

ALFIAN, MIRELLA WYRA AND MARIETTA ROSSETTO

10. LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY USE BY PROSPECTIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN INDONESIA

I believed that through research I could also help others, and I feel it is my social and academic responsibility to contribute to the development of my community. (Alfian)

The English language is considered an important language for international communication across many areas. Therefore, the Indonesian Government has made English a compulsory subject from junior secondary to tertiary level with the expectation that students will achieve a basic standard competency in English, enabling them to communicate in both written and spoken modes (Permendikbud, 2013). This places considerable demands on learners and on teachers. Learning a new language demands much time and effort. As time spent on language learning in formal educational settings is limited, it is important that learners develop effective ways of regulating their own learning. One of the key elements of language learning success is language learning strategy (LLS) use, which supports learners' learning in formal education settings and beyond. This chapter reports a study that investigated the use of LLS by learners at an Indonesian university who were studying to become teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL). It contributes an Indonesian perspective on LLS use.

BACKGROUND

Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies (LLS) are broadly considered as steps or actions learners take to enhance their learning of another language. A number of definitions of LLS (e.g. Chamot, 2004; Griffiths, 2003; Oxford, 1990) address a range of aspects of interest and importance. Although all are generally accepted in the field of LLS research, none of the definitions capture the full extent of the complexity of the concept of LLS, which has been deemed “notoriously difficult to define” (Griffiths, 2008, p. 83). This is not surprising. Learning a language is a complex process and capturing it through simple definitions is rather ambitious, if not impossible. The complexity is also reflected in a large number of LLS that have been identified in the past few decades. Trying to make sense of these strategies

has led to a number of proposed classification systems (see Hsiao & Oxford, 2002) because there is no consensus as to which classification offers an optimal and comprehensive picture of LLS. One of the frequently cited classifications was that proposed by Rebecca Oxford (1990), which consists of two broad categories of strategies that contribute directly and indirectly to language learning. Direct strategies are those that directly involve the use of the target language, while indirect strategies support and manage the language learning process without the use of the target language (Oxford, 1990). Oxford has further classified direct and indirect strategies into six main categories: memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies (direct); and metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies (indirect).

Although not without criticism, Oxford's LLS classification and her Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) have been used extensively in international LLS research. Her work is viewed as a comprehensive, systematic model of LLS (e.g. Cohen & Macaro, 2007; Ellis, 1994; Radwan, 2011).

SILL RESEARCH

By 1995, about 50 major studies had used SILL to investigate strategies used by approximately 8500 language learners around the world (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). The number of studies using SILL has grown considerably since then. The EFL version of the questionnaire has been translated into more than 20 languages, including Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Thai and Ukrainian. However, only a handful of studies using SILL to investigate the LLS of EFL learners in Indonesia have been reported (Annurahman et al., 2013; Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011; Mistar, 2001; Wahyuni, 2013; Yusuf, 2012). It is important to engage in such investigations to gain a greater understanding of LLS across cultures and languages because one of the criticisms of using questionnaires is that large and general learner strategy inventories such as SILL are not readily transferable across sociocultural domains (LoCastro, 1994, 1995). Nevertheless, individual reports are valuable not only for the target group of learners and their context, but also for contributing to a larger international perspective on LLS use. Thus, although SILL is not without problems, it has been used extensively and serves as a common tool for measuring LLS use across languages and cultures. It is a useful measure for providing a basis for understanding LLS patterns in a range of sociocultural contexts and has been used to investigate relationships between language learners' patterns of LLS use and factors such as gender, age, language proficiency levels and year level of study (e.g. Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Wharton, 2000).

LLS and Language Proficiency Level

Studies investigating LLS use by learners of various levels of language proficiency have used different instruments to classify learners into proficiency levels. Standardised proficiency level tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign

Language (TOEFL), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) have been used often (e.g. Gerami & Baighlou, 2011; Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012; Green & Oxford, 1995; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Liu, 2004; Park, 2010; Wahyuni, 2013; Wharton, 2000; Yang, 2010). Other measures, like teachers' judgements (Magogwe & Oliver, 2007) and grade point averages (GPA) (Mullins, 1992; Yılmaz, 2010) have also been used. Findings indicate that learners with higher language proficiency levels use more strategies more often than those with lower proficiency levels (Alhaisoni, 2012; Green & Oxford, 1995; Liu, 2004; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Radwan, 2011; Wahyuni, 2013; Wharton, 2000; Yang, 2010).

