AN EVALUATION OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY ENGLISH STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the language learning strategies used by English students of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP, hereafter) of Universitas Jambi. This research employed the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionaires designed by Oxford (1990) to obtain data from 85 students of the fifth semester class 2015 studying at the English Department. The statistical analysis of the data revealed that students opted for *metacognitive (Part D), social (Part F), cognitive (Part B), compensation (Part C), memory (Part A),* and *affective (Part E)* strategies respectively as the most strategies they have used most in their language learning process. This finding shows that teachers can actually assess their students' view about their learning strategies. This finding implies that teachers should be aware that students have different preferences to learn so that teachers need to be prepared to conduct variety of teaching strategies in their classrooms as well as emphasing the importance of learners' metacognitive strategies without leaving out the other learning strategies.

Key Words: *language learning strategy; English; Strategy Inventory for Language Learning*

ABSTRAK

Riset ini menginvestigasi strategi pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris yang digunakan oleh mahasiswa-mahasiswa Prodi Bahasa Inggris pada Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan (FKIP), Universitas jambi. Riset sekarang ini menggunakan kuestioner the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) yang didesain oleh Oxford (1990) untuk memperoleh data dari 85 mahasiswa-mahasiswa semester 5 kelas 2015 yang belajar pada Prodi Bahasa Inggris. Data statitis menunjukkan mahasiswa-mahasiswa memilih strategi metacognitive (Part D), social (Part F), cognitive (Part B), compensation (Part C), memory (Part A), dan affective (Part E) berturut-turut sebagai strategi yang paling sering digunakan dalam proses pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris mereka. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa guru dapat menilai pandangan siswa-siswa tentang strategi pembelajaran bahasa. Temuan ini juga mengimplikasikan bahwa guru semestinya menyadari bahwa siswa memiliki pilihan-pilihan yang berbeda dalam belajar sehingga guru perlu mempersiapkan berbagai macam variasi strategi mengajar dalam kelas sekaligus menekankan pentingnya strategi metacognitive pada siswa tanpa mengabaikan strategi pembelajaran bahasa lainnya.

Kata Kunci: strategi pembelajaran bahasa; bahasa Inggris; daftar strategi pembelajaran bahasa

INTRODUCTION

This current research investigates the language learning strategies used by the fifth semester students of the English Department at the KIP of Jambi University. Definitions of learning strategy are usually found in psychological literatures. Learning has been defined as the process of storing and recalling of information (Dörnyei, 2005; Rubin, 1981), while strategy has been described as a technique or tool used to acquire knowledge (Rubin, 1975) or behaviours to achieve the targeted objectives (Cohen, Weaver & Li, 1996). Further, Chamot (2005) defined language learning strategies as "procedures that facilitate a learning task" (p. 112). She explained further that these strategies are "most often conscious and goal-driven, especially in the beginning stages of tackling an unfamiliar language task" (p. 112). Learning strategies are different from learning types at the level of consciousness, consistency, and deliberateness (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990). Oxford (1993 as cited in Wong & Nunan, 2011) argued that students who are aware of their learning types will use learning strategies to meet their learning types.

Bromley (2013), Dornyei (2005) and Oxford (1993) stated that the inclusion of learning strategy into education will generate active and competent students, and it contributes to a student-centred instructional design. Afshar, Tofighi and Hamazavi (2016) argued that the awareness and the application of learning strategies differentiate the successful and unsuccessful students. Wong and Nunan (2011) investigated the distinctions between active and passive students in terms of learning styles, strategies and practices. They found that effective students were those who were communicative in their learning styles, were independent in practicing their learning strategies, and applied various of learning strategies while ineffective students had to be guided and tended to be passive and solitude. Therefore, due to the acknowledged influence of the learning strategy, an evaluation toward these learning strategies is important because at the end this evaluation provides descriptions of effective strategies to support language learning acquisition.

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

One of mostly used methods to evaluate language learning strategy is the *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL, hereafter) designed by Oxford in the 1990s. Initially, this method was designed to assess how often students at the *Defence Language*

Institute Foreign Language centre in Monterey, California used particular language learning strategies. There are two versions of the SILL, namely version 5.1 which consists of 80 questions for native English speakers who learn another foreign language, and version 7.0 which contains 50 questions for English as a second language or foreign language learners. The SILL aims to evaluate the extent to which students apply language learning strategies and to provide teachers with descriptions about the effective strategies used by the students so that the teachers are able to suggest which effective strategies that can be used for other learners (Oxford, 1990). SILL has commonly has been used to examine university students who learn foreign languages (see Afshar, Tofighi & Hamazavi, 2016; Kunasaraphan, 2015; Zhou & Intaraprasert, 2016). This research has investigated the language learning strategies used by the learners, the variables which influences the application of these strategies, as well as the connections between the strategies used and the competences in the second/foreign language.

