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LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES BY INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY OF GENDER ROLE

Shonia Galuh Ajeng

Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, Bristol, United Kingdom
shonia.ajeng@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aimed to find out the language learning strategies used by English study program students and its differences between male and female ones. This study was a case study research, and the data were collected by using demographic background questionnaire and in-depth interviews with the selected participants. The findings were explained by using the theory of language learning strategies by O'Malley and Chamot (1990), in which they divided language learning strategies into metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective strategies. The results showed that there were differences between male and female learners in the use of language learning strategies in each language skill, but there were also similarities. Even though they have the same strategies, but they tend to have different activity in the learning process. The findings presented that male learners used more metacognitive and social strategies than female students, while female learners used more cognitive strategies than male. Cognitive strategies were the most frequently used strategies by both genders, and metacognitive are the least used one. The implication of this research for teaching and learning are the lecturer may get new knowledge, and ways of teaching and the students may find a new strategy to improve their language skills in language learning process.

Keywords

EFL, Language Learning Strategies, Gender, Case Study

1. Introduction

Learning English is common for people in Indonesia because the ability of English skill is needed in many aspects, even though English is still a foreign language in this country. A foreign language is a language where it is not an official language, and the input of the language is limited. People learn a language other than their vernacular to get the communicative competence in the target language, which is to be mastered in the knowledge of the language and to be fluent in performing the language appropriately. In learning a second or foreign language, learners do some strategies to get their goals which can be considered as their learning strategies. Since the mid-1970s, numerous studies have been conducted about language learning strategies as it becomes widely recognised as the central element in several models of language learning. Research in language learning strategies has gained interest among researchers worldwide because it is one of the key factors in second language acquisition (Green & Oxford, 1995). Some researchers emphasise on the terms “conscious” in defining learning strategies. The learners consciously choose their strategy and employ it to facilitate their learning process (Cohen, 1998). It means that the learners do some activities or habits that they choose as their language strategies consciously. Similarly, Chamot (2004) defined Language Learning Strategies (LLS) as the conscious thought and action that learners take to achieve a learning goal. Thus definitions show that the students select particular strategies consciously and then make some efforts to attain their learning goals. Furthermore, Oxford (1990) stated that language learning strategies are precise efforts that the students make to create a less challenging, pleasant and more adjustable learning environment. She divided learning strategies into two broad categories, direct and indirect strategies (ibid.). Direct strategies are particular attempts that the learners do including using the language, while indirect strategies are strategies that support the language learning without directly using the language (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989).

The students of English study program at one public university in Indonesia learn English due to their education program, but they also have their goals in learning English. To achieve their targets, they make some efforts that can be considered as their learning strategies. This research was necessary because research exploring at learning strategies in EFL learning, especially in its differences because of gender role among Indonesian learners at the university level is rare. This matter motivated me to do this research, to investigate the

difference in learning strategies use between male and female Indonesian college students of English study program. Additionally, the finding of this study attempted to fill the gap in the literature theory related students' learning strategies at the college level.

Thus, I aimed to answer two research questions in this study:

1. What are the Indonesian EFL learners' learning strategies in their language learning?
2. How do male and female learners are different in the use of language learning strategies in their EFL learning?

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Learning Strategies in Language Learning

Linguists have proposed several definitions of learning strategies. Early on, language learning strategies were defined as particular attempts that the learners do to improve their linguistics and sociolinguistics competence in the second language (Tarone, 1983). Furthermore, Rubin (1987) stated that these strategies employed by the learners give direct impacts on their learning process. Additionally, she also identified two types of learning strategies: ones that provide a direct contribution to the learning process, and the other one that contributes indirectly (*ibid.*). Language learning strategies are also defined as a particular choice and attempt that people pick to assist them in understanding and to gain new knowledge (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). They had formulated a classification of language-learning strategies, which is widely used in SLA, there are metacognitive, cognitive and affective strategies (*ibid.*). Cohen (1990) insists that the plan should be selected consciously by the learners. Otherwise, it is not a strategy. It stated that students choose their learning strategies consciously. However, sometimes they may not consciously realise about their strategy, but they do some activity that they prefer it help them in learning to gain their goals.