Studies related to the use of the six noted categories of LLS in the SILL at different proficiency levels have displayed consistent findings in the profiles of strategy use. Some noted that all three proficiency levels (good, fair and poor) favoured metacognitive strategies (Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Radwan, 2011). Radwan (2011) found in studies in Oman that both proficient and less proficient learners used metacognitive strategies at a high frequency, and Magogwe's studies in Botswana showed that learners at all proficiency levels tended to choose metacognitive strategy categories the most (Magogwe & Oliver, 2007). In contrast, some studies have demonstrated that only high proficiency level learners employ metacognitive strategies at a high frequency, with middle and low proficiency learners employing different strategy categories (Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012; Peacock & Ho, 2003; Wahyuni, 2013; Yang, 2010). For example, Yang (2010), who conducted a study involving 300 "high", "intermediate" and "beginning" proficiency level participants in a Korean university, found that high proficiency level students tended to choose metacognitive strategies, while intermediate and beginning level learners tended to choose compensation strategies. This is consistent with Wahyuni (2013), whose study in Indonesia found that advanced learners favoured metacognitive strategies, whereas intermediate and elementary learners preferred compensation strategies.

LLS and Year Level of Study

Year level of study refers to the course level or length of study, and how it may influence LLS use. Studies show that students in higher course levels use a broader variety of strategies than those in lower course levels. Griffiths (2003) found a positive relationship between year level of study and LLS use in a study with 348 students in New Zealand. Lee and Oxford's (2008) research on LLS use among 1000 Korean EFL learners from middle school to university in relation to education levels found that middle school and university students used LLS more often than high school students. A recent study by Tse (2011) in Hong Kong, also involving high school and university students, found that university students used LLS more than grade 12 and 13 students. Magno (2010) identified that the length of time taken to study English in formal schooling influenced learners' proficiency; the longer the learners studied English, the more proficient they became, developing more in-depth experience in learning that helped them use LLS

appropriately. Magno's finding reaffirmed McLaughlin's (1990, p. 170) argument that "more experienced language learners are more able to switch strategies when the task calls for such flexibility".

LLS and Gender

Studies investigating the influence of gender on LLS have had mixed findings. A few studies report higher LLS use among male students (Radwan, 2011; Wharton, 2000), some demonstrate no, or a less clear, distinction between male and female students' LLS use (Nisbet et al., 2005), while most report greater LLS use by female students in terms of quantity, frequency and quality (Catalán, 2003; Green & Oxford, 1995; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Liu, 2004; Macaro, 2000).

THE STUDY: AN INVESTIGATION OF LLS USE BY INDONESIAN LEARNERS

At the Indonesian tertiary level, students wishing to be English language teachers can choose English as a major. These prospective English teachers will teach English at a range of levels, beginning with elementary school and going through to university level. The university curriculum or syllabus addresses the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Curriculum in which 80% of the subjects are related to the teaching of English, such as Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), focusing on the four English macro skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking), vocabulary and grammar. In addition, lecturers use mainly English as the medium of instruction.

Prospective English teachers' language proficiency represents one of the major contributions to the success of English teaching and learning in the Indonesian context because informed teachers are a critical factor in successful student learning (Baradja, 1994). Thus, prospective teachers as English language learners need to develop sound proficiency in English prior to graduating. However, while some prospective English teachers who learn English as a foreign language learn quickly and use English well, many experience difficulties and make little progress (Song, 2004). Many cannot use English well, cannot pick up new words and sentences quickly, and do not do well in exams despite learning English for years (Song, 2004). Prospective teachers' LLS knowledge and use can contribute to how they teach, and consequently to the success of future generations of EFL learners.