Oxford (1990) classified language learning strategies into two types, namely *direct strategies* and *indirect strategies.* Direct learning strategies directly include the target language in the process of learning, while indirect strategies assist and direct language learning without immediately include the target language (Oxfrod, 1990). Direct strategies comprise memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies while indirect strategies involve metacognitive, affective and social (Oxford, 1990), while indirect strategies are classified into metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies (Oxford, 1990). The examples of memory strategies are creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing well, and employing actions (Oxford, 1990). Cognitive strategies may involve strategies, such as practicing, receiving and sending messages, analysing and reasoning, and creating structure for input and output (Oxford, 1990). Compensation strategies consist of actions related to guessing intelligently, overcoming limitations and writing (Oxford, 1990). Meanwhile metacognitive strategies comprise actions, such as centering one's learning, arranging and planning one's learning, and evaluating one's learning (Oxford, 1990). Affective strategies encompass lowering one's anxiety, encouraging oneself, and taking one's emotional temperature (Oxford, 1990). The last type of strategies, which are social strategies, and might consist of actions such as asking questions,

cooperating with others, and empathising with others (Oxford, 1990).

METHOD

Data were collected by administering SILL questionaire to the participants. The participants were 85 students of English Department, Class of 2015 of FKIP, Jambi University who were at their fifth semester when this study took place. Before the participants were given the questionnaires, the participants were provided with clear description about the research. The students were explained that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions, their responses given were not influenced their mark because the researcher was their lecturer, and had option not to participate, and their answer was used for the research purpose only. Their confidentiality was also guaranteed. The students were then asked to respond to 50 items of likert-scale questionnaires, ranging from 1 to 5. The questionnaires consisting of statements related to memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive strategies, affective, and social strategies. A range of 3,5-5 is considered to reflect high frequent use of that strategy, range 2,5-3,4 means moderate use of the strategies, while range 1,0-2,4 indicates low use of the strategies (Oxford, 1990).

The data were then analysed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) to show the frequency, mean, and standard deviation of students' self-evaluation of their self-reported strategy use. The numbers obtained were then depicted to explain the most chosen strategies as well as what they imply for the learners and the teachers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The statistical findings reveal that language learning strategy used by students of English department FKIP Universitas Jambi class of 2015, as measured by the SILL, was high with an overall mean of 3,5. The statistical analysis of the data revealed that students opted for *metacognitive (Part D)*, *social (Part F)*, *cognitive (Part B)*, *compensation (Part C)*, *memory (Part A)*, and *affective (Part E)* strategies respectively as the most frequent strategies they have used in their language learning process, which is shown in the following tables 1 & 2.

Table 1. Frequency of the strategy used

Strategy	Never or almost never true of me	Usually not true of me	Somewhat true of me	Usually true of me	Always or almost always true of me
	%	%	%	%	%
Part A (Memory)	4.2	16.2	37.4	32.7	9.5
Part B (Cognitive)	1.6	9.8	33.3	36.3	19
Part C (Compensation)	2	14.3	33.7	30	20
Part D (metacognitive)	1.6	5.6	27.7	39.6	25.5
Part E (Affective)	10	17.1	32.7	27.4	12.8
Part F (Social)	2.6	8.8	30.8	35.1	22.7
Average	3.67	11.96	32.6	33.52	18.25

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of the strategy used

Domain	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Ranking
Part A	85	3.2719	0.93430	5th
Part B	85	3.6126	0.92361	3rd
Part C	85	3.5176	0.95462	4th
Part D	85	3.8183	0.87610	1st
Part E	85	3.1588	1.04424	6th
Part F	85	3.6647	0.97079	2nd

These findings imply that the fifth semester students of English Department are aware of their own metacognitive skills which are often claimed to be rare existing among students (Rahimi & Katal, 2012). In this current research, the participants gave the following statements *as usually true or always true of me* option as their most preferences. The statements are: *I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better, I pay attention when someone is speaking English, I try to find out how to be a better learner of English, I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English, I look for people I can talk to in English, I look for opportunities to read as much as*

possible in English, I have clear goals for improving my English skills, and I think about my progress in learning English (Oxford, 1990).

Rubin (1987) argued that metacognitive knowledge is very important for learners to assist them choose and activate their learning strategies. Research has shown that learners with metacognitive strategies are likely to be successful language learners (Anderson, 2003). Developing metacognitive strategies encourages learners to understand their learning process and to know what strategies help them succeed. Subsequently, learners with these strategies are more keen to take control of a variety of choices and applications of learning strategies, as well as how they go with the strategies (Zhang & Goh, 2006).

