EXPLORING *STAIN PEKALONGAN* STUDENTS' STRATEGIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study explored college students' strategies in learning English language. Two questions were presented. The first question is what strategies are used by the students in learning English language and the second question is how do the students use strategies in learning English language. To answer the first question, 49 college students gave respond on Strategy Inventory For Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire. Then, to answer the last question, five students participated in think aloud protocol (TAP) sessions. The data analysis from SILL questionnaire showed that the students were medium user of strategies in learning English language. The strategies then ranked from social strategies, followed by metacognitive, cognitive, affective, compensation, and memory strategies at the latter position. Then, to find out how the students use strategies in learning English language, think aloud protocol (TAP) sessions presented that the students made use of three major strategies in learning English language cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. These three strategies were used by the students in three different activities (understanding reading passage, dealing with unfamiliar words or phrases and self-awareness) as the study was limited to reading skills. In conclusion, the students made use of different strategies when doing particular task given to them. At this point, students in some ways have the ability to learn by themselves, that is by using strategies as lecturers cannot always facilitate students' learning, especially when lecturers teach large class.

Keywords: *English language learning, individual differences, language learning strategies, , psychology of language learner*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi strategi mahasiswa dalam belajar bahasa Inggris. Dua pertanyaan yang disajikanyaan adalah (1) apa strategi yang digunakan oleh siswa dalam belajar bahasa Inggris dan (2) bagaimana mahasiswa menggunakan strategi dalam belajar bahasa Inggris. Subjek penelitian ini adalah 49 mahasiswa prodi bahasa Inggrius stain pekalongan. Data dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan kuesioner Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). Sebagai indepth study digunakan lima mahasiswa berpartisipasi dalam sesi think aloud protocol (TAP). Analisis data dari SILL kuesioner menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa umumnya menggunakan strategi media dalam belajar bahasa Inggris; peringkat berikutnya adalah strategi sosial, diikuti oleh strategi metakognitif, kognitif, afektif, kompensasi, dan strategi memori. Hasil

analisis sesi think aloud protocol menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa menggunakan tiga strategi utama dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, yaitu strategi kognitif, strategi metakognitif, dan strategi kompensasi. Ketiga strategi yang digunakan oleh mahasiswa dalam tiga kegiatan yang berbeda (memahami bacaan, mempelajari kata-kata asing, dan mawas diri). Simpulannya adalah mahasiswa memanfaatkan strategi yang berbeda ketika melakukan tugas tertentu yang diberikan kepada mereka. Mahasiswa dalam beberapa hal memiliki kemampuan untuk belajar sendiri, yaitu dengan strategi pembelajaran karena dosen tidak bisa selalu dapat memfasilitasi pembelajaran mahasiswa, terutama ketika dosen mengajar kelas besar.

Kata Kunci: *pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, strategi pembelajaran*

INTRODUCTION

The atmosphere of English language learning the Indonesian students had before taking higher education in college whether at home, their neighborhood and even previous schools haven't given the students much exposure for them to learn or practice English. As Saslow and Ascher (2005) pointed out that the language learning experience in a neighborhood which is surrounded by the English language is more effective by means of giving exposure and opportunities to practice with each other. However, it doesn't stop the college students to learn English. Instead, English language is encouraged to be learned as part of higher education curriculum.

It can be seen from their scientific literatures which are important for their study is mainly written in English language. Besides, there are a lot of opportunities to enrich knowledge and life experience by communicating with people or specifically scholars from other countries by using English language. These reasons provide the students purposes to learn English as foreign language.

As stated above, to achieve the purpose, the students have to learn English as foreign language. In the progress of English language learning, one of the factors which has influence to be successful English language learner is individual differences. Individual differences, as pointed out by Dörnyei (2005), are characteristics of individuals which showed them to be different from each other. One of the individual differences which are being the main focus of this study is learning strategies. Language learning strategies could be in many forms which are useful to improve language learning by facilitating internalization, storage, retrieval or use of the new language. Brown (2000) even noted that learners use different strategies to solve or approach a problem. Language learning strategies are very promising and not many articles or journals have been published about language learning strategies specifically to Indonesian college students.

As a result, the purposes of this research are: (1) to find out the strategies that have been used by the college students in learning English language; and (2) to find out how the college students use strategies in learning English language. At this point, this study presented findings on what strategies have been used by college students and how they use it in learning English language.