ETHICS

The Dean of the participating university and from the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee gave permission to conduct this study. Participation was informed, voluntary and confidential.

METHOD

Participants

Two hundred and eighty six students pursuing EFL teacher education at an Indonesian university volunteered to participate and completed the SILL questionnaire translated into Indonesian. Students from four year levels were invited to participate but only a small number of 4th year students volunteered because they were engaged in fieldwork and not required to attend university classes. Slightly over 75% of the participants were women (see [Table 10.1](#)).

Table 10.1. Selected demographic characteristics of participants

Characteristic		N	%
Gender	Female	218	76.8
	Male	66	23.2
Year level	Year 1	102	35.9
	Year 2	92	32.4
	Year 3	67	23.6
	Year 4	23	8.1
Proficiency level	Low	10	3.5
	Middle	190	66.9
	High	84	29.6

English Proficiency

A range of language proficiency measures has been used in the literature, including standardised tests, such as TOEFL, IELTS and TOEIC (Gerami & Baighlou, 2011; Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Park, 2010; Wahyuni, 2013) or self-rated reports (Green & Oxford, 1995; Liu, 2004; Wharton, 2000; Yang, 2010). Using GPA to identify proficiency levels is also generally accepted as a classification mechanism (e.g. Al-Buainain, 2010; Radwan, 2011; Yilmaz, 2010). Despite the many classification methods, most studies classify learners into three proficiency levels, albeit using different terms. For example, Yilmaz (2010) classified learners by GPA as “good” (3.5–4.0), “fair” (2.5–3.4), and “poor” (less than 2.5). Similarly, Wharton (2000) classified learners into “poor”, “fair” and “good” using self-rated proficiency levels. In another study, Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) used TOEFL scores to classify learners into “beginning”, “intermediate” and “advanced” levels. In this study, English course GPAs were used to classify learners into “high”, “middle” and “low” proficiency levels, with high and middle representing successful learners and low representing less successful learners ([Table 10.1](#)).

SILL Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability of the six SILL constructs (memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and

social strategies) were examined to ensure that SILL was a valid and reliable measurement instrument for investigating LLS use. All items in each construct were checked for construct validity by performing Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Alpha Factoring (AF) (Thompson, 2004) to identify factors that may be inferred from the pattern of responses for the set of variables. The constructs' suitability for EFA was examined by looking at the Kaiser-Meyer-Okline (KMO) value and Bartlett's test of sphericity prior to performing the EFA. The KMO was $>.6$ and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$) for each scale, indicating that all constructs met the basic requirement for EFA (Field, 2009).

The SILL reliability in the Indonesian context, with a high Cronbach alpha (.92), was similar to most SILL studies reported by Oxford and in Mistar's (2001) study. The Cronbach's alpha for the SILL constructs varied from .67 to .83, indicating an adequate level of internal consistency. These findings are consistent with each construct's reliability values reported in most studies using SILL (e.g. Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012; Griffiths, 2003; Radwan, 2011; Wharton, 2000).

DATA ANALYSES

Descriptive statistics using means, frequencies, percentages and standard deviations were employed to describe demographic information, and to identify overall frequency of strategy use in the six categories and associated strategy items. In line with the majority of studies on LLS, this study adopted the three frequency criteria proposed by Oxford, which involved assessing the degree to which the strategies were used, namely: high frequency use (5.0–3.5), medium frequency use (3.49–2.50) and low frequency use (2.49–1.0) (Oxford, 1990, p. 300).

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the strategies used at the three proficiency levels and year level of study. An independent samples t-test was performed to identify differences in strategy use by gender. SPSS Version 22 was used in these analyses (SPSS, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Individual Strategy Use

In terms of the strategy item or individual strategy in the SILL, the mean scores for the 50 SILL items were ranked from the lowest to the highest. One of the most frequently used strategies was a metacognitive strategy: "I try to find out how to be a better learner of English". In contrast, a compensation strategy had the lowest mean score, indicating it was the least favoured strategy: "I read English without looking up every word". What is of particular interest is that these experienced EFL learners continue to seek ways to be better learners of English, suggesting that they are not satisfied with their current strategies for language learning.

