
A CORRELATIONAL STUDY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND ENGLISH PROFICIENCY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AT EFL CONTEXT

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Abstract

Mastering English requires the students to have their own strategy. The use of appropriate language learning strategies may help the students to be proficient in English. This research investigates the language learning strategies used by EFL students and their relationship with the Students' English Proficiency. This study adopted *Ex-post facto* quantitative research design in which the data were collected from the result of students Language Learning Inventory and also the data of their latest English Proficiency Score. 38 students majoring in English participated in this research. The result of this research shows that metacognitive strategies were the most frequent strategy, followed by cognitive strategy, compensation strategy, memory strategy, affective strategy, and social strategies. Additionally, there is a significant correlation between language learning strategy use and students' English proficiency.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies, EFL, Students, English

Introduction

English has been taught in educational school as the foreign language. According to Mandasari & Oktaviani (2018), in Indonesia, English has been considered as the foreign language because Indonesians do not use English for daily communication. In the curriculum of Indonesia, English is taught for 6 years started from middle school until senior high school. Suharmin et al., (2016) stated that since English become one of primary subjects in Indonesia curriculum, learning English has become compulsory for students to master. It is expected that Indonesian graduate possess excellent academic and communication skills to cope with the current globalized industrial revolution.

However, this does not merely ensure the students to be able to speak English fluently since they find some difficulties and problem while learning. The students might find hard to produce sentences correctly since they are not accustomed to using English in a real context. Besides, students may find boredom and feel demotivated while following the teacher's instruction. In the situation where the teaching and learning should be done remotely, it is essential for students to cope with the information and technology that support their learning (Simamora, et al. 2022). To solve the problem, it is believed that students' desire to help their own learning is very critical to be discussed. One of the ways that caught many attentions is the use of language learning strategies (LLS).

LLS has been defined in many ways as a determining aspect in learning a new language (Juanito & Tandoc, 2019). Learning strategy means learning with special method to achieve learning goals. For students, this LLS can be used to take the specific strategies to make the students' learning become easier, enjoyable, faster, and the students can reflect their own learning.

There are four language skills that students should need to master. They are speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Additionally, to achieve communicative competence, the students must be familiar with vocabulary and grammar and language use in relevant and authentic situation. It is believed that the awareness about language learning strategies can impact significantly to the development of the communicative competence. For example, some language learning strategies such as listening to movie, song, reading a novel, and vocabulary strategies (Wahyudin, et al, 2021) can be employed during in and out of classroom. They can learn based on their hobby, so the learners can be enjoyable when learn English without feeling bored. Besides, this strategy can be more effective than learning in the classroom because sometimes the students tend to be bored in the classroom.

It is apparent that LLS has been the important aspect to learn language. The study of LLS began to rise and evolve (Bremner, 1998). Majority of research on LLS said that student needs LLS to make their learning enjoyable and effective. Various definitions have been proposed by various studies due to the importance of LLS in the lives of EFL learners. LLS, for example, is defined by Oxford (1990) as the tactics and approaches used by learners to improve their L2 learning process. LLS is defined by Wenden (1991) as the mental steps taken by learners to acquire a new language and manage their efforts in order to improve their learning efforts. Beside that, Language Learning Strategy makes the students decide what the learning styles that suitable with them. For example, the students can learn English language by their hobby such as watching movie, listening to music, reading novel, writing an essay (Wahyudin, 2018) and so on. These kinds of hobby can be utilized as the students' learning strategy so that students can carry out their hobby as well as studying at the same time. Hence, learning strategy can make the students do not feel bored while studying. As stated by Richard and Platt (1992), LLS is defined as deliberate behaviors utilized by learners during the learning process to assist them in organizing, remembering, and processing new knowledge. The students also can match when the best time they should learn with their own language learning strategy out of in the classroom. Furthermore, learning strategy can probably make the students match their learning so that the students can develop their own potentials as well as helping other students to be aware of the most effective way to learn (Hamzah, et al., 2009).

LLS can also help the students to be more motivated and independent in managing their study. Some studies delineated that students' LLS use have some relationship with learning achievement (Agustin, et al, 2021) and proficiency. The students' LLS might be used by teachers to design the material and teaching method that suitable with the students' needs. Based on Michael & Harris (1999), there are six types of strategy including:

1) *Memory Strategy*

Memory strategy offers the students to learn and obtain the information systematically. There are many ways to memorize what students already learned. The students can memorize through images, sounds, body movements, mechanical

means, and so on. These ways will help the students to memorize easily and better for memorizing.