1. The Nature of Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies, or any other terms such as learning strategies or even strategies was actually has been well defined by Oxford (1999:518) who use the term learning strategies and

proposed its definition as "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques that students use to improve their own progress in developing skills in a second or foreign language. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language". This definition gave broad understanding not just about what the form of learning strategies can be but also provided the use of the learning strategies in developing skills in a second or foreign language by facilitating internalization, storage, retrieval or use of the new language.

Then, Brown (2000:113) defined strategies as "specific methods of approaching problems or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned design for controlling and manipulating certain information". The definition showed more specific form of strategies that exist which is used to achieve a specific purpose.

Referring to these two definitions, language learning strategies could be in many forms which are useful to improve language learning by facilitating internalization, storage, retrieval or use of the new language. It also should be noted that learners use different strategies to solve or approach a problem.

2. Taxonomy of Language Learning Strategies

Two taxonomies of language learning strategies are presented in this study. First is by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) which classified language learning strategies into three categories, namely (1) cognitive strategies; (2) metacognitive strategies; and (3) social/affective strategies. Then, Oxford (1990) provides a more specific classification of language learning strategies, namely: (1) cognitive strategies; (2) memory strategies; (3) compensation strategies; (4) affective strategies; and (5) social strategies.

These two taxonomies are almost the same where cognitive strategies of O'Malley and Chamot (1990) are specified by Oxford (1990) into cognitive and memory strategies. Then, social/affective strategies of O'Malley and Chamot (1990) are considered stand alone strategies in Oxford (1990), affective and social strategies. Meanwhile, metacognitive strategies are existed in both taxonomies, and compensation appeared only in Oxford (1990) taxonomy. Regarding to these two taxonomies, Oxford (1990) taxonomy provides a clear cut of categories of language learning strategies.

3. Researches on Language Learning Strategies

Second/foreign language learning strategies are defined as specific actions or techniques that learners use to assist the development of their second/foreign language skills (Oxford, 1990). Research on such matters was probably initiated by Stern (1975) who attempted to make a list of characteristics of learners who were considered to be good language learners. A similar attempt was carried out by Rubin (1975). In subsequent stages, the studies were directed at finding the effect of learning strategies on success in learning as measured by either achievement or proficiency by covering both good and less good language learners.

The type of study, which correlated learning strategies and measures of success in language learning, became even more popular with a more sophisticated classification of learning strategies in the early 1990s. More projects in the field were set out. Oxford and Ehrman (1995) surprisingly came up with findings different from what were expected. They asked 268 students at the Foreign Service Institute, United States to complete the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

(Oxford, 1990). One of the questions to be answered was whether the strategy use correlated significantly with proficiency ratings. The proficiency assessments of speaking and reading were conducted at the end of the training. The analysis unexpectedly came to a conclusion that only cognitive strategies correlated significantly with both speaking and reading proficiency.

Meanwhile, findings of studies with students in Korea and Taiwan suggest that learning strategies correlate with English proficiency. In their research project involving 1,110 students from middle school, high school, and university levels in Korea, Lee and Oxford (2008) found that students who rate their English proficiency as high employed learning strategies more frequently than those who rate their English proficiency as low. The significant differences occur in the six types of strategies as measured by the SILL. This finding agrees with Yang's (2007) study with 451 junior college students in Taiwan. The study found that more proficient students reported using strategies more often than less proficient students.

