Identifying Language Learning Strategies of Secondary School Students in Learning English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract: Knowing students' language learning strategies is very important in teaching a foreign language. The purpose of this study is to identify language learning strategies used by secondary school students in learning English as a foreign language. The participants of this study were 31 secondary school students in Singkawang. The questionnaires developed by Gursoy (2013) were used as the instrument of data collection in this study. The questionnaires consist of four factors in learning a foreign language, i.e., cognitive and metacognitive strategies and two social-languages, strategies to improve language learning, strategies of facilitation of the reception and production of the target language, and strategies for the consolidation of the target language. Overall, the result of the study shows that the students have strong strategies to study English as a foreign language. By knowing students' strategies in learning a language is very important to teachers because it can give much information to the teachers for planning their teaching.

Keyword: language learning strategies, foreign language, secondary school, students

INTRODUCTION

This study was conducted in Singkawang, West Kalimantan, investigating the language learning strategy of secondary school students. This research is inspired by the fact of the negative result of the English final examination in the school year 2018/2019. According to the Department of Education of Singkawang, Singkawang is in the seventh position of twelve regencies and two municipalities in West Kalimantan.

English is one of the most difficult subjects faced by the students in secondary school besides Mathematics and Science. Language learning can be frustrating in some cases (Hismanoglu, 2000). They have to master four skills of the languages, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Besides, they also have to know the essential elements (sound, vocabulary, and grammar) of a language (Zhi-liang, 2011).

Mastering four skills is hard work for the students in Singkawang because the position of English is as a foreign language, English is not used in society. English is learned only in the classroom, whereas the setting of the EFL class is usually multilingual and living in the own country (Krieger, 2005). The feeling of strangeness can be evoked by a foreign language. In some other cases, L2 learners may have negative feelings about native speakers of L2 (Hismanoglu 2000).

Students feel frustrate in mastering this subject even though they know the importance of learning the English language. The simplest reason why they want to master the English language is they will pass the final examination if they can master it well. In fact, they face many difficulties in mastering that language. They do not know how to master English well. It is also caused by the way the teachers teaching. Teachers often teach the English language in a traditional way. Teachers also think that students can achieve the English by themselves. Teachers do not present the material according to the learning strategy of the students.

Learning strategy is important to the students and plays an important role in learning a foreign language (Adnan et al., 2004). Learning strategy is very helpful to the students to make learning easier, faster, and more enjoyable (Oxford, 1990). They will achieved the knowledge easily if they aware and use their learning strategy. In mastering a foreign language, using language learning strategy is very useful if we want to understand the language well. Identifying language learning strategy of the students also can make teachers prepare the material correctly.

The main purpose of this study was to identify the learning strategy of secondary school students. There is only one research questions of this study, i.e., what are the learning strategies used by the secondary school students in mastering English? This question is very important as the information for English language teachers to know learning strategies used by his/her students in mastering English, so that they can teach English based on their students' learning strategies.

Every student has a strategy in understanding a lesson to achieve the purpose of their learning (Hardan, 2013). Besides, by using learning strategy, students also can improve their motivation in learning (Protheroe & Clarke, 2008). There are various definitions of learning strategies based on the experts. Learning strategy is a mental procedure that is used to promote learning and which sometimes can be observed as an overt activity (Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999). Oxford (1990, cited in Gürsoy & Eken, 2018, p. 44) defines learning strategy as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations."

According to (Shi, 2017, p.24), learning strategies can be defined as the efforts which are used by the students to enhance their learning. Then, Schumaker and Dahler (2006) cited in (Protheroe & Clarke, 2008, p. 34) define a learning strategy as "an individual's approach to a task. It includes how a person thinks and acts when planning, executing and evaluating performance on a task and its outcomes". Next (Mariani, 2002, p. 46) states that learning strategies are any action that is taken to solve the problem in learning, to get benefit from the learning process, to develop the cognitive, affective, and social behavior maximally.

Oxford (1990, in Richards & Renandya, 2002), differentiates learning strategies into following categories, that is, cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social.. A cognitive strategy is related to the identification, retention, and retrieval of language elements. Then, a metacognitive strategy is the strategy deals with the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of language learning activities. Next, an affective strategy is a strategy that serves to regulate emotions, attitudes, and motivation. Last, the social strategy refers to actions learner take to interact with users of the language.