2) *Metacognitive Strategy*

This strategy enables the students to collecting the task, planning the task, evaluating the task, finding the errors and etc. Thus, the metacognitive strategy is used to carry out the overall learning process. This strategy is helpful for students as the execution of cognitive strategy.

3) *Cognitive Strategy*

The cognitive strategy helps the students to make the learning material through analysis, outlining, summarizing, note-taking, reviewing, practicing, and so on. With this strategy, the students significantly will improve the students' ability in English language learning.

4) *Social Strategy*

The social strategy offers the students to interact with the teacher or the one who understand the material. The students may ask to get the information or classification that they want to know and ask to help their language task. This strategy also enables the students to interact with native speaker and exploring the social norms and culture.

5) *Compensation Strategy*

Compensation strategy means enabling the students to learn by guessing the context of listening and reading skill using a synonym to complete the writing and speaking skills. This strategy can facilitate students to be characterized of how they learn.

6) *Affective strategy*

The affective strategy is the strategy used by students to learn language by identifying anxiety and mood. This strategy makes the students to give themselves a reward for their good achievement of learning language in order to relieve their feeling. It is very helpful to make motivated students.

The study done by Sartika, et al., (2019) discussed the most frequently learning strategy used by students in Senior High School. The result reveals that language learning strategy is one of the significant factors that decides whether the students can be more effective learners or help them to achieve the successful in language learning. To improve the students' language learning strategy, the students need to be more active to employ their own language learning strategy. Additionally, Khaza'leh (2020) explores LLS of Saudi EFL learners at Shaqra University and found that social strategy and metacognitive strategy were the most frequently used by EFL university students. Both strategies got the high range according to Oxford scale. Even though, these two studies talked about the most frequently Language learning strategy used by EFL students it does not have focus on how it is related to other aspects such as learning achievement or language proficiency.

This research aims to figure out the students' language learning strategy uses and their relationship with English proficiency. In order to guide the research procedure, the research questions were formulated as follows:

- 1) What are the most frequent LLS used by students?
- 2) Is there any correlation between LLS use and Students' English Proficiency?

Method

To answer the research questions, this quantitative research was conducted using ex-post facto design in which the research was carried out after the facts have already occurred. The research was conducted on May until June 2021 involving 38 students of English education major that enrolled quantitative research class in one of private universities in Lampung. To reveal the LLS use of the students, likert-scale questionnaire adopted from Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) developed by Oxford (1991) was distributed. The questionnaire used the 5 rating scale consist of *Strongly Agree-Agree-Neutral-Disagree-Strongly Disagree*. The questionnaire was distributed through WhatsApp group or personal email of the participants to collect the information related to the use of cognitive strategy, metacognitive strategy, compensation strategy, memory strategy, affective strategy, and social strategy. Additionally, the participants are required to fill out the biodata and the score of their EPT prior to responding the questionnaire. To analyze the data, SPSS ver 15 was used to calculated the correlation (indicated by r value) between LLS use and Students' English Proficiency.

Findings and Discussion

This section shows the results of the research concerning the language learning strategies used by EFL students. The findings were taken from questionnaire consisting 38 items as the instrument of this research. The result can be seen from the following data that has been analyzed from SPSS.

Table 1. The Reliability of Instrument

Case Processing Summary		N	%
Cases	Valid	38	100,0
	Excluded ^a	0	,0
	Total	38	100,0

a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,949	38

Based on the data above, it can be seen that the output of Reliability Statistics was obtained Cronbach's Alpha value of 0,949. It means that $0,949 > 0,600$. So, because the value is higher than 0,600, it can be concluded that the instrument used in this study is reliable.

Table 2. Category Language Learning Strategies

Category	Mean
Metacognitive Strategies	3,95
Cognitive Strategies	3,91
Compensation Strategies	3,84
Memory Strategies	3,82
Affective Strategies	3,72
Social Strategies	3,86

The data above are the type of language learning strategies used by EFL students. There are Metacognitive strategy, Memory strategy, Social strategy, Affective strategy, Cognitive strategy and Compensation strategy. It is revealed that the most frequent strategy is metacognitive strategy with 3,95 mean score. While the least strategy is affective strategy with 3,72 mean score. Furthermore, each category will be analyzed descriptively to further explore the strategies used by the students.