Despite the fact that learning strategy has been an issue investigated extensively especially in western countries since 1970s, it has not been very much studied among learners of English as a foreign language in Indonesia until the late 1990s. One of Indonesian researchers is Lengkanawati (1997), who investigated the predictability of proficiency from learning strategies of 114 students at the English Education Department, Institute of Teacher Training and Education, Bandung. The data on learning strategies were collected by means of the SILL. The data on proficiency, on the other hand, were measured by means of TOEFL. In general, when the students' total TOEFL scores were regressed against the six categories of learning strategies, the analysis found that the independent variable and the dependent variables shared a common variance of only 5%. Moreover, Djiwandono (1998) investigated the predictability of oral communication proficiency from learning strategies and degree of extroversion. Using 50 students at the Widya Karya University, Malang, Indonesia, as the subjects, the study found that diversity "one out of three dimensions of strategy use" and expressiveness "one out of seven indicators of extroversion" turned out to be the best predictors of oral communication proficiency. These two predictors explained 48% of the total variance of the dependent variable. While Djowandono used learning strategy as a predictor of English proficiency, Huda (1998) treated learning strategy as the dependent variable and speaking proficiency as the independent variable. The subjects consisted of 30 students of the English Education Department, Institute of Teacher Training and Education at Malang, Indonesia. He found that learners with good speaking proficiency used fewer strategies than their fellow learners with fair speaking proficiency did. This finding contradicts a claim that more proficient learners use more varieties of strategies (Oxford, 1993). Then, in a study with Indonesian learners of English at three universities in Malang, Mistar (2001) reported a finding that motivational factors influence the learners' use of learning strategies more significantly than personality traits and language aptitude. In another study (Mistar, 2006) it was found that the use of learning strategies significantly affects the learners' perceived proficiency attainment.

As reviewed above, although few studies failed to show the significant contribution of learning strategies, most of them revealed that learning strategies affect learning achievement or learning proficiency. These studies have inspired the researcher to find out language learning strategies preferences in Indonesian college students' context. What makes this research different is that besides language learning strategy preferences, the research also focusing on how do the Indonesian college students use strategies in learning English language.

RESEARCH METHOD

Forty nine first year students of STAIN Pekalongan who are taking English class gave respond through Strategy Inventory for Language Learning or known as SILL. Then, five college students were chosen randomly in purpose to join think aloud protocol sessions.Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is well known by its use to identify language learning strategy preferences. Kazamia (2007) pointed out that SILL consist of 50 items which the items presenting language learning strategy and every respondents will be asked to respond to the SILL items by indicating how frequently they use those strategies by selecting one response out of five Likert scale options. The SILL classified language learning strategies into six parts which use Oxford (1990) classification of language learning strategies (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, social and affective strategies). All data collected in the questionnaire were input into the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS 18.0 for Windows). Based on the result of SPSS, the reliability coefficient Cronbach alpha was found to be .902, which showed that it was highly reliable.

Think Aloud Protocol or known as TAP was used to provide how the students use strategies in learning English language. TAP is very commonly used to explore language learning strategies (Ohly, 2007). Specifically, a reading task was given to the students. And while the students do the task, they should talk what they think to give insight of how students use strategies in learning English. Moreover, even though it seems that TAP will be focusing more to mental processes, to cover the entire language learning strategies that have been identified, the students were allowed to interact with other students and use both Indonesian or English language as long as it is beneficial for them while doing their task. The process was audio recorded. In addition, before the real TAP begin, a practice was conducted before to achieve better results.

The result of SILL was analyzed to provide description of the data, in this case, frequency distribution of the language learning strategies that are more to less frequently used by the students in learning English language. Meanwhile, the data from TAP was analyzed qualitatively. After the students think aloud procedure has been audio recorded, the recording then transcribed to do a content analysis. Finally, the result from the transcript was summarized to describe how do the students use strategies in learning English language.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Analysis of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Questionnaire Result

There were 49 respondents who filled in the SILL questionnaire. From the data analysis, the overall average score (m= 3.25) showed that the strategies used are at medium degree. Then, the strategies were ranked from the highest mean to the lowest mean. It showed that social strategies at the first rank with an average score of 3.53, followed by metacognitive strategies with average score of 3.46, then cognitive strategies with average score of 3.24 at the third rank, affective strategies with average score of 3.15 at the fourth rank, compensation strategies with average score of 3.06 at the fifth rank, and the latter position, memory strategies with average score of 3.04.

Below is the table which showed the summary of descriptive statistics regarding the result of the SILL questionnaire.

Table 1. The Summary of Descriptive Statistics of the Result of SILL Questionnaire

Strategies	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social	1	5	3.53	0.75
Metacognitive	1	5	3.46	0.68
Cognitive	1.79	4.50	3.24	0.52
Affective	1	4.83	3.15	0.69
Compensation	1	4.67	3.06	0.67
Memory	1.56	4.44	3.04	0.51
Overall Average Score			3.25	0.47

2. The Analysis of Think Aloud Protocol Results

At this part, think aloud protocol has provided important data on how do the students used strategies in learning English language as the protocol was commonly used to explore language learning strategies (Ohly, 2007). To be specific, this study only use reading task which provided specific data related to strategies that can be used during reading.

