Gender Differences in Language Learning Strategies

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Abstract

This study investigates the application of language learning strategies by different gender of university students. To do so, memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social language learning strategies were investigated. To collect data, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL; Oxford, 1990) was administered to male and female student. They, then, were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings of the study indicated that students used a wider range of learning strategies and different from those often preferred by their gender. Both female and male often use social strategies while the lowest frequency strategy use both them were different. The results of this study can be useful for language teachers instead of raising their awareness on reducing the gap between the students' language learning strategies and their teaching technique preferences.

Keywords: language learning strategy; gender; male; female

Introduction

English as an international language has become the main requirement in this world to be accepted in international level associations. Students are required to be able to use English as accurately as possible in order to interact with the world community. Because of this urgency, the learning of English has been proclaimed by the government everywhere to every subject to be studied as early as possible at any level of education. However, this appeal does not necessarily make the people who learn it can be skilled in foreign languages. Learning English, especially language as a foreign language for a long time, is not a guarantee that they will be skilled in speaking at a higher level. Many factors influence it and this then becomes interesting to be used as research studies from year to year.

One interesting discussion examined from year to year is a discussion of the relationship between the strategies of learning English in relation to the achievement of learning outcomes or the relationship with student performance, which can be influenced by other factors. This issue was developed in the era of the 90s, whereas the beginning of this issue developed, a number of researchers only described the dominant learning strategies used (Abraham & Vann, 1987; Breen, 2001; Horwitz, 1987). Although refraining from categorizing beliefs as 'good' or 'bad,' researcher stated that learners' subscription to certain beliefs had a direct consequence on the ways they learn (Riley, 1997). Recent researches which have developed until now have not only illustrated the dominance of the strategies used but are related to other factors. (Riazi & Rahimi, 2005; Chamot, 2005; Aharony, 2006; Zhang, 2008; Yunus, 2016). One factor that should not be ignored is about gender differences. There are many results of research that give different results about the meaningful learning strategy associated with gender, which is certainly a separate signal to find out whether there are other factors that influence the differences in the results.

Gender differences in achievement of language learning achievements are seen as learning strategies used is a study that has been studied by many researchers. Some of them tried to find problems that existed in differences in the learning outcomes of men and women viewed from various fields of science and from various perspectives. The results of the study prove that the relevance of gender with learning outcomes in a particular field is very meaningful where the value of the success of male learners outperforms the value of female students (Maharani et al, 2018;Tang et al, 2014),. However, some studies on gender differences do not provide significant results for the linkages of this problem.

Definition of language learning strategies

Many researchers have defined the term language learning strategy. Oxford (1990) defines language learning strategies as "approaches or techniques that learners use to enhance their progress in developing L2 skills ". Wenden (1991) defines it as "mental steps or operations that learners use to learn a new language and to regulate their efforts to do so." Richards & Platt (1992) define it as "intentional behavior and thoughts used by learners during learning so as to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information". Cook (2001) defines learning strategy as "a choice that learner makes while learning or using the second language that affects learning". Finally, Griffiths (2007) defines language learning strategies as activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning. These definitions inform us that learning strategies are essential in learning a language.

Classification of language learning strategies

Rubin (1981) identified three kinds of strategies, which contribute directly or indirectly to language learning: learning strategies, communication strategies, and social strategies. O'Malley et al (1985) divided LLS into three main categories: metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies. In Oxford (1990) a distinction is made between direct and indirect strategies: Direct strategies require mental processing of the target language. There are three main groups of direct strategies: *memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies.* Each group processes the language differently and for different purposes. Indirect strategies, on the other hand, support and manage language learning often without involving the target language directly. There are three groups of indirect strategies: *metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies.* Oxford's classification has been selected for this study.

Studies on language learning strategies

Many researchers have studied language learning strategies and factors related to choice and use of language learning strategies. Those studies includes learners' level of language proficiency, motivation, learning style, cultural backgrounds, gender, nationality and context of language learning since in the middle of 19th century then grew until the 20 century (Chamot, 2005;Aharony, 2006; Zhang, 2008;Mahalingam, M & Yunus, M,M, 2016). Also, the fact that high use of social strategies somehow contradicted with the findings (Gerami, et al 2011; Salashour et al, 2012; Tang, et al, 2014; Maharani et al, 2018 that reported learners tended to use more rote learning and language rules and less communicative strategies.