2.1.1 Classifications of Language Learning Strategies

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) identify three categories of language learning strategies, i.e. metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective learning strategies. They defined metacognitive strategies as the strategies in which the learner plan their study process, keep track of it and then evaluate their study to determine whether they have achieved their goals or not (*ibid.*) iThe metacognitive learning strategies by O'Malley and Chamot and their definitions are as listed in the table below:

Table 2.1: *Classification of Metacognitive Strategies*

Learning Strategies	Description
Planning	Previewing the main ideas and concepts of the material to be learnt, often by skimming the text for the organising principle.
Directed attention	Deciding in advance to attend in general to a learning task and to ignore irrelevant distracters.
Functional planning	Planning for and rehearsing linguistic components necessary to carry out an upcoming language task.
Selective attention	Deciding in advance to attend to specific aspects of input; often by scanning for keywords, concept sand/ or linguistic markers.
Self-management	Understanding the conditions that help one learn and arranging for the presence of these conditions.
Monitoring	Checking one's comprehension during listening or reading and checking the accuracy and appropriateness of one's oral or written production while it is taking place.
Self-evaluation	Checking the outcomes of one's language learning against a standard after it has been completed

(Source: O'Malley and Chamot (1990:119))

O'Malley and Chamot (1990:44) defined cognitive strategies as the strategies that operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning". The cognitive strategies identified by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and their definitions are listed in the table below:

Table 2.2: *Classification of Cognitive Strategies*

Learning Strategies	Description
Resourcing	Using target language reference materials such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias, or textbooks
Repetition	Imitating a language model, including open practice and silent rehearsal
Grouping	Classifying words, terminology, or concepts according to their attributes or meaning.
Deduction	Applying rules to understand or produce the second language or making up rules based on language analysis.

Imagery	Using visual images (either mental or actual) to understand or remember new information.
Auditory representation	Planning back in one's mind the sound of a word, phrase, or longer language sequence.
Keyword method	Remembering a new word in the second language by (1) identifying a familiar word in the first language that sounds like or otherwise resembles the new word and (2) generating easily recalled images of some relationship with the first language homonyms and the new word in the second language.
Elaboration	Relating new information to prior knowledge, relating different parts of new information to each other or making meaningful personal associations with the new information.
Transfer	Using previous linguistic knowledge or prior skills to assist Comprehension or production.
Differencing	Using available information to guess the meaning of new items, predict outcomes, or filling missing information.
Note-taking	Writing down key words and concepts in abbreviated verbal, graphic, or numerical form while listening or reading.
Summarizing	Making a mental, oral, or written summary of new information gained through listening or reading.
Recombination	Constructing a meaningful sentence or larger language sequence by combining known elements in a new way.
Translation	Using the first language as a base for understanding and producing the second language

(Source: O'Malley and Chamot (1990:119-120))

Finally, social/affective strategies are referred to as —a broad grouping that involves either interaction with another person or ideational control over affect. The social/affective strategies identified by O'Malley and Chamot and their definitions are as listed in the table below:

Table 2.3: *Classification of Social Strategies*

Learning Strategies	Description
Questioning for clarification	Eliciting from a teacher or peer more additional explanations, Rephrasing, examples, or verification.

Cooperation	Working together or with one or more peers to solve a problem, pool information, check a learning task, model a language activity, or get feedback on oral or written performance.
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(Source: O'Malley and Chamot (1990:120))

There is also another strategy in social/affective theories that is not mentioned in the table along with the other strategies, but it is referred to in another page of the book. The approach is called “self-talk” which defined as “using the mental control to assure one that a learning activity will be successful or to reduce anxiety about a task” (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990:45).

2.2 Previous studies on gender differences in language learning strategies in EFL learning

Saville and Troike (2006) stated that there are several factors which affect ones' learning strategies, for instance, motivation, cognitive style, personality, age, gender, and aptitude. Many research has been conducted in the field of sex differences in the use of language learning strategies by second language learners. Green and Oxford (1995) discovered that women use strategies more frequently than males. Moreover, gender differences are reflected in the type of strategy used by men and females. Researchers found that women use more social strategies (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989), also try to involve more in conversations and try to get as many inputs as possible (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989), and employ their memory strategy more (Khalil, 2005) than the opposite gender.

On the other hand, the researcher found that sex gave no impact in both the number and types of the strategy used by bilingual foreign language learners in Singapore (Wharton, 2000). Again, this might be attributable to the language learning abilities of bilingual students which may have nullified any gender difference. According to one study, females reported more use of a private, non-oral mode (Bacon and Finnemann, 1992). Oxford and Ehrman (1988) summarised findings from several studies and concluded that, typically, not only do women use more learning strategies than men, but they also use them more often. R. Ellis (1994) reported on research that indicated that females might, in general, be more motivated to learn a second language and may have more positive attitudes toward speakers of the second language (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). There is another research that reveals learners' gender and their language proficiency play a significant role in the choice of their learning strategies (Dongyue, 2004). The findings discovered that females use more strategies in their overall learning and are better at handling their emotions than men.

