sound in my own language.	2.9412	Moderate
4	Pay Special attention to specific aspect of the language.	3.1765	Moderate
5	Try to predict what the other person is going to say based on what has been said so far.	2.6765	Moderate
6	Listen for key words that seem to carry the bulk of the meaning.	3.2647	Moderate
7	Try to understand what I hear without translating it word for word.	3.2647	Moderate
8	Ask speakers to repeat what they said if it wasn't clear to me.	3.6176	Moderate
9	Ask for clarification if I do not understand it the first time around.	3.6765	Moderate
10	Draw on my general background knowledge to get the main idea .	3.2353	Moderate
	Overall Mean	3.2235	Moderate

Table 1 illustrates the overall usage of listening strategies. As shown in Table 1, the two highest mean score are for strategy number 8 and 9. The mean score are 3.6765, and 3.6176. This indicates that respondents tend to ask for clarification if they do not understand it the first time around and they also tend to

ask the speakers to repeat what they said if it was not clear for them. In addition, the results show that the respondents also used other strategies. They try to listen to the people who are speaking in English and try to understand what they are saying. They listen for key words that seem to carry the bulk of the meaning, and try to understand what they hear without translating it word for word.

The two strategies with the lowest mean score are strategy number 3 and 5 (with the mean score of 2.6765 and 2.4912). This indicates that the respondents seldom try to predict what the other person is going to say based on what has been said so far and to practice the sounds in the target language that are different from the sounds in their own language.

Table 2. Speaking Strategies

No	Strategy	Mean	Frequency
1	Practice saying new expressions to myself.	3.2647	Moderate
2	Practice new grammatical structures orally in different situations to build my confidence level in using them.	3.0000	Moderate
3	Initiate conversations in the target language as often as possible.	2.6471	Moderate
4	Direct the conversation to familiar topics.	3.0000	Moderate
5	Plan out in advance what I want to say.	3.8824	Moderate
6	Ask question as a way to be involved in the conversation.	3.1765	Moderate
7	Try to talk about topics even when they are aren't familiar to me.	3.1176	Moderate
8	Encourage others to correct errors in my speaking.	3.5588	Moderate
9	Ask for help from my conversational partner.	3.5294	Moderate
10	Make up new words or guess if I don't know the right ones to use.	2.8235	Moderate
	Overall Mean	3.2000	

The second skill is speaking. The finding shows that the highest score is strategy number 5 with the mean score of 3.88 (Plan out in advance what I want to say). The second highest is strategy number 8 with the mean score of 3.55 (Encourage others to correct errors in my speaking.). The third highest mean score is strategy number 9 with the mean score of 3.529 (Ask for help from my conversational partner).

The strategy with the lowest mean score are strategies number 3 and 10 concerning making up new words or guessing if they do not know the right ones to use and initiate conversations in the target language as often as possible (with the mean score of 2.82 and 2.64 respectively). The mean score for this category is 3.20.

Table 3. Reading Strategies

No	Strategy	Mean	Frequency
1	Read as much as possible in the target language.	3.1176	Moderate
2	Try to find things to read for pleasure in the target language.	2.9118	Moderate

3	Find reading material that is at or near my level.	3.5294	Moderate
4	Skim an academic text first to get the main idea and then go back and read it more carefully.	3.6176	Moderate
5	Read a story or dialogue several times until I understand it.	3.6471	Moderate
6	Pay attention to the organization of the text, especially heading and subheading.	3.2353	Moderate
7	Make ongoing summaries of the reading either in my mind or in the margins of the text.	2.9118	Moderate
8	Make predictions as to what will happen next.	3.1176	Moderate
9	Guess the approximate meaning by using clues from the context of the reading material	3.4412	Moderate
10	Use a dictionary to get a detailed sense of what individual words mean.	3.8529	Moderate
	Overall Mean	3.3382	

Table 3 shows the results of reading skill. The highest score is item number 10 with the mean score of 3.85 (Use a dictionary to get a detailed sense of what individual words mean). The second highest is item number 5 with the mean score of 3.64 (Read a story or dialogue several times until I understand it). The third highest is item number 4 with the mean score of 3.61(Skim an academic text first to get the main idea and then go back and read it more carefully).These results show that respondents tend to look up words they do not understand in an English dictionary and would use an English-Indonesia dictionary. In addition, the results also show that the respondents tend to try to skim the text.

The items with the lowest mean score are items 2 and 27. The mean score of these items are 2.91. The results show that students do not try to find things to read for pleasure in the target language and make ongoing summaries of the reading either in their mind or in the margins of the text.