As we have seen from the definitions above, it can be stated that learning strategies are the approach used consciously by a student to achieve his/her learning goals effectively. Foreign or second language is a subject that must be learnt. Students also have the strategy when learning it. The strategy that students use when learning a language is called language learning strategies. Same to the learning strategy, language learning strategies are also defined differently by many researchers. Foreign or second language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques used consciously by the students to improve their foreign or second language knowledge (Oxford, 1994, p. 3; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989).

Language learning techniques have several qualities, according to (Oxford, 1990), such as leading to the main purpose of communicative maturity, encouraging learners to become more self-directed, extending the role of instructors, problem-oriented, practical actions taken by the learner, including several facets of the learner, not just the cognitive, promoting learning, both directly and indirectly.

Language learning strategies has two kinds of systems, that is, direct and indirect strategies. Both of these systems support each other. In a variety of particular tasks and circumstances, direct strategies include the language itself. Direct strategies include recall strategies to recall and recover new information, cognitive strategies to learn and generate the language, and, amid knowledge deficits, compensation strategies to use the language.

On the other hand, for general learning management, indirect strategies are used, including metacognitive strategies for learning process coordination, affective strategies for emotional regulation, and relational strategies for learning with others. As s/he increasingly becomes more responsible for her/his learning experience, the learner will ultimately use all forms of techniques.

Besides, many researchers connect language learning strategies with good language learners. Rubin describes the profile of successful language learners as follows (in Oxford & Nyikos, 1989, p. 29):
1. they are eager and precise guessers;
2. have a strong, persevering drive for communication;
3. are often uninhibited and willing to make mistakes in order to learn or communicate;

4.   focus on form by looking for patterns, classifying, and analyzing;
5.   take advantage of all practice opportunities; and
6.   monitor their own speech and the speech of others; and pay attention to meaning.

Then, some experts describe the strategies used by successful language learners to learn a foreign or second language (Naiman, Frohlich, and Tedesco in Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). They are:

1.   selecting language situations that allows one's [learning] preferences to be used;
2.   actively involving oneself in language learning;
3.   seeing language as both a rule system and a communication tool;
4.   extending and revising one's understanding of the language;
5.   learning to think in the language;
6.   addressing the affective demands of language learning.

METHOD

The study took place at a Junior High School located in the City of Singkawang. In this school, English language is not only taught as main subject, but also as an extracurricular subject. Prior to collecting data, permission was given by the school principal.

The subject of this research is year eight D students. The reason why the researcher choose grade eight because of they have learn English language as long as one year in secondary school as an adaptation and they still have two years before facing the final examination. It means that teachers still have time to know the language learning strategies of his/her students. The questionnaires were distributed to around 31 students of grade eight. The questionnaire was filled in the class, and returned after they have answered it.

The questionnaire consists of 30 items developed by Gursoy (2013) was used as the instrument of data collecting. The researcher translates this questionnaire into Bahasa Indonesia in order to prevent confusion of the students when answering the questions.

There are four factors in questionnaire; first factor (10 items) is composed of cognitive and metacognitive strategies and two social strategies. Second factor (8 items) is strategies are used to improve language learning. The third factor (7 items) is composed of strategies used for the facilitation of the reception and production of target language. Then the fourth factor (5 items) is the strategies used for the consolidation of the target language (Gursoy, 2013).

In this questionnaire, respondents were asked to choose one answer out of three that best reflects their idea by using the tick (√) symbol. These responses were "Yes", "Sometimes", and "No". From the result of the questionnaires, the researcher only finds the percentage of students' language learning strategy and used MS. Excel 2007 to analyze the data.

Qualitative method was used in analyzing the data in this study. It is because there is no statistical analysis in this study. The researcher only wanted to find the percentage of the students' results according to the questionnaire.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The students' overall responses are presented in the diagram. There are four diagrams presented in this study based on the factors in the questionnaire developed by Gursoy (2013). The result of the study, overall, indicated that the students have the good strategies in learning a language, even though in the third and fourth factors the number of students' percentage in "Sometimes" is higher than "Yes".

