Language Learning Strategies Preferences of Sundanese EFL Learners

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Abstract

It is acknowledged that a strategy chosen by an individual to be employed in the process of learning a foreign language can determine the success of his foreign language mastery. Niles (1995), on the other hand, states that one's cultural background is influential towards the selection on what language learning strategies (LLS) are culturally appropriate for him. It means that every individual coming from different ethnics would possess differently preferred LLS. Although it is necessary to know the LLS preferences of certain ethnic groups in Indonesia, up to the present time, the study identifying this is still rare. Therefore, for the sake of providing information to the members of the group which are in the process of learning English as a foreign language and bridging them to reach success in such learning, this study is important to be conducted. Specifically, the objective of this study was directed principally on the language learning strategy choices of Sundanese EFL learners. The study intended to identify what LLS that were applied by Sundanese EFL learners while they were in the process of learning English as a foreign language. This study utilized the descriptive research model with a random sampling assignment involving thirty participants among the eight semester Sundanese students taking English education major at the English Language Teaching department of Ibn Khaldun University Bogor. The instrument used to collect the data was the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning questionnaire (SILL) – Version for Speakers of Other Languages Learning English--which is adapted from Oxford (1990). The result showed that Sundanese EFL learners highly used meta-cognitive strategies and cognitive strategies, meaning they always made use all of their mental processes and organized and evaluated their learning. Meanwhile, they did not really often employ compensation strategies and social strategies in the process of learning English language.

Keywords: Sundanese EFL learners, Language learning strategies, Cultural background

INTRODUCTION

Since the appearance of globalization era, English language learning has come to be seen and treated as a part of the people's trend of living. This can be seen from the phenomenon where most countries throughout the world formally include English subject in their curriculum. While informally people from many countries have started to take intensive English courses or even learn the language individually from books. This is proven by the survey conducted by the British Council (2007) in which 42 EFL countries under the investigation put a strong emphasis on the importance of learning English, particularly in the formal educational setting. Hsin, Hui and Ying (2006, p.2) state that "the advocacy of the government, the prosperity of English learning institutes, and the growing popularity to study or travel abroad are also considered as some of the influential factors that have made English to become the most desired foreign language to learn". Of course, in Indonesia, the similar trend of learning English is also no exception. English has been considered as a compulsory subject to be taught in all schools from lower secondary to upper secondary schools. Even in some elementary schools,

English is offered as an elective subject (Lengkanawati, 2004).

Learning English, especially for Indonesian where it is considered as a foreign language (EFL), is not as easy as it is compared to learning English in second language context (ESL). In EFL context, the process of learning English will be much more effectively carried out and mostly take place inside the classroom setting. In this case, English is learned so that the learners can use it when they are travelling or communicating with other people from different countries. On the other hand, ESL learners would have much opportunity to rehearse English as the target language because English is widely used in the surroundings (Alwasilah, 2004; Harmer, 2007). Therefore, there is a big possibility for them to be able to master the language in short period of time as they have supporting environment that could give significant contribution towards their progress on English language learning. Because of that reason, EFL learners are strongly suggested to posses their own language learning strategies (LLS) to help them improve their English language skills.

LLS are believed to be one of the determining factors that could assist English language learners to gain success in mastering the language. Since it is found to be highly crucial, up to the recent time, there has been numerous numbers of studies conducted by expert on LLS. Four of which are 1) a study done by Hsin, Hui and Ying (2006) in which they tried to identify the LLS use of applied foreign language students in one of the senior high schools in Taiwan, 2) a work of Rao (2006) where he made some efforts to analyze the frequency of overall strategy use by a group of Chinese university students and how it could connect the students' overall strategy use with their cultural and educational background, 3) a study done by Hou (2008) where he investigated the

language learning strategies use of 45 Chinese ESL students enrolled in the Ohio Intensive English Program (OPIE), and 4) Deneme's research (2008) which observed the language learning strategies choices of Turkish students when they were learning English. From all of the four mentioned studies, it could be generalized that their works focused on the identification of the choices of language learning strategies that were selected by students from different cultural background. It is in line with the findings of the research which was carried out by Niles (1995). Here, he identified the cultural impact on the selection of learners' language learning strategies. Surprisingly, he found considerable differences between culturally different learners.