The other researchers that tried to investigate the role of gender in language learning are Bozinovic and Sindik (2010); they discovered that there are statistically significant differences in the frequency of the learning strategy use: memory strategies are most frequently used ones, while cognitive strategies are the least often used and gender plays a significant role in the use of learning strategy, where the female sex more often uses all types of learning strategies, apart from socio-affective strategies. Min (2012) conducted research at one senior high school in China to investigate the relationship between gender and learning strategies used by the students at that school. She found that female students used more learning strategies and at a greater frequency than boys.

Based on the previous research, there was only few research observed learning strategies intensely focusing on each language skill. The previous researchers only investigated learners' language learning strategies. Furthermore, research on this topic in Indonesia is rarely to find. Additionally, many studies utilised quantitative design. Thus, this study attempted to fill the gap and be one of the new points why this research should be conducted. There were two reasons to support this research to be done. Firstly, this study used a qualitative design that is rarely used by other researchers in research site. Additionally, qualitative design gave in-depth understanding to the research problem. After that, previous studies were observed language learning strategies in each language skill was still limited. In brief, the reasons to conduct these ideas were clear, and it was hoped to give new solutions on English study program students' in research site.

3. Research Methodology

The participants in this study were the five male and five female students of 6th semester of English study program at one university in Indonesia. In this study, for data collection, I used demographic questionnaires to find the intended participants and then I did interviews to answer the research questions. Demographic questionnaires were elicited personal and biographical data, and interview questions were adapted from Oxford's SILL questionnaire that is used to find out someone's language learning strategies in EFL learning. The recorded interview data were transcribed. Then the data were divided based on participants' gender. A qualitative design with a case study approach was used in this study because the researcher needs in-depth information to reach the purpose of the study, and need to explore the facts to get a comprehensive result.

4. Findings and Discussions

Within this study, there were many various data from the participants' answer that found to enrich the result of this research, but the researcher related those data to the research questions of this research and divided those data into some themes. Based on the data analysis, I found that there were four major related to learners' learning strategies in listening skill and three major themes in speaking. Three major themes in reading and two in writing. Six major themes in grammar, four in pronunciation and seven in vocabulary. The findings above showed the learners' learning strategies in each language skill and language components, and in this section, the researcher presented the differences in learning strategies between male and female students. I found that there are similarities and differences in the use of language strategies and also in the activities that the learners did to improve their English skills. The similarities and differences between male and female students in the use of language learning strategies are presented in the table below:

Table 4.1: Theme and Sub-theme in similarity and differences between male and female learners' learning strategies

Male Learners		Female learners	
Theme	Sub-theme	Theme	Sub-theme
Learners' strategies in listening skill			
Imagery	Watching English movies	Imagery	Watching English movies
Auditory-representation	Listening music	Auditory-representation	Listening music
		Self-management	Set a comfortable condition to learn
		Note-taking	Take a note while listening
Learners' strategies in speaking skill			
Cooperation	Speak English with friends	Cooperation	Speak English with friends
	Make a group to practice speaking		
			Debating with friends
		Repetition	Imitating native speaker while listening
Self-talk	Speak to his self when doing the activity		
Learners' strategies in reading skill			

Resourcing	Read English novels, books, comics and passages	Resourcing	
			Read science and fiction books and newspaper
Cooperation	Discussion in group		
		Grouping	Classify the structure of the text
Learners' strategies in writing skill			
Recombination	Write a diary and simple essay	Recombination	Write a diary and simple essay
	Write something in social media		Write something in social media
Self-management	Using computer		
Learners' strategies in grammar			
Resourcing	Read book	Resourcing	Read anything that suitable for learning
			Read newspaper
		Deduction	Apply the formula in learning grammar
Repetition	Repeat from what have been heard		
Imagery	Watching YOUTUBE		
Functional planning	Do exercise in TOEFL test		
Recombination	Practice grammar by speaking and writing		
Learners' strategies in pronunciation			
Cooperation	Practice with friends	Cooperation	Practice with friends
Repetition	Imitate native speaker	Repetition	Repeat from what have been heard from movies, song and friends
Questioning for clarification	Ask the interlocutor		
		Resourcing	Read a lot
Learners' strategies in vocabulary			

Resourcing	Read English textbooks	Resourcing	Read English textbooks
Keyword method	Memorise new vocabulary	Keyword method	Memorise new vocabulary and its meaning
Cooperation	Get involved to English study group community		
Translation	Translate new vocabulary into Bahasa Indonesia		
		Imagery	Playing games
		Questioning for clarification	Ask friend about new vocabulary
		Note-taking	Take a note about new vocabulary and try to find the meaning