There were two sessions in TAP. At the first session, the students were asked to get to know how to do TAP during reading task (1st reading task) and at the same time making sure that the tools (recording devices) are ready to use. After the students fully prepared, the actual think aloud protocol was conducted using different reading task (2nd reading task). In addition, the students were doing the TAP in the same classroom to make them more comfortable and they were allowed to use English or Indonesian language to help them providing rich data during the reading tasks.

After the think aloud protocol finished, the data which were recorded during the reading task were transcribed and analyzed. The inter rater reliability as evaluated by the kappa reliability test, was 0.858 with a standard error of 0.05.

From the data analysis, it was found that in order to understand a reading task, the students were using five different strategies. First, translating the target language into Indonesian language as their first language was frequently used during the reading task. At this point, the students were able to use this strategy when they have sufficient vocabularies. For example:

A15: "For young and old alike, a trip to the beach means relaxation *hmm untuk ahh anak muda atau orang tua yah ahh liburan ke pantai itu diartikan sebagai relaksasi yah"*.

Besides translating, it was also found that the students were also skimming the reading passage which followed by reading the passage carefully. This strategy was relevant with SILL questionnaire item number 18 which stated "I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully." For example:

A23: "*Ok and a this stories ah the title is* how to make a sand castle. Ok" (silent reading).

The third strategy to understand the reading passage was making a summary per each paragraph which relevant to SILL item number 23 which stated "I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English." For example:

A23: "*Aah* in the second paragraph they are talking about step per step *aah* how to make a sand castle and then to *to* smooth off the top and side of the wall and tower.*"

Then, the fourth strategy was retelling the reading passage by using one's own words. For example:

A25: "*Dan disini kita bisa memulai dengan* digging up *dan langkah-langkah seterusnya. Kita disini tidak hanya membuat satu* castle but sixteenth-century sandcastle *ehm dan disitu dipisah oleh suatu* walls *ehm setelah itu kamu sudah memiliki* sixteenth-century sandcastle..."

The latter strategy was reading the passage without looking up every new word which relevant with the SILL questionnaire item number 27. At this point, the students were able to understand the reading passage without having looking every new word that came up in the passage. For example:

A35: "Making a sand castle is a favorite project of beach goers of all ages *membuat istana pasir adalah kegiatan favorit dipantai untuk semua umur*"

And, when the students found unfamiliar words or phrases, there were two different strategies that the students used. First, inferring known words to recognize unknown words from the passage and try to make sense. For example:

A35: "Whether swimming or surfing *apakah berenang* or surfing tossing a volleyball *bermain* volley ball or just snoozing in the sand *bermain dipasir kali nih*."

Then, looking back or reread unfamiliar words or phrases to find its meaning was used when inferring known words didn't help to understand the unfamiliar or unknown words or phrases. For example:

A15: "...ok *ombak menyapu bersih semuanya* full stop *oh ya masih ada kata-kata yang meragukan*."

Finally, self awareness was also used during reading where student giving comments to one's own ability. For example:

A25: "*Ya mungkin itu ajah sedikit penjelasan yang gak terlalu jelas*."

As a result, from the examples provided, the data analysis showed that the students applied three major strategies to understand the reading passage, namely: (1) cognitive strategies (translating from the target language to the first language, inferring known words, skimming and making summary); (2) metacognitive strategies (retelling, look back unfamiliar words or phrases, and giving comments to one's own ability as self awareness); and (3) compensation strategies (reading English without looking up every new word).

3. Strategies Used By the Students in Learning English Language

SILL questionnaire was used to find out strategies that are used by the students in learning English language. From the finding, the students were categorized as medium user of strategy with overall average score of 3.25. Meaning there was no outstanding strategy has been used by the students or in other words, the students were able to make a balance use for each category of strategies.

However, judging from the mean score for each strategies, social strategies have important contributions in their English language learning. It showed that the students were likely to communicate with others that contribute to English language learning. This finding is in line with Alhaysony (2012) who discovered that social and skipping strategies are the most used strategy categories regarding to vocabulary learning.