Several studies indicated some of the learning strategy preferences reported by students in different cultural contexts. It was found that students reported a preference for social strategies as well as a disinclination to use affective

strategies (Chamot,2004). Riazi, A & Rahimi, M, (2005) investigated the use of language learning strategies by post-secondary level Persian EFL learners. The results of the study pointed to proficiency level and motivation as major predictors of the use of language learning strategies. The difference between learners' use of the SILL's six major strategy categories was found to be significant. Some studies have also been done to explore the language learning strategies used by successful language learners so that they can be trained to less successful language learners as a part of English teaching syllabuses (Oxford, 1995). Most researchers have agreed that more proficient learners employ a wider range of strategies more efficiently than less proficient learners (Oxford, 1995; Lan, 2005; Oxford, 1996; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Philips, 1991;Gan Z & Humphreys, G, 2004).

Research on language learning strategies has attracted much interest from researchers but the focus of this research strategy on language learning has changed from the domain of language teaching to language learning. As Corder (1981) said that language learning is considered more dynamic, the process is more original and students will be more active in gaining knowledge. Based on research conducted by Chang (2011) learning strategies have received increased attention from a number of researchers in the field of knowledge of English as a foreign language in relation to how language is studied for differences that are individual in nature. (Chang, 1999; Cohen, 1998). The importance of research on the use of language learning strategies is reported by a number of researchers and identified in the nature of which students are effective and good in their learning activities (Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003).

According to Chamot (2005), the application of research to learning strategies has two objectives. First is to identify and compare the strategies used by students. Second is research that aims to provide a form of instruction that can help students who are less successful in learning languages better understand and achieve language learning outcomes. O'Malley et al (1985) consider strategies as a tool to be active and involve self-regulation capabilities that are important in the development of more communicative foreign languages. Until finally recent research has identified the main key individual differences that influence the choice of language learning strategies they use (Chang, 2011; Griffiths, 2003; Lan, 2005). Alhaysony (2017) in this study of language learning strategies also found results. This research shows that instructors are advised to introduce and motivate students as a whole about language learning strategies.

Recommendations for further research are directed at other things, among others, differences in age, types of research methods, multiple approaches, language skills, self-confidence, social and cultural backgrounds, and personal motivational factors. Saragih and Kumara (2009) suggest that there is a significant difference in language learning strategies with intrinsic motivation.

Language learning strategies used by students with high, medium and low levels of intrinsic motivation differ significantly.

Since language is socially mediated and context dependent, it would be expected that learners' use of language learning strategies may vary with the context. In Iran, for instance, for the past three decades, due to a variety of social and political reasons, Iranian EFL learners have had little or no contact with native speakers of English. The use of Internet and other media, such as satellite TV, is neither widespread nor easily accessible to all language learners. Moreover, language teaching during high school years is mostly grammar–based with no attention paid to languages (Riazi, A & Rahimi, M, 2005). Thus, this study intends to investigate the language learning strategies of Iranian EFL university students by finding out what learning strategies they employ most frequently. It also aims to compare the differences used in learning students between the successful and the unsuccessful EFL students.

Starting from the discussion above, the authors are interested in re-describing the study of gender differences in the choice of language learning strategies used. The research questions of this study are: (1) what are the most and least used categories of language learning strategies by gender difference? (2) Are female and male high, medium or low 'language learning strategy' users?

Method

Participants

The participants attending this study were 12 male and female 12 learners out of 50 subjects randomly selected from the students of FKTI Univerrsitas Mulawarman Samarinda, majoring in TEFL.

Instruments

The study used two instruments, the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford and self-teacher standard test. The current study used SILL questionnaire (Oxford, 1990, pp. 293-300) to determine the type of language learning strategies and frequency of strategy use of IT students. It is a 50-item Likert-type questionnaire with five-scale responses regarding the six major strategy groups as distributed in Table 1. According to Oxford (1990) classification, learners with the mean of 3.5 or more were considered as high strategy users, learners with the mean of below 2.4 are low strategy users, and the mean for medium strategy users is between 2.4 and 3.5.

Results

The overall use of language learning strategies

Table 1 shows in average over all female EFL students' responses to language learning strategies. They used metacognitive, compensation, social,

memory, cognitive, and affective strategies respectively. The mean of the most frequently used strategy, social strategy, is 3.30. Moreover, the mean of the least frequently used strategy, memory, is 2.62. The female EFL students reported medium use of strategy categories, as the mean of overall strategy use is 2.88.

Tabel 1. Summary of strategy use showing female frequency used

Strategy	Mean	Rank	Strategy use
Memory strategies	2.62	6	Medium; sometime used
Cognitive strategies	2.84	4	Medium; sometime used
Compensation strategies	2.93	3	Medium; sometime used
Meta-cognitive strategies	2.96	2	Medium; sometime used
Affective strategies	2.63	5	Medium; sometime used
Social strategies	3.30	1	Medium; sometime used

Table 2 shows in average over all male EFL students' responses to language learning strategies. They used metacognitive, compensation, social, memory, cognitive, and affective strategies respectively. The mean of the most frequently used strategy, social strategy, is 3,22. And, the mean of the least frequently used strategy, affective, is 2,72. The male EFL students reported medium use of strategy categories, as the mean of overall strategy use is 3,01.