The first diagram shows two social strategies and the cognitive and metacognitive strategies. In this diagram, 51% students use cognitive, metacognitive and two social strategies in learning language. 43% students sometimes use them and only 6% students never use these strategies in learning language.
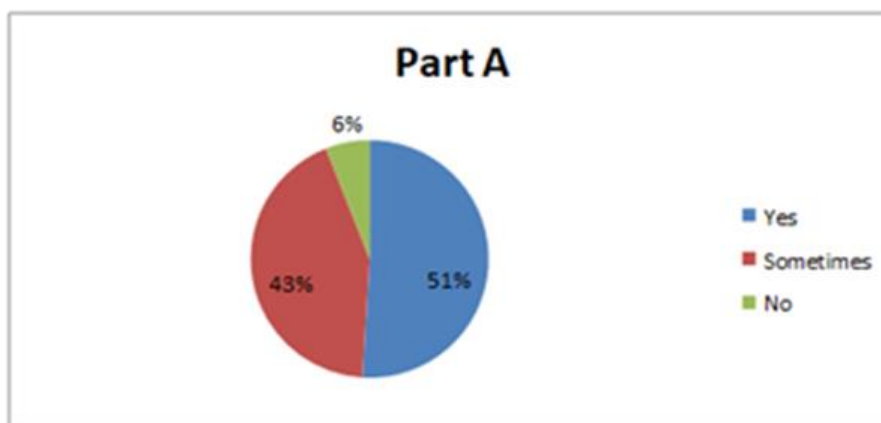
**Figure 1.** Cognitive and Meta Cognitive Strategies and Two Social Languages

The second diagram shows the students strategies to improve their language learning. From this diagram, the percentage of response "Yes" and "Sometimes" are same. There are 46% students responded in these two responses and only 8% students gave the answer with "No" response.

Figure 2. Strategies to Improve Language Learning

There are 37% students responded with "Yes" response in the third factor of the questionnaire. 42% students responded with "Sometimes" and 18% students answered with "No" response. In this factor, the graph shows the strategies for facilitating the reception and development of the target language.
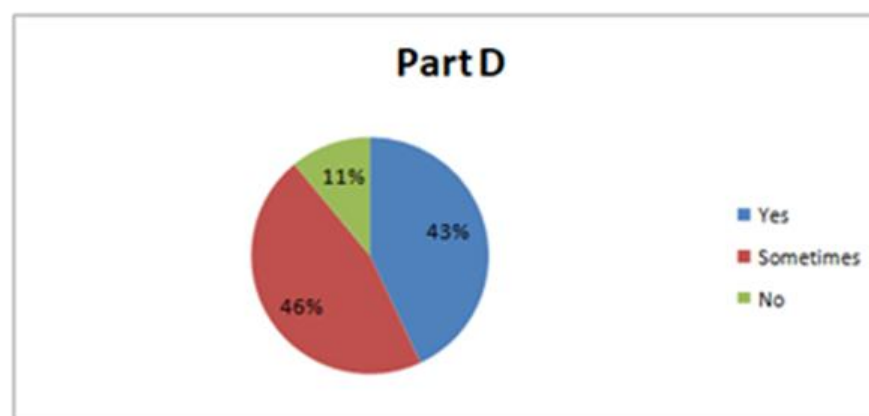