Table 4. Writing Strategies

No	Strategy	Mean	Frequency
1	Practice writing the alphabet and/or new words in the target language.	3.2647	Moderate
2	Plan out in advance how to write essays by writing an outline of the essay first.	3.3824	Moderate
3	Try writing different kinds of text in the target language.	3.3529	Moderate
4	Take class notes in the target language as much as I am able.	2.6176	Moderate
5	Find a different way to express the idea when I don't know the correct expression.	3.2353	Moderate
6	Review what I have already written before continuing to write more.	3.7059	Moderate
7	Use reference materials such as a glossary, a dictionary, or a thesaurus to help find or verify words in the target language.	3.5294	Moderate
8	Wait to edit my writing until all my ideas are down on paper.	3.0588	Moderate

9	Revise my writing once or twice to improve the language and content.	3.5882	Moderate
10	Try to get feedback from others, especially native speakers of the language.	3.2059	Moderate
	Overall Mean	3.2941	

The last skill is writing. As the table shows, the highest score are items number 6 and 9 with the mean score of 3.70 and 3.58. The results show that the students use these strategies. They review what are written before continuing to write more. They also revise their writing once or twice to improve the language and content. The lowest score is item number 4 (take class notes in the target language as much as I am able) with the mean score of 2.61. The average mean score for this category is 3.29.

Table 5. Frequency of Language Learning Strategies

No	Strategy	Mean	Frequency	Rank
1	Listening	3.2235	Moderate	3
2	Speaking	3.2000	Moderate	4
3	**Reading**	**3.3382**	**Moderate**	**1**
4	Writing	3.2941	Moderate	2

Based on the data shown in Table 5, reading strategies were the most frequently used while speaking strategies were used least frequently. The mean score for reading is 3.338 respectively. Then, the mean scores for writing and listening are 3.294 and 3.223. Finally, the mean score for speaking is 3.200 respectively. It can be concluded that, the eighth grade students have moderate frequency in using language learning strategy ranged moderately. It also means that they have their own learning preferences and strategies in learning English.

This study investigated the learning strategies of eighth grade students by finding out what learning strategies they employ most frequently. The descriptive analysis demonstrated that reading (3.338) and writing (3.294) strategies are shown to be used most frequently while listening (3.223) and speaking (3.200) strategies are used less frequently by students. The most frequently used reading strategy by the students was item number 10; use a dictionary to get a detailed sense of what the individual words mean. The students are not high frequency users of the speaking strategy. Thus, it could be concluded that they lack of vocabulary, self-confidence and practice. Students learn English only in the classroom; they do not practice the language outside the classroom.

As discussed above, the subjects of this study used reading strategies most frequently, followed by writing, listening, and speaking as the least used strategy. In addition, the eighth grade students have moderate frequency in using language learning strategies. These results seem to show that the eighth grade students have awareness and willingness in learning English.

The findings of the present study were consistent with the study conducted by Kaur and Embi (2011) who claimed that reading strategies are the most frequently employed by the primary school students in Malaysia. The most frequently used by male and female primary students was to use a dictionary to get a detailed

sense of what the individual words mean. Furthermore, speaking strategies are used less frequently by the students. In contrast to this, the study by Weng et all (2016) revealed that primary school students were moderate users of listening, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary strategies and low users of speaking strategies.

As discussed above, though the eighth grade students had no special training in using the learning strategies, most of them were conscious in using learning strategies in learning English. They seemed to be aware of the importance of learning English and were applying some kind of measures to facilitate their own learning. As Oxford (1990) suggest, learning strategies can be instructed to language learners.

The findings of this study seem to imply that there is a need to instruct learning strategies more explicitly to English learners, especially for junior high school level because they are usually motivated to do well at school. According to Oxford (1990), learner training is especially necessary in the area of second and foreign language because language learning in these contexts require active self-direction on the part of the learners. In this case, the role of the teacher is needed significantly. Embi (2000) believes that in learner training, teachers have several important roles to play. Cohen (1998) proposed that teachers in the twenty-first century must reconsider the role of the teacher and change their belief-system to learner-centeredness. If they can offer a "strategy-based instruction" to language learners to accommodate individual learners in the classroom and meet their learning needs, then students can take more responsibilities in learning English and learn more independently even outside the classroom. As a result, learners can eventually develop their learning autonomy and achieve their learning goals.

Conclusion

The present study is carried out in an attempt to investigate the language learning strategies used by young EFL learners. The statistical analysis shows that the eighth grade students are generally moderate users of language learning strategies. The findings in the study also bring some pedagogical ideas for English teachers, among them is the importance of knowing learners' language learning strategies. Hence, teachers were expected to know not only how to teach but also how to learn in order to help the learners to be successful language learners to face the requirements of the 21st century learning.

The followings are the contribution of this study and suggestions for future research on language learning strategies based on the present research study:

1. This present study has illustrated that there is an increasing need and a high demand of investigating language learning strategies used in learning a foreign language, especially in Indonesian context. Most strategy research in the past has concentrated on language learning strategies used in a first and second language.
2. There are only very few studied conducted on young EFL learners. There are still many rooms/space for studies to be conducted at different levels and in different learning contexts (for example kindergarten learners, primary learners of different stream, university students and adults). It is also

recommended to conduct a comparative study on English major and non-English major students.

3. Future studies can be conducted on studying the strategies used by successful language learners in order to help unsuccessful language learners to learn the language effectively and efficiently. There should be also studies on the ways to allow learners to be more autonomous in their own learning.

In conclusion, there is still much work to be done on strategy research. The works on strategy research in the Indonesian context itself is limitless. There are always some studies and research that can be carried out to understand the learning process in our learning.

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