Tabel 2. Summary of strategy use showing male frequency used

Strategy	Mean	Rank	Strategy use
Memory strategies	2,78	5	Medium; sometime used
Cognitive strategies	3,05	4	Medium; sometime used
Compensation strategies	3,15	3	Medium; sometime used
Meta-cognitive strategies	3,16	2	Medium; sometime used
Affective strategies	2,72	6	Medium; sometime used
Social strategies	3,22	1	Medium; sometime used

Use of strategies by gender

The overall use of language learning strategies by the subjects has been shown in Table 1. This table presents the mean of strategy use among all the subjects. The average strategy use for overall strategy use ranged from a high 3.2 to a low of 2.62, while the overall mean for the sample was 2.91. As for strategy categories to both female and male students, social strategies were the most frequently used strategies (M = 3.30 to the female and M = 3.22 to the male) even though memory strategies were the least frequently used to female (M = 2.62) and affective strategy were the least frequently used to male (M = 2.72). The descending order in medium frequency used were meta-cognitive strategy (M = 2.96), compensation strategy (M = 2.93), cognitive strategy (M = 2.84) were social strategies (M = 3.00) to female, while the descending order in medium

frequency used were metacognitive strategy (M = 3.16), compensation strategy (M = 3.15), cognitive strategy (M = 3.05) and memory strategy (M = 2.78) to male.

Discussion

As many result, in their interpretation cite that achievement is necessary to students' desire doing something more, with those of previous researches (Maharani et al, 2018; Tang et al, 2014), which have indicated that the higher their score the more frequencies student use many strategies in language learning and can be identified too to gender differences.

Specifying in current results, dividing learners in male and female students', our project employed social strategies for both of genders (M = 3.22 for male, M = 3.30 for female) were the highest score where female students' were upper than male students'. This is similar to the findings of research (Bozinovic et al, 2011) in Iran subjects. Also, despite the fact that high use of social strategies in this study somehow contradicted with the findings (Gerami, et al 2011; Salashour et al., 2012; Tang, et al., 2014; Yih, et al., 2017; Maharani et al, 2018) that they reported learners tended to use more rote learning and language rules and less communicative strategies. It is surprised us finding the newest of dominances frequency of language learning strategies.

Another finding of this study is still focus to gender differences. One of the lowest frequency of female students' strategies was cognitive strategies. It is similar to the finding of (Salashour et al, 2012; Bozinovic et al, 2011) promoted it to their research. This means that cognitive strategies such as 'dividing words into smaller parts to understand, 'using words in different ways', and making summaries' are not   very common among Iranian high school second language learners. It can be said that the need to change of mainstream curriculum is emerge which normally do not focus to developing students' cognitive strategies.

Surprisingly, affective were the lowest of frequency language learning strategy use to the male students' in this study. It is the same finding in students of collage in Iran (Gerami et al., 2011) both successful and unsuccessful student. It seems like they are not comfort to feel out of English such as writing feeling so sad in diary, talking to someone about the failure or fill not something wrong in any available mistaken during in classroom. This signs is likely to thinking it more as another aspect to facilitate student more comfortable in class.

Conclusion

This study aimed to the use of language learning strategies among students to promote a clearer understanding of the processes learners engage in the process of learning a second language. It was revealed that all six language learning strategies were employed at varying degrees of frequency by the

subjects, and that this variation was subjects to learners' gender.

Through this research, a number of information has been obtained. The results of the study not only find a real picture of how learning strategies are used by a number of students of different sexes but furthermore, clarifying how certain indications can be found to know more about the characteristics of students and how to clarify other language learning strategies introduced to them. Another thing that can then become study material for decision makers about how the best curriculum can be presented for more optimal learning outcomes.

This study has certain implications for second language pedagogy. For one thing, what research of this sort may indicate is the necessity of raising awareness among language learners of the functions and usefulness of such strategies so that they become encouraged to select and use more appropriate strategies at various stages of learning their second language. However, this does not end in here. Awareness should also be built among language teachers to recognize the salient role of leaning strategies for language learners, and to be aware of the significance of factors such as gender and level of proficiency in the learner choice of strategy use. Such awareness would undoubtedly help language teachers in respecting individual differences among language learners and thus may lead them towards implementing a learner-centered class. There also exists an implication for syllabus designers and material developers in that realization of the significance of learning strategies should be incorporated into syllabi, textbooks, tasks and activities that not only requires the development of learning strategies but also use such strategies.

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