Strategy Category Use

The descriptive statistical analysis showed that participants used all six strategy categories at a high frequency (see Table 10.2) in accordance with Oxford's (1990) mean score criteria.

Table 10.2. Strategy use in the six SILL strategy categories

Strategy category	N	Mean	SD
Metacognitive	284	4.19	0.50
Social	284	4.16	0.57
Affective	284	3.78	0.60
Cognitive	284	3.76	0.49
Memory	284	3.76	0.47
Compensation	284	3.55	0.64

Metacognitive strategies were used most frequently, followed by the social, affective and cognitive strategies, then the memory strategy and finally the compensation strategy. The high use of these six strategy categories, despite the compensation strategy being used least often, proved significant because it shows that prospective English language teachers in Indonesia always or usually use LLS.

Strategy Use by Proficiency Level

Like the majority of studies on LLS, this study adopted Oxford's (1990) three proposed frequency criteria, which involved assessing the degree to which the strategies were used. Results of the ANOVA conducted to examine strategy use by proficiency level indicate a significant relationship between proficiency levels and overall use of SILL strategies ($F(2, 281) = 585, p < 0.05$), with a small effect size ($\eta = 0.014$). A Tukey-LSD Post Hoc was run to identify any significant differences between groups, which indicated significant differences between the low and high levels ($p = 0.03$), and the middle and high levels ($p = 0.00$). However, there were no significant differences between the low and middle levels ($p = 0.35$), suggesting that the higher the participants' proficiency levels, the more strategies they employ. These findings are consistent with reports from previous studies that show a relationship between proficiency levels and the use of LLS (e.g. Alhaisoni, 2012; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Radwan, 2011; Wayhuni, 2013).

Strategy Use by Gender

An independent sample *t*-test demonstrated a significant difference in the overall use of LLS between male ($M = 3.72, SD = 0.43$) and female ($M = 3.91, SD = 0.40$) participants ($t(282) = -3.27, p < .001$, two-tailed). Significant differences between males and females were found for all substrategy categories ($p < .05$) except compensation strategies ($p = 0.38$), consistent with findings reported in other LLS studies (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Oxford, 1990).

Strategy Use by Year Level

The ANOVA indicated no significant differences in overall LLS use among year level groups; somewhat surprising because it would be expected that experienced language learners would differ from less experienced learners in LLS use. This result leads to the proposal that experienced learners do not advance their LLS use or, more plausibly, that the number of strategies used does not change. Experienced learners may replace some strategies they deem ineffective with others they find more useful. A longitudinal study investigating strategy use by students over a period of several years would be useful. Typically, though, studies report changes in strategy use *between* rather than *within* learners.

CONCLUSION

Although this study provides a small picture of LLS use in Indonesia, its findings contribute to a better understanding of LLS use by future teachers of EFL in that country. The findings are not intended to be generalised but to contribute to the international body of LLS and SILL studies by providing a snapshot of LLS use in an Indonesian context. In order to fully understand the relationship of gender, year level of study and proficiency levels to LLS use, and to understand LLS use across time, a large scale longitudinal study is needed. Macaro (2006) added a good perspective to the picture of LLS use by proposing that “successful learning is no longer linked to the individual learner’s frequency of strategy use, but to his or her orchestration of strategies available to him or her” (p. 332). This orchestration of strategies and the fluid movement between them should be of further interest to future LLS research. Considering that this study’s participants represent a group of experienced learners who, although demonstrating that they use a broad range of LLS, are still concerned with finding new ways to best learn English, it is plausible to question whether they are using the identified strategies correctly and effectively. Further studies investigating learners’ declarative, procedural and conditional strategy knowledge are needed.

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ALFIAN ET AL.

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Alfian EdD
School of Education
Flinders University, Australia

Mirella Wyra PhD
School of Education
Flinders University, Australia

Marietta Rossetto PhD
School of Education
Flinders University, Australia