Table 2.1 Descriptive Statistics of Memory Strategies

Strategy	Mean	SD
I think of relationships between what I already know and the new things I learn in English.	4,05	0,65
I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them	4,2	0,73
I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word	4,02	0,71
I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used	3,8	0,86
I use rhymes to remember new English words	3,6	0,99
I use flashcards to remember new English words	3,2	1,10
I physically act out new English words	3,7	0,80

The table of memory strategies show that the highest mean score is 4,2 with the question “*I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word*”. While the lowest mean score is from Q2 (Question 2) with 3,2 mean score. The highest of Standard deviation is from Q2 while the lowest SD is from Q1.

Table 2.2 Descriptive Statistics of Cognitive Strategies

Strategy	Mean	SD
I say or write new English words several times	3,9	0,81
I try to talk like native English speakers	3,9	0,91
I practice the sounds of English	4,0	0,83
I use the English words I know in different ways	4,0	0,73
I start conversations in English	3,68	0,80
I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English	4,1	0,79
I read for pleasure in English	3,8	0,87
I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English	3,7	1,02
I first skim an English passage (read it quickly) then go back and read	3,8	0,88

carefully		
I look for words in my language that are similar to new words in English	4,0	0,86
I try to find patterns in English	3,9	0,81
I find the meaning of any English word by dividing it into parts that I understand	4,1	0,63
I try not to translate word-for-word	3,8	1,0
I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English	3,65	1,04

The table of descriptive statistics of cognitive strategy shows that the highest mean score has two same mean score which are from Q13 and Q19. The lowest mean score found in Q21 with the value 3,65 mean score. The highest SD obtained by Q21 with 1,04 SD score while the lowest SD obtained from Q19 with 0,63 SD score.

Table 2.3 Descriptive Statistics of Compensation Strategies

Strategy	Mean	SD
To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses	4,0	0,61
When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures	4,02	0,85
I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English	3,8	0,77
I read English without looking up every new word	3,3	1,04
I try to guess what the other person will say next in English	3,7	0,87
If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing	4,0	0,73

From the table descriptive statistics of Compensation strategies above, it can be seen that the highest mean score is 4,02 with the question "*When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures*". The lowest mean score obtained from Q25 with the 3,3 mean score. The highest standard deviation score is from Q25 with 1,04 SD score while the lowest SD is from Q22 with 0,61 SD score.

Table 2.4 Descriptive Statistics of Metacognitive Strategies

Strategy	Mean	SD
I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English	4,0	0,69
I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better	4,1	0,62
I pay attention when someone is speaking English	4,07	0,58
I try to find out how to be a better learner of English	4,07	0,67
I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English	3,6	0,96
I look for people I can talk to in English	3,81	0,83
I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English	8,84	0,97
I have clear goals for improving my English skills	3,97	0,78
I think about my progress in learning English	3,97	0,84

The table of metacognitive strategy has 8,84 as the highest mean score, with the question "*I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English*". the lowest mean score obtained from Q32 with the question "*I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study english*". the highest SD from metacognitive strategies is from Q35 while the lowest is from Q30 with the value 0,58.

Table 2.5 Descriptive of Affective Strategies

Strategy	Mean	SD
I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English	3,9	0,716
I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake	3,84	0,78
I reward myself or treat when I do well in English	3,89	0,95
I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English	3,84	0,717
I write down my feelings in a language learning diary	3,1	1,19
I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English	3,6	0,94

The highest mean score from affective strategies is 3,89 with the question “*I reward myself or treat when I do well in English*”. While the lowest mean score is 3,1 with the question “*I write down my feelings in a language learning diary*”. The highest standard deviation of affective strategies is 1,19 while the lowest SD is 0,78 standard deviation score.

Table 2.6 Descriptive Statistics of Social Strategies

Strategy	Mean	SD
If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again	3,94	0,92
I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk	3,84	0,94
I practice English with other students	3,84	0,94
I ask for help from English speakers	3,7	0,97
I ask questions in English	3,89	0,76
I try to learn about the culture of English speakers	3,92	0,94

From the table descriptive statistics of social strategies above, it can be seen that the highest mean score obtained from the question “*If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again*” with 3,94 mean score. while the lowest mean score is 3,7 with the question “*I ask for help from English speakers*”. From the standard deviation of social strategies, it can be seen that the highest score is 0,97 while the lowest score is 0,76.