Meanwhile, metacognitive strategies were ranked at the second position in this present study. In this case, metacognitive strategies enable learners to control their own cognition by considering and connecting with prior knowledge, understanding, postponing speech production, managing, setting aims and objectives, preparing for a language assignment, seeking for chances of drills, self monitoring and evaluating (Zare, 2012).

Furthermore, Zhang (2001) and Alhaisoni (2012) findings are in line with the present study which pointed out memory strategies as the least strategies used by the students. But, Zhang (2001) and Alhaisoni (2012) also noted that besides memory strategies, affective strategies were also categorized as the least used strategies in which the present study showed the opposite finding. Affective strategies help learners to organize their feelings, motivation, and behaviors that are related to learning (Zare, 2012). In this study, the students try to relax whenever they feel afraid of using English.

4. The Students Strategies in Learning English Language

The finding from think aloud protocol showed that the students made use of different strategies in learning English language. There were three major strategies that are used by the students, namely: (1) cognitive strategies; (2) metacognitive strategies; and (3) compensation strategies which in line with Ohly (2007). However, Ohly (2007) pointed two strategies with different rank, that is, metacognitive and cognitive strategies.

Those strategies as mentioned above were used by the students for different purposes. There were three activities that the students did during the TAP sessions.

The first activity the students did was to understand the reading passage given. In order to do that, the students use three different strategies. The very frequently used by the students was translation which belongs to cognitive strategy when they have sufficient vocabularies. It means that, "the students had understood the text correctly when they put it into their L1" (Kern, 1994: 44). And, when the students have limited knowledge in vocabulary, they made use of compensation strategy, that is, reading without looking up every new word. Skimming and summarizing which belong to metacognitive strategy were also used by the students when they can deal with the complexity of the reading passage.

The second activity which the students did in the think aloud protocol was when they found unfamiliar words or phrases. At this point, the students use two strategies. First, the students made use of cognitive strategy by inferring known words to find the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases. By reading known words, they could infer the meaning of the unknown word or phrases. And, when it took too long for them to do that, they kept continue their reading, and use a metacognitive strategy, that is, looking back or reread the unfamiliar words or phrases once to find its meaning.

The last activity was self awareness. At the end of the reading, the student gave comment to one's own ability. It showed that the student being aware of one's competence. It should be noted

that the result from think aloud protocol in this study is not just about strategies that the students use in the practice as what Ohly (2007) did, but also showed how do the students use strategies in learning English language.

However, the finding from think aloud protocol was limited to reading skills which could not facilitate every strategy that has been analyzed through SILL questionnaire, such as social strategies. Even though, the students were allowed to interact with other students, the students were not doing any contact to each other. Then, the researcher also could not identify any affective strategy which involved emotional feeling in their English language learning as think aloud protocol was designed to know more about cognitive processes (Someren, Barnard, Sandberg, 1994).

Moreover, the study only involved first year students of *STAIN Pekalongan*. That's why, the result of study shouldn't be generalized because even though the findings were promising, we need to put in mind that every student have their own characteristics, including their strategies and how do they use these strategies in learning English language.

CONCLUSION

This descriptive case study was conducted to find out what strategies that are used by the college students and how do they use strategies in learning English. The sample was the first year students of *STAIN Pekalongan*. Two instruments were used to collect the data from the sample.

The first instrument was SILL questionnaire. The data analysis of SILL questionnaire presented that the overall average score (m= 3.25) showed that the strategies used are at medium degree. Then, it was found that social strategies are at the first rank, followed by metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, affective strategies, compensation strategies and the latter position, memory strategies.

However, this finding didn't show how do they use strategies in learning English language. As a result, a think aloud protocol would provide the necessary data to find out how do the students use strategies in learning English language. From the findings, the students made use of three different strategies (cognitive, metacognitive and compensation strategies) in three different activities (understanding reading passage, dealing with unfamiliar words or phrases and self-awareness) as the study was limited to reading skills which could not facilitate every strategy that have been analyzed through SILL questionnaire.

At this point, students in some ways have the ability to learn by themselves as lecturers have very limited ability to teach, especially when lecturers deal with large classes. Yang (2007: 50) mentioned that effective strategy use can determine students' success. It means that, by providing language learning strategy training will activate students' autonomous learning in which will be beneficial for the students in learning English language and the students will not depend to lecturers where nowadays learning should be students centered instead of teacher centered.

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