In listening skill, both male and female learners had cognitive strategies; those are imagery and auditory representation. Both male and female students usually watched movies and listened to music to improve their listening ability, because they thought that it is the simplest and pleasing way to do, as they could listen to music everywhere and every time they want. Watching movies was also helping, because it was a pleasing way to do, as most of them love movies. When they were listening to music and watching movies, they made their ears familiar to hear to native speakers, how they say words, and it also helpful for their pronunciation and speaking skill. The difference between male and female strategies in listening skill was that female learner had the other strategies which are self-management and note-taking. One of the women in this study has a metacognitive strategy that was self-management, where she set comfortable environment when she wanted to practice her listening skill, while male didn't have this activity. Another female learner preferred to take a note while she was listening something, so she would not quickly forget the information that she got.

Both male and female students had a cognitive strategy that was cooperation strategies in speaking skill. They preferred to practice their speaking with their friends because they could share each other and also could measure their ability in speaking. But there was a difference in the activity, that male learner made discussion groups to share the idea, while one of the female students that used this strategy preferred to join debate community, because she thought that in debating she also could practice her critical thinking. The difference between male and female strategies in speaking skill was that one of the male learners has a

social strategy that was self-talk, while one of the women has a cognitive strategy that was repetition. To practice his speaking, one of those male students usually talked to him because it could make him feel more confident if he practised it before speaking to other people. Meanwhile, female student imitated native speakers' utterances when she was listening something. She believed that this way helps her in improving her verbal skill.

Both genders had resourcing strategy in reading ability, in which it is included in the cognitive strategy. The learners improved their reading ability by reading as many as possible because they believed that they have to read more to improve their reading ability. The difference between male and female learners was in the book choice; male students preferred to read English novels, books, comics and passages, while female learners preferred to read science and fiction books and newspaper. The difference between male and female strategies in reading skill was that one of the boys has another cognitive approach that was cooperation. To improve his reading ability, he made a group to discuss the information that he has read. He preferred to do this activity because he could get more information from his friend as they discussed together. One of the female learners had another cognitive strategy that was grouping. She preferred to classify the structure of the text, as it made her easier in understanding the text that she read. If she already knew about the structure, then it helped her in understanding the content of the passage. She preferred this activity to improve their reading skill.

In writing ability, the learners had the same strategy in cognitive strategy which was recombination. To improve their writing ability, they thought that they have to write as many as possible. They tried to write something by combining the knowledge that they already have. They usually wrote an essay as their task in their campus, and they also wrote something on their social media. But one of the male learners used to write a diary to improve his writing skill; while there were none of the female students did this activity. The difference between male and female strategies in writing ability was that one of the boys had a metacognitive strategy that was self-management. He preferred to use a computer to help him in improving his writing skill. In his point of view, using a computer made him easier in writing, and there were none of the female learners did this activity.

To improve their grammar, both male and female students had a cognitive strategy that was resourcing. They used the sources that were written in English because they believed that credible sources could give them useful information in grammar. But there was the difference in the choice of sources; male learners preferred to choose a book while female students preferred to choose newspaper and anything that suitable for their learning. The difference

between male and female strategies in grammar was that male students had more strategies than female learners. Male students had three cognitive strategies those were imagery, repetition, and recombination, and one metacognitive strategy that was functional planning. One of the boys have imagery strategy; he preferred learning grammar by watching YouTube. According to him, YouTube provided much information about grammar, and discovered grammar through YouTube was enjoying for him. The other one of male learners have repetition strategy in learning grammar; he studied by repeating what he has heard. Another cognitive strategy was recombination, where one of the learners studied grammar by practising his speaking and writing. In functional planning strategy, one of the male students planned his grammar learning by doing exercise in TOEFL test. Female students had a cognitive strategy that was a deduction. In learning grammar, some of the women learnt by the formula of the tenses, and some of them even memorise it. They thought that if they already know the formula of the tenses, then it will be easier for them in understanding the grammar.

To improve their pronunciation, both male and female learners had one cognitive strategy that was repetition and one social strategy that was cooperation. In repetition strategy, they imitated from what they already heard to improve their pronunciation and worked together with their friends in cooperation strategy to practice their pronunciation so that they could improve it. They felt better when they consult with their friend. They selected the students that they think he or she was better than them. They thought that if their friends said that their pronunciation is correct, then it is correct. The difference between male and female learners in pronunciation learning was that boys had another one social strategy that was questioning for clarification, while the female has a cognitive strategy that was resourcing. Some of the males preferred to ask their interlocutor about their pronunciation, whether it was correct or not. This way helped them in improving their pronunciation. One of the female learners preferred to read books to improve her pronunciation. She thought that if she read a lot, then she would be able to improve her pronunciation.