Figure 3. Strategies of Facilitation of the Reception and Production of Target Language
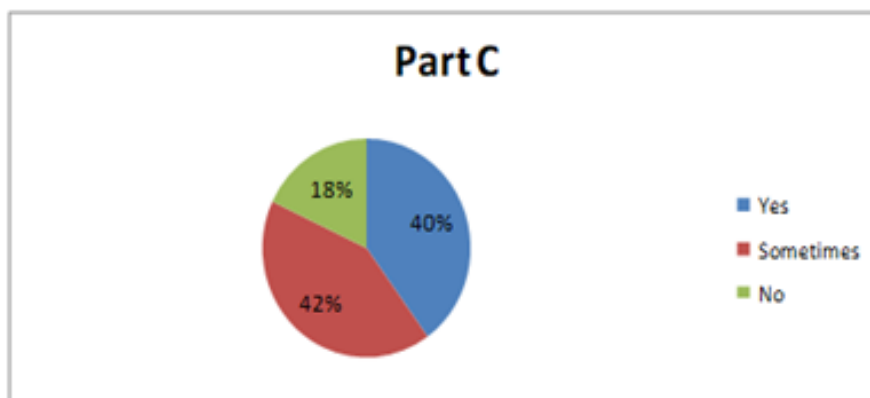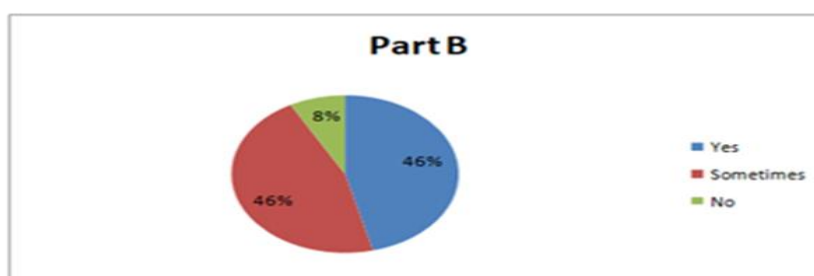
The fourth diagram shows the students strategies that used for the consolidation of target language. In this factor, the "Sometimes" response is the highest than two responses that is 46%, 43% students responded with "Yes" and 11% students responded with "No".

Figure 4. Strategies for the Consolidation of Target Language

This study focused to identify language learning strategies of secondary school students. Interestingly based on the questionnaire delivered to the students, the students have the good strategies in learning a language. It means that teachers have got the information of how their students learn a language especially foreign language.

The most important thing from the result of this research, teachers can deliver the material effectively to their students and the students have a chance to develop their knowledge about English language successfully. As Oxford (1990) said, learning strategy is very helpful to the students to make learning easier, faster, and more enjoyable.

This research also tells us that cognitive, metacognitive and two social strategies almost used by secondary students in learning English. For example, learners use new vocabulary in context to correctly pronounce it, review one mistake during speaking practices, or ask others to correct one's mistakes (Gursoy, 2013). It means that students need the collaborative learning in learning a language. Teachers should facilitate learning so that the goals of teaching and learning process can be achieved successfully.

Then, the strategies to improve language learning also used by the students for example students re-read the books that were read before; use other books or CDs to learn about language. It means that teachers should give many materials to improve his/her students in mastering English. Various materials in learning can make students enjoy in learning.

On the other hand, students often use strategies for facilitating the reception and development of the target language and strategies for consolidating the target language. It means that teachers have to explain the important of these strategies, so that the students will always use this strategy in learning a foreign language.

Finally, knowing students' strategies in learning a language is very important to the teachers. It can give much information to the teachers to plan a better way of teaching.

CONCLUSION

The most significant aspect of this study's findings are the teachers can effectively teach their students the material and the students have the opportunity to successfully expand their English language knowledge. In addition, this research reveals that secondary students almost exclusively employ cognitive, metacognitive, and two social strategies when learning English.

In addition, this research reveals that secondary students almost always employ cognitive, metacognitive, and two social strategies when learning English. The students also employ strategies to enhance language acquisition, such as reading previously read books again; Learn about languages by using additional books or CDs. On the other hand, students frequently employ strategies for consolidating and facilitating the reception and development of the target language. Lastly, teachers place a high value on

knowing how students approach language learning. It can provide teachers with a lot of information to plan a better way to teach.

This report reveals only the language learning strategy used by secondary learners to study foreign languages. Qualitative method was used in doing this research. Data were collected using the questionnaire measuring students' language learning strategies towards foreign language.

This study has many limitations. First, the findings of this research are based on the responses of the students who learn English in one secondary school in Singkawang. So, the results from the other schools are not heard. Therefore, further research can be done to the others schools.

Second, the type of the questionnaire in this study, that is, closed-ended questionnaires in this research cannot get the deep information from the students about their ideas in learning a foreign language.

Also this study did not give deep information about students' language learning strategies. It is focused only to find the language learning strategies of the students as the information for the teachers.

Acknowledgements

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