Although the percentage of the metacognitive strategies is not far beyond other preferences, with the fact that students have preferred to use metacognitive skills more to help them acquire English, teachers, in particular, lecturers at English Department of FKIP in Jambi University should attempt to help students to cultivate these strategies. This does not necessarily mean to leave out others language learning strategies. Instead, teachers or lecturers should combine these strategies into activities such as

proposed by Banisaeid (2015) namely to encourage learners to be motivated in their own learning process, realize the importance of giving positive feedback to learners, understand their students' beliefs and attitudes toward their language skills learning, support students to design, assess and observe their learning process, assist students to arrange and adjust their learning materials, encourage learners to understand their targets and their interests, and guide students to improve their out of class activities, such as seeking study partners and teacher assistances, and evaluating their notes and assignments.

With regard to the second most frequently strategy amongst the options, namely, social strategy, which comprises activities such as interacting with others, for instance, asking for assistance and explanation or practising English with others. This finding could indicate that students nowadays have realized that they cannot succeed to learn the language in isolation, therefore they have to make efforts to pursue help from others they think can help them or can work out together. Thus, the participants thought they responded positively to statements in this current study such as: *If I do not understand something in English I ask the other person to slow down or say it again, I ask English speakers to correct me when I*

talk, I practice English with other students, I ask for help from English speakers, if I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again, I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk, I practice English with other students, I ask for help from English speakers, I ask questions in English, and I try to learn about the culture of English speakers (Oxford, 1990).

The third most frequent strategy used by the participants in this study is cognitive strategy. Oxford (1990) argued that cognitive strategies are crucial in learning a new language because these strategies work promptly upon the information arrived. The participants selected strategies such as: *saying or writing new English words several times, talking like native English speakers, practicing the sounds of English, using the English words I know in different ways, starting conversations in English, watching English language TV shows spoken in English or going to movies spoken in English, reading for pleasure in English, writing notes, messages, letters, or reports in English, skimming an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully, looking for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English, trying to find patterns in English, finding the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand, trying not to translate word-for-word, and making summaries of*

information that I hear or read in English. Oxford (1990) suggested that, cognitive strategies are usually found to be the most popular strategies used by language learners. This argument corroborates the finding of this study.

Compensation strategies are reported to be the fourth most frequently strategies used by the participants in this research. Al-Otaibi (2004), explained that the strategies are used when the learners try to fill the gaps in their knowledge when they produce or understand the language learned. Therefore, the learners use *gestures, make up new words when they do not know the words in English, read English passages without checking out every new words, guessing what person will likely to say next, and using synonyms* (Oxford, 1990).

Memory and affective strategies respectively then are the least frequent strategies used by the participants in this study. According to Oxford (1990), memory strategies are formidable mental tools. Yet, the participants in this study opted these strategies infrequently. Memory strategies involving activities such as: *thinking of relationships between what learners already know and new things they learn in English, using new English words in a sentence so learners can remember them, connecting the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help learners*

remember the word, remembering a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used, using rhymes to remember new English words, using flashcards to remember new English words, acting out new English words, reviewing English lessons often, and remembering new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign (Oxford, 1990).

The least strategies chosen by the participants in this study, namely the affective strategies involving activities that allow students to manage their own motivations, behaviours, and feelings in the process of language learning. The strategies such as: *relaxing whenever learners feel afraid of using English, self-encouraging to speak English even when students are afraid of making a mistake, giving self a reward or treat when learners do well in English, self-noticing if learners are tense or nervous when learners are studying or using English, writing down feelings in a language learning diary, and talking to someone else about how learners feel when they are learning English* (Oxford, 1990). The possible cause of the reason why students chose the affective strategies as the infrequent strategies they used perhaps because participants were focus more on what would come out in the exams instead making their selves satisfied with their progress in learning English.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This research has investigated language learning strategies of the fifth semester students of English Department Class of 2015 of FKIP, Jambi University by utilizing SILL. While we must acknowledge that the information about language learning strategies used is based on students' self-reports and this may differ from what students actually do when they learn, it is, nevertheless, a useful method for investigating learners' mental processing (Chamot, 2004). Therefore, utilizing this kind of instrument, we can access their students' view about their learning strategies. As this research revealed, students reported frequently using metacognitive strategies when learning English. Additionally, high percentages for other strategies were showing students opted for social, compensation, and cognitive strategies. These findings suggest that teachers can actually assess their students' view about their learning strategies. This implies that teachers should be aware that students have different preferences to learn so that teachers need to be prepared to conduct variety of teaching strategies in their classrooms as well as emphasing the importance of learners' metacognitive strategies without

leaving out the other learning strategies.

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