To improve their vocabulary, both male and female learners had two cognitive strategies; those were keyword method and resourcing. Both of them memorised new vocabularies that they got, and also remembered its meaning. This way helped them in improving their vocabulary. They also had resourcing strategy where they read English textbook to enhance their vocabulary because they would find new vocabularies while reading. The more they read, the more vocabularies that they get. The difference between male and female learners in improving their vocabulary was that male had two cognitive

strategies those were cooperation and translation, while female students had two cognitive strategies, those were imagery and note-taking, and one social strategy that was questioning for clarification. One of the males preferred to get involved in an English speaking community to improve his vocabulary because in the community he could share the idea and get many vocabularies, and another one of male learners preferred to translate new vocabularies that he got into Bahasa Indonesia to understand the vocabularies. In the other hand, one of the female preferred to play games to improve her vocabulary, because when she was playing games, she could get many new vocabularies. Another woman preferred to take a note when she got new vocabulary; by taking note, she thought that it would be easier for her to improve her vocabulary. The other one of female learners took the easiest way when she found new vocabularies; she asked her friend to understand the words.

Related to the previous studies, Saville and Troike (2006) state that learning strategies are strongly influenced by the nature of motivation, cognitive style, personality, age, sex, and aptitude. In this study, the researcher focused on the role of gender in the use of language learning strategies. According to Ehrman and Oxford (1989), female learners tend to use more social learning strategies than male students, but in this study, I found the different data, that man tend to use more social strategies rather than a woman. I also found that male students use more social strategies than female students in their language learning strategies. Male used social strategies in improving speaking skill, reading skill, grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary learning, while female students only used social strategies in developing speaking skill, pronunciation and vocabulary. Male students felt if they worked together it would help them be better in language learning. This condition also could be influenced by students' perspective in language learning, male pupils thought that it would be better if they have partners to share the idea and practice the language use, so in learning, they tend to cooperate with their friends to improve their language skills and competencies.

Nowadays, male learners thought that being dominant among the other male pupils at their educational environment was not such a good condition. They thought that it was useless if you were fluent in English but your friends were not because it would make you have nobody to practice your skill in your environment, so they rather choose to study together, while female learners used more cognitive strategies than male students. This condition might be influenced by the female perspective that they wanted to be dominant in the classroom, so they rather learn by choosing the strategies that they realise it would make their language skill improved. There was like a hidden competition among female learners in learning achievement. They tried to get a better score than their friends in the classroom.

Female students liked to get the lecturer attention when they could show their ability in front of the teacher. They are likely to have less social strategies because they are an individualist in learning.

These findings were also different with the data from Min (2012); she found that female students used more learning strategies than boys, but in this study, I found that male learners use more learning strategies than female learners. The result might be different because of the level of the participants was different, college students mindset was likely to be different from high school students', and this condition also might be influenced by the differences in culture between Indonesian and Chinese. Bozinovic and Sindik (2010) found that memory strategies are most frequently used ones, while cognitive strategies are the least often used. In this study I found the different data, that cognitive strategy is the most commonly used strategies. Most participants have cognitive strategies in all of language skills and competencies, except for male learners in speaking ability, they only have social strategies.

According to Oxford (1990), cognitive strategies are the most popular strategies among language learners and these strategies were the most frequently used ones by the students. I found the same data in this study, that cognitive strategy were the most commonly used ones by the students, both of male and female. There is also other similarities with the previous research that Oxford (1990) reported that despite the importance of metacognitive strategies, students rarely or unconsciously use these strategies. In this study, the researcher also found that metacognitive strategies are the least used strategies. There only two metacognitive strategies utilised in this study, there were self-management and functional planning. Male learners used these strategies in improving writing skill and grammar, while female students only used this approach in developing the listening ability.

In conclusion, the language learning strategies used by the participants were not too different between male and female learners, but even though they have the same strategies, some of the activities that they choose were different. In this study also found that male students used more metacognitive and social strategies than female learners, but female learners used more cognitive strategies than male learners.

5. Conclusions and Suggestions

5.1 Conclusions

Findings in this study indicated that male students used more metacognitive and social strategies than female learners, while female learners used more cognitive strategies than

male. Cognitive strategies were the most frequently used strategies by the learners, and metacognitive are the least used one. It will be better if in the future both lecturer and students work together to find new activity in the learning process to make both of teacher and students more motivated so that the learning goals can be achieved. There are many aspects can be investigated for the future research, but there will be a good topic for that the next researcher, that is about the effectiveness of students' strategies toward their learning process in each of language skills.

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