Table 3. the correlation between Learning Strategies and EPT score

Correlations		
	LLS	EPT
Pearson Correlation	1	,942**
LLS Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
N	38	38
Pearson Correlation	,942**	1
EPT Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
N	38	38

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis of correlation between students' EPT score with their learning strategy based on the table above shows that the Pearson correlation's value is 0,942. The value shows positive result. Since the coefficient value lies between 0,50 and 1, so this correlation called as high degree correlation which means the value has a strong correlation. Then about sig. (2-tailed) it can be seen that the value is 0,000 which means it is $<0,05$ so, it can be concluded that there is statistically significant difference between students' EPT score with their learning strategies. In summary, increases or decreases Language Learning Strategy used by EFL students relate to increases or decreases their EPT score.

The discussion section explain further the data analysis obtained from the findings. From the finding of table correlation between Language Learning Strategy and EPT score shows that there is statistically significant difference among them. From this result, it can be interpreted that many students use LLS to learn English. LLS itself brings a great influence to EFL students. This is proven by the result of table correlation that EPT score of students increased by adjusting how much they use LLS. It means that the higher EPT score students, the more they use LLS. Language teacher or instructors has also the important role in LLS. As stated by Khaza'leh (2020), Language teacher has a major role for helping the students to recognize LLS to make the language learning process easier and quicker. The teacher also can persuade the students to use such strategies as much as possible when they learn since the appropriate using LLS can enhance language proficiency.

As has been mentioned in finding of descriptive statistics of memory strategies that most of the students used the strategy "*I connect the sound of a new english word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word*". This question or statement got the highest mean score among other questions or statements. It indicates that most of the students use some kinds of media such as picture to help them memorize the vocabulary of English. It means that when students forget about the English word, they will remember the picture of the word. This strategy is useful for students to remember new vocabulary that they found.

Based on the data descriptive statistics of cognitive strategy above, there is two questions that the same highest mean score. The questions are "*I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English*" and "*I find the meaning of any English word by dividing it into parts that I understand*". It's not wondering if many students like to watch movie. Thus, many students utilize that to learn English. Watching movie with English dub or English subtitle definitely make the students improve their English skill. They can learn vocabulary, grammar and listening skill at the same time.

In compensation strategy, the highest mean score is from the question "*When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures*". It indicates that when the students get difficult to speak English in a conversation, they will use gestures in order to remember the word. For example, the students will move or shake their hand as the gestures to remember the words. Since, the students are not native speakers so, it is very common if they forget about some vocabularies. Therefore, using gestures can ease the students to be comfortable when they make a conversation in English.

In metacognitive strategy, the highest mean score is obtained from the question "*I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English*". Most of the students agree that they look for opportunities to read English text. Reading English can be found in

various platforms. Beside reading a book, reading can be done by taking part in digital platform such as social media, vlog, or chat. Nowadays, social media become more popular especially for teenagers. So, it is suggested that they may utilize Social Media to add more English exposure. This strategy is helpful for students to increase their reading skill.

Based on the table descriptive statistics of affective strategy, the highest mean score is from the question “*I reward myself or treat when I do well in English*”. It indicates that most of the students giving a reward of themselves when they do well in English. This strategy can motivate the students to learn English effectively. Then, they will reward themselves as the appreciation of their effort in learning English. The reward can be done in any way as long as the students feel happy of that.

In social strategy, the highest mean score obtained from the question “*If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again*”. This happens often in a conversation. This thing is very common if the students do not understand the speaker’s talk, they may ask them to slow down or say it again. This practice may give some reflection of the current state of Students’ listening skills. These skills can be improved if the students can practice listening to peers’ academic and daily conversation.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that there is a correlation between students’ EPT score with Language Learning use. Furthermore, there are six types of Language Learning Strategy explored in this research. They are Memory Strategy, Cognitive Strategy, Metacognitive Strategy, Compensation Strategy, Affective Strategy and Social Strategy. The most frequently learning strategy used by EFL students is Metacognitive strategy, while the lowest strategy is affective strategy in which the students are rarely to do. However, there might be some opportunities where other language learning strategy not explored in this research was also done by students in learning English. Further research may concern other language learning strategies using different approach. Finally, the role of lecturer as the facilitator in learning process is still important and there is a necessity for lecturer to facilitate the students’ understanding about the LLS and give them motivations to employ suitable LLS for successful study.

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