Exploring English Language Students' Learning Strategies in Reading ELT Materials

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Abstract

This research aimed to reveal the type of language learning strategies dominantly used by the learners and the least type of learning strategies used by the learners. There were 10 students who were taken as the sample of participants. They are students who officially enrolled in Academic Reading Class in the second semester of English Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty (FKIP) Tanjungpura University in Academic Year 2016/2017. Questionnaire consisting of 40 statements was distributed for data collection which in turn were analyzed by using mean score calculation. The analysis of the data revealed that the mean score of metacognitive learning style was 4.0 which indicated that this type of learning strategy fell into the highest frequency used by the students. Meanwhile, the average score for cognitive strategies was 3.7 in which it is categorized as the second rank of the learning strategy mostly used by the learners. The analysis toward compensation strategy resulted 3.5 for the mean score, and the average score for affective and social strategy reached average at 3.1 and 3.0 respectively. By contrast, memory strategy is the least type of learning strategy used by the students, reaching the mean only at 2,9.

Keywords: EFL**,** Language Learning Strategies, Reading, ELT Materials

INTRODUCTION

Language learners vary on number of dimensions to do with learning strategy, style, motivation, aptitude, and also age. These dimensions are assumed to be significant contributors that determine the success or failure in acquiring language learning. However, among of these, learning strategy is considered as the utmost important contributes to learners' success.

There are some discussions triggering about the definition of learning strategy.

To begin with, learning strategies are defined as specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques, such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language tasks which is used by the students to enhance their own learning (Scarcella& Oxford, 1992, p. 63). O'Malley and Chamot (1990) defined LLS as a particular thoughts or behaviors that individual invested in themselves to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information. Similarly, Embi (2000)

asserted that LLS is 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. In other words, when the learners consciously choose the learning strategies that fit their learning style, these strategies become a useful tool for active, conscious, and purposeful self-regulation of learning. Chen (2014) also conducted a study concerning students' learning strategies in age differences; revealing that students employed oxford theory concerning learning strategies. The result of studies showed that students need to choose their learning strategies to make them aware in case of their learning. Learning strategies give much more opportunities for the learners to learn independently to become autonomous learners.

Meanwhile, Oxford (1990) offers a more comprehensive, systematic and detailed system of LLS which are classified into six different categories. Firstly, memory strategies are strategies that help learners to learn and retrieve new information (Oxford, 1990). Secondly, cognitive strategies are strategies that involve the manipulation or transformation of the learning materials/input (Oxford, 1990). The example of this kind of strategy is repetition, summarizing, using images, etc. (Dornyei 2005). Thirdly, compensation strategies allow learners to use the language despite their large limitations in knowledge, like inadequacy of grammar and vocabulary (Oxford, 1990).

Next, metacognitive strategies are strategies that aim at analyzing, monitoring, evaluating, planning, and organizing the learning process (Dornyei, 2005). Then affective strategies involve one's engaging in taking control of the emotional (affective) conditions and experiences (Dornyei, 2005). The last, social strategies are strategies thatbinvolve interpersonal behaviors to increase the amount of L2 communication (Dornyei, 2005).

Kumaravadivelu (2006) states that students experience more meaningful and practical learning if they know how to learn. It means that if the students have the awareness onthe way to learn materials; hence, they are going to get a better understanding.Morever, they can also consider the learning contents to be challenging and meaningful for them. As a result, the students are well-planned to "monitor their learning success" and improve their "learning potentials" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

With the above concepts in mind, it is

very essential for the students to manage their learning strategies for learning process. Students who have different learning strategies are presumably would behave differently in the way they perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment. Wang (2007, p. 410) points out that the information about students' learning strategy preference can help the teachers or lecturers become aware to the students' differences bring to the classroom.

However, most of the time, students unconsciously use such learning strategies during their learning, especially in reading comprehension. In fact, reading is a fundamental skill to improve area skills of students. The reading objectives invites the readers to understand of what being presented by the writer. Understanding here will not only know what being delivered, but also deep reference of specific information in the texts. Therefore, it involves particular learning strategies to achieve a critical level of reader.

Research on language learning strategies are scattered to proof that each learners have different style of learning that need to be taken into account by the teachers. Nikoopour, Farsani, &Neishabouri (2011) investigated the most preferred strategy used by EFL

students in Iran. The findings revealed thatin terms of overall strategy use, Iranian EFL learners are, in general, moderate strategy users. The results showed that Iranian EFL learners preferred to use metacognitive as the most frequently used language learning strategy and memory as the least frequently one. Another related study was conducted by Current study on students' language learning strategies was carried out by Wael, Asnur, Ibrahim (2018) aimed to explore learning strategies used by students in speaking performance. The result of this research showed that students of the third semester of English department frequently used memory strategies in learning speaking. The second was metacognitive strategies followed by social strategy in the third rank. The fourth was affective strategies and compensation strategies in the fifth rank and followed by cognitive strategy in the sixth rank.Another quite similar research on learning strategiesof foreign learners was conducted byAmir (2018) where the main interest is in investigating the language learning strategies of junior high school students in learning English. The findings of this study revealed that the eighth grades of junior high school students were moderate users of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. These students were reported to use reading strategies the

most while speaking were less used.