Having inspired by the works of Niles (1995), Hsin, Hui and Ying (2006), Rao (2006), Hou (2008), and Deneme (2008), the writers decided to conduct a study which was aimed at investigating the LLS preferences of Sundanese EFL learners. Sundanese is one of the ethnic groups/ tribes in Indonesia. They are originally from and mostly live in the area of West Java, one of the provinces in Java Island. As a member of the group, the writers does expect that the result of this present study would be able to provide useful information to the rest members of the group which are in the process of learning English as a foreign language and bridge them to reach success in such learning.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

The term language learning strategies (LLS) has been defined by a number of well-known experts on the field and, as the consequences, has resulted various interpretation. Ellis (1996, p.529) describes that "LLS usually consisted of mental or behavioral activities related to some specific stages in the overall process of language

acquisition". Parallel with this, Cohen (1998) and Oxford (2003) propose an almost similar definition in which they explain that LLS is specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques, and other integrated processes that are chosen consciously by learners learning the language and further may result in the actions that the learners take to develop their own language learning. From all of these statements, it can then be concluded that the ultimate advantage of LLS is to enhance the process of an individual's language learning. Every strategy that one has determined to take will influence on either how good or how bad the progress of his own language learning is.

Talking about the classifications of LLS, Oxford (1990) divides it into two major categories, namely direct strategies and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are the LLS which require the direct involvement of the target language/ the language being learned. Further she explains that all direct strategies need mental processing of the language. One thing that has to be remembered is that the three groups of direct strategies (memory, cognitive, and compensation) do the processing in different ways and also for different objectives. Besides the direct strategies, she defines the indirect strategies as the strategies taken by language learners to support and manage their language learning process in which there is not a direct involvement of the language being learned. The indirect strategies include three sub-groups. They are meta-cognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. The detail explanation on the division of the two major classifications of the LLS can be seen in the following table.

Table 1
The Classifications of Language Learning Strategies (Oxford, 1990)

No	Major Classes	Sub-groups	Functions	Examples
1.	Direct Strategies	Memory strategies	Helping students store and retrieve new information	Creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, employing action
		Cognitive strategies	Enabling learners to comprehend and produce new language by many different means	Practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning, creating structure for input and output
		Compensation strategies	Allowing learners to use the language despite their often large gaps in knowledge	Guessing intelligently, overcoming limitations in speaking and writing
2.	Indirect Strategies	Meta-cognitive strategies	Allowing learners to control their own cognition—that is, to coordinate the learning process by using functions	Centering the learning, arranging and planning the learning, and making evaluation on the learning
		Affective strategies	Providing help to regulate emotions, motivations, and attitudes	Lowering anxiety, encouraging yourself, taking emotional temperature
		Social strategies	Helping students to learn through interaction with others	Asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others

Each strategy listed in the table above possesses its own typical function that could give a favor to language learners in gaining success to learning language. However, the choices of which strategy to select is a hundred percent on the learners' hands.

LLS choices and learners' cultural background

It is believed that the language learners' background of culture would have significant influence on what LLS they are about to choose when they are in the process of learning a language, in particular English. Several studies have proved that there is correlation between those two elements. Cited in Deneme (2008), Green in 1991 made a study that could be able to reveal the fact that 213 students taking English major at the University of Puerto Rico showed high use of meta-cognitive strategies and medium use of social, cognitive, compensation, affective and memory strategies whereas a different result found in the research done by Touba (1992) where meta-cognitive and memory strategies were highly used by Egyptian university students taking English major. The result also indicated poor use of cognitive strategies (Touba 1992, in Deneme 2008). These all strengthen the truth that every individual coming from different ethnics would possess differently preferred LLS.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Method

This was a small scale study which utilized the descriptive research model with a random sampling assignment involving thirty participants among the eight semester Sundanese students taking English education major at the English Language Teaching department of Ibn Khaldun University Bogor. The instrument used to collect the data was the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning questionnaire (SILL) – Version 7.0 for Speakers of Other Languages Learning English--which was adapted from Oxford (1990).

The version 7.0 of SILL was purposively designed as an instrument used to measure the frequency of the use of the LLS employed by ESL/ EFL learners. The reason behind choosing the version 7.0 of SILL was because it seemed to be the only one LLS instrument that has been extensively examined for reliability and validated in multiple ways (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995, p.4).

There are 50 items contained in the version 7.0 of SILL and they are characterized into six sub-groups: Items 1 to 9 are a part of memory strategies; items 10 to 23 belong to cognitive strategies; compensation strategies start from item 24 to 29; meta-cognitive strategies begin with the item no 30 to 38; items 39 to 44 are lists of affective strategies while the last 6 items, 45 to 50, are social strategies. The table below shows the 50 items contained in SILL Version 7.0.

Table 2
Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0
for ESL/ EFL Learners, (Oxford, 1990)

Sub-groups	Items	Statements
Memory Strategies	1	I think of relationships between when I already know and new things I learn in English
	2	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.
	3	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of a situation in which the word might be used
	4	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used

	5	I use rhymes to remember new English words
	6	I use flashcards to remember new English words
	7	I physically act out new English words
	8	I review English lessons often
	9	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign
Cognitive Strategies	10	I say or write new English words several times
	11	I try to talk like native English speakers
	12	I practice the sounds of English
	13	I use the English words I know in different ways
	14	I start conversations in English
	15	I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English
	16	I read for pleasure in English
	17	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English
	18	I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully
	19	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English
	20	I try to find patterns in English
	21	I find the meaning of an English word by dividing into parts that I understand
	22	I try not to translate word-for-word
	23	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English
Compensation Strategies	24	To understand unfamiliar words, I make guesses
	25	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures
	26	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English
	27	I read English without looking up every new word
	28	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English
	29	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing
Meta-cognitive Strategies	30	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English
	31	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me to do better
	32	I pay attention when someone is speaking English
	33	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English
	34	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English
	35	I look for people I can talk to in English
	36	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English
	37	I have clear goals for improving my English skills
	38	I think about my progress in learning English
Affective Strategies	39	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English
	40	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake
	41	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English
	42	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English
	43	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary
	44	I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English
Social Strategies	45	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again
	46	I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk
	47	I practice English with other students
	48	I ask for help from English speakers
	49	I ask questions in English
	50	I try to learn about culture of English speakers

Those 50 items listed on the table are evaluated using a five-point Likert scale which ranges from 1 to 5. The numbers are used to indicate the frequency of how often the ESL/ EFL learners employ the strategies when they are learning English as the target language. Scale '1' is for never or almost never true of me, scale '2' is for generally not true of me, '3' is somewhat true of me while '4' is generally true of me, and '5' shows always or almost always true of me.

Specifically, the objective of this study was directed principally on the language learning strategies choices of Sundanese EFL learners. The study intended to identify what LLS that were mostly applied by Sundanese EFL learners while they were in the process of learning English as a foreign language.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

After having finished with collecting the results of the version 7.0 of SILL questionnaires which were distributed to all of the thirty participants of this present study, the data analysis process was carried out. Eventually, it could reveal the fact about the frequency of the use of the preferred language learning strategies chosen by Sundanese EFL learners. Further and detail information is presented clearly on the following sub-topics.

The frequency on the use of memory strategies

It was found out that 66.6 % of the participants had medium intensity in employing the strategies listed on the memory strategies. The scales ranged from 2.5 to 3.4. It meant that there were 20 participants who sometimes used the strategies. Meanwhile, the total of the participants who usually used the strategies was lesser than that of the participants who sometimes used them. They only consisted of 10 participants which was actually 33.3 % for the whole percentage. The following table provides information on the detail.