Previous studies have indicated thatlanguage learning strategies is profoundly essential for foreign learners. Therefore, this study aimed fill the gaps from the aforementioned research above, to reveal the language learning strategy used by the students for specific area of skill, that is in EFL Reading. It is presumably that reading is the most fundamental key to learn a foreign language because it can develop student's mind. Once they have developed their mind, they would increase their language skill as well. With regard to this matter, the problem of this research were divided into three; they are 1) what type of learning strategy is dominantly used by the students in EFL Reading? 2) what type of learning strategy is the least used by the students in EFL Reading?

METHOD

Research Design

The method used in this research is survey design. A survey research design is used to investigate, assess opinions and preferences in educational issues and problems. This design is considered the most appropriate method to measure attitudes, beliefs or personality structures in a natural setting through tests or attitudes scales or questionnaires (Leedy, 1993). In this research, the researcher was

intended to provide answers on the students' learning preferences in specified situation, that is while reading ELT materials. There were ten students who officially enrolled in Academic Reading Class were selected as the participants. It is based on the consideration that they had higher rank of GPA. The researcher intended to reveal what type of learning strategies was used by the students with high rank of GPA. With regard to the first and second research questions mentioned, the researcher tried to reveal the frequency of language learning strategies dominantly used and the least used by the students while reading English materials.

Respondents

There were 10 students taken as participants for this study. They are students who officially enrolled in Academic Reading Class in the second semester of English Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty (FKIP) Tanjungpura University in Academic Year 2016/2017.

Instruments

In term of data collecting, the researcher distributed the questionnaire to the participants. The questionnaire was adapted from Strategy Iventory for Language Learning (SILL) that was originally introduced by Oxford (1990). The SILL adapted from Oxford (1990)

originally has 50 statements. However, in this research, only 40 statements are taken while other statements which considered irrelevant to reading strategies were excluded. The questionnaire broke down into four parts. First part is memory strategies consisting of 10 questions, secondly is cognitive strategies with 12 total questions, compensation strategies consisting of 2 questions, metacognitive strategies consisting of 10 questions, affective strategies consisting of 10 questions, and there were 6 questions fall into the category of social strategies. Meanwhile, technically the participants of the research have to answer the questionnaire by giving checklist on the column provided. There were five options in each statement: number 1 means never or almost never, number 2 means usually, number 3 means sometimes, number 4 means usually, and number 5 means always. Below is the questionnaire used as a tool of data collection.

Data Analysis

In this research, the researcher did sorts of steps in data collecting technique to obtain the comprehensive data. In order to reveal the first and second questions of this research which intended to find out the language learning strategies mostly used and those the least used by the students in EFL Reading, the researcher used mean score calculation adopted from Sugiyono (2011).

$$Me = \frac{\sum xi}{n}$$

Notes:

Me :

$\sum xi$: the sum of language learning strategy chosen by students

N : total number of questions

The result from the mean formula then classified using into three levels: low frequency of language learning strategy used, medium frequency of language learning strategy used and high frequency of language learning strategy used. 1.0 to 2.4 indicated low frequency of language learning strategy use, 2.5 to 3.4 indicated medium frequency of language learning strategy use, and 3.5 to 5.0 indicated high frequency of language learning strategies used.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In order to answer the problem raised in this research, the researcher analyzed the data from ten students in Academic Reading Class of second semester in FKIP UNTAN Pontianak academic year 2015/2016. The data was taken from the students' score of learning strategy questionnaire adapted from SILL by Oxford (1990).

In terms of analyzing the data, there

were sorts of steps done by the researcher. Firstly, the learning strategies of students in reading ELT materials were determined by examining the mean score of each item for language learning strategy categories, they are: memory strategy, cognitive strategy, metacognitive strategy, compensational strategy, affective strategy, and social strategy. Those elements are based on Oxford's (1990) classifications of learning strategies. As for the overall mean score of learning strategies used by the students while reading ELT materials is shown 3.4. By referring back to the classification proposed by Oxford (1990), strategies between 2.5 to 3.4 are classified to medium level users. Meanwhile, the score that is lower than to 2.5 is stated as low and the score that is higher than 3.5 is stated as high category. Hence, the data were compared to Oxford's assigned mean score classification of high, low, and medium users. At the end, it resulted that the participants in this research are overall categorized as medium user. It is indicated that they are aware of language learning strategies, but they do not use learning strategies very frequently and effectively.

The data were further evaluated to record the frequency of six types of learning strategies mostly and the least used by the students. The frequency analysis showed that the average score across metacognitive strategy was identified as the major learning style used by the students. Interestingly, the data revealed that the mean score of metacognitive learning style was 4.0 which indicated that this type of learning strategy fell into the highest frequency used by the students. Therefore, this has answered the first problem raised (see Introduction) in this research, that the type of language learning strategies dominantly used by the students in reading ELT materials was metacognitive strategy.