Table 3
The frequency on the use of memory strategies

Level	Scales	Frequency
High	4.5 – 5.0	
	3.5 – 4.4	10
Medium	2.5 – 3.4	20
Low	1.5 – 2.4	
	1.0 – 1.4	

The frequency on the use of cognitive strategies

What has been obtained from the data analysis dealing with the frequency of the use of the cognitive strategies selected by Sundanese EFL learners when they were in the process of learning English was quite contradictory with that of the frequency on the use of memory strategies. 66.6 % of the participants getting involved in this study possessed a high intension in usually using the cognitive strategies whose range started from 3.5 to 4.4. Only 33.3 % from the overall participants, however, sometimes practiced the strategies. The table below illustrates the detail.

Table 4
The frequency on the use of cognitive strategies

Level	Scales	Frequency
High	4.5 – 5.0	
	3.5 – 4.4	20
Medium	2.5 – 3.4	10
Low	1.5 – 2.4	
	1.0 – 1.4	

The frequency on the use of compensation strategies

The result of the analysis showed that 10 % of the participants always made use of the compensation strategies. The scales ranged from 4.5 to 5.0. It meant that they all always made guessing when trying to comprehend unfamiliar English words. Additionally, they used gestures when they could not think of a word during a conversation in English, etc. Other findings indicated that 53.3 % participants used the strategies quite frequent and the rest 36.6 % sometimes used them. The distribution of the frequency can be seen as follows:

Table 5
The frequency on the use of compensation strategies

Level	Scales	Frequency
High	4.5 – 5.0	3
	3.5 – 4.4	16
Medium	2.5 – 3.4	11
Low	1.5 – 2.4	
	1.0 – 1.4	

The frequency on the use of meta-cognitive strategies

This strategy seemed to be the favorite strategy chosen by Sundanese EFL learners. This could be seen from the high intensity shown by them. This was represented by the fact that 20 % of the participants really loved to apply meta-cognitive strategies when learning English. 50 % included the strategy frequently in their daily English practices. Only 30 % or 9 participants occasionally executed the strategy. Following is the table.

Table 6
The frequency on the use of meta-cognitive strategies

Level	Scales	Frequency
High	4.5 – 5.0	6
	3.5 – 4.4	15
Medium	2.5 – 3.4	9
Low	1.5 – 2.4	
	1.0 – 1.4	

The frequency on the use of affective strategies

After taking a look at the result on the analysis of SILL version 7.0 responded by the thirty participants, it could be seen clearly that affective strategies were the only strategy that could resulted in varied responses regarding of the level of intensity it produced. However, the result did not show a significant use of affective strategies by Sundanese EFL learners in the English language learning activity. This could be seen from a really low

percentage of the use of these strategies where there was only 33.3 % of the whole

participants who liked to employ them.

Table 7
The frequency on the use of affective strategies

Level	Scales	Frequency
High	4.5 – 5.0	1
	3.5 – 4.4	9
Medium	2.5 – 3.4	14
Low	1.5 – 2.4	6
	1.0 – 1.4	

The frequency on the use of social strategies

Sundanese people are well-known with their friendliness and hospitality. They also have a high sense of making social relationship with others. This is also proved by the result on the analysis of their social strategies use in learning English as a foreign language. It was counted that there were 53.3 % of the participants had a really high intension in using the social strategies; either they

always or frequently used them. Then, it could be sum up that Sundanese EFL learners loved to learn English language through having interaction with others such as asking questions in English, practicing English with other students, even with native speakers, learning about culture of English speakers, and asking native English speakers to correct the mistakes when the learners themselves are using English.

Table 8
The frequency on the use of social strategies

Level	Scales	Frequency
High	4.5 – 5.0	3
	3.5 – 4.4	13
Medium	2.5 – 3.4	14
Low	1.5 – 2.4	
	1.0 – 1.4	

CONCLUSION

After all of the data analysis process finished and interpretations were made, a conclusion could be finally drawn. It was revealed that Sundanese EFL learners highly used meta-cognitive strategies and cognitive strategies, meaning they always made use all of their mental processes and organized and evaluated their learning. They only employed compensation strategies and social strategies not really often in the process of learning English language.

However, this study is only an early step. Further study on identifying language learning strategies preferences of other ethnic groups in Indonesia is also important to be conducted. Apart from

that, further study related to the same topic should use a larger sample so that the result can be used to generalize the preferred language learning strategies choices of the observed tribe.

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