The second most liked learning strategy is cognitive strategy with the average score 3.7. This is followed by compensational strategy, affective strategy and social strategy with the mean score 3.5, 3.1, and 3.0 respectively. However, the lowest mean score of 2.9 was obtained by memory strategy. This has answered the second problem raised in this study, that the least type of learning strategy used by the students was memory strategy. Considering the fact of data analysis, it shows that there is a high awareness of students' planning and evaluation. It also indicates the students do not only involve themselves during reading but also before and after reading. To make this clearer and easier to understand, the analysis will be illustrated in Figure 1.
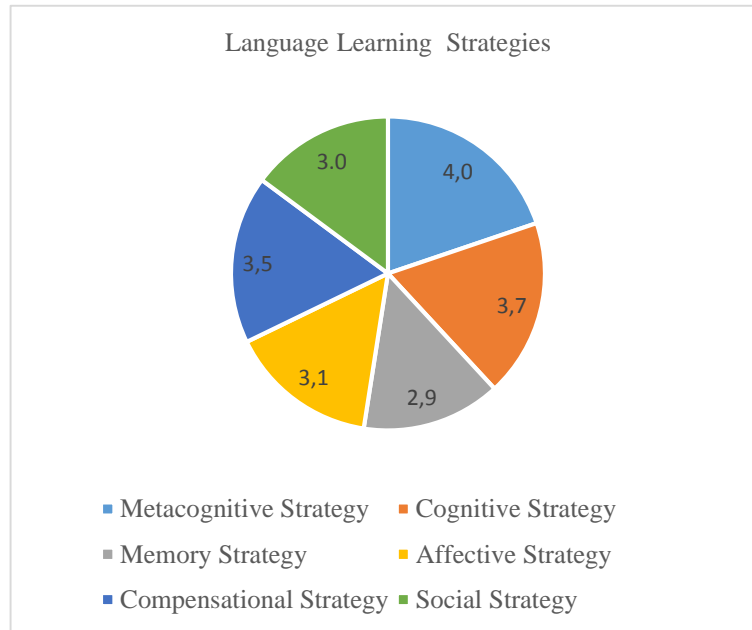
Figure 1. The Students' frequency of language learning strategies in reading ELT materials

The data has confirmed the initial study reporting metacognitive strategies as the highest frequency of learning strategies used by the students.Nikoopour, Farsani, &Neishabouri (2011) noticed that students in Iran preferred to use metacognitive as well. In this strategy, according to their research, students frequently employ all strategies that may help them in organizing and evaluating their language learning. Similarly, the students in that research is also considered less frequent to use memory strategy.This finding is also in line with the previous research findings of Oh (1992), Sheorey (1999), and Salahshour, et al. (2013) at which students make use of metacognitive strategy to have fixed preparation, control, and evaluation for their own stage of learning language (Graham, 1997; Zare, 2012).

Meanwhile, from the data analysis, it can be concluded that the least type of learning strategy used by the students was memory strategy. This result confirmed the study from Kitakawa (2008), revealing that memory strategy is used as the least frequent than the other strategies for Japanese students. However, from a study conducted in Japan, a significant different was on the major frequency of learning style was obtained by cognitive strategies while metacognitive was only in the third rank in the research. The fact that some initials study has confirm the same result, and to some extents showed different result, therefore it can be inferred that successful students learns in several different ways. On the whole, every student has certain degree of preferences in each type of learning strategies, and the

majority of them have dominance in one or more strategy of learning. Students tend not to like memorization, so memory strategy does not involve the most for students while obtaining new information on reading ELT materials. The memory strategy consisting of 10 statement, in which the highest mean score was from item no.8. It means that the students usually like to review the words to ease them comprehending their reading. They prefer to review the words to help them remember or retrieve the words. The result of this research also supported the study by Amir (2018) asserting that students were reported to use reading strategies the most.

CONCLUSION

As this article has outlined, language learning strategies, being specific actions, behaviors, tactics, or techniques, facilitate the learning of the target language by the language learner. All language learners, needless to say, use language learning strategies in the learning process. In this research, the finding has concluded that the participants of this research are a medium users of learning strategies. Interestingly, it is also found that metacognitive strategy is the type of strategy mostly used by the participants. Conversely, lowest frequency was on memory strategy, because students somewhat avoid memorization during reading activities.

The finding of research study in the area of language learning strategies provides greater understanding of strategy used among the students and support language instructors and curriculum developers to improve their approaches toward teaching and learning goals. In this regard, language instructors need to incorporate language learning strategies into their teaching methods and approaches, train the students to apply the appropriate strategy for a specific purpose or a specific skill area. The teachers, also have to encourage the students to use the strategies as frequently as possible. Students can learn to use language learning strategies to improve their language skills.

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