Exploring Students' Learning Strategies in EFL Learning

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe students' learning straties in an English as a Foreign Langauge (EFL) learning used by social and science students in certain senior high school in Sumedang. Students of grade 11 were chosen as participant of this research. 9 students of social and 9 students of science were selected as the sample of this research. This research is categorized as qualitative research using questionnaire from Oxford (1990) as the instruments and followed up by semi-structured interview to confirm the result from questionnaire. It is found that there are 6 strategies used by both social and science students. They are memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Based on the data found, the researcher concluded that most of social students frequently use social, cognitive, and affective strategies, while most of science students frequently use metacognitive, cognitive, and compensation strategies. In essence, each student has a different way of learning. they have their advantages and disadvantages. Since it is known that learning strategies are importnat it is suggested for teacher to train students to use language learning strategies that can help them become better language learners.

Keywords: learning strategies, EFL learning, Social and Science Students

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, phenomena in society often debate about pros and cons between science and social students. Science students are often seen as diligent and superior students, while social students are often seen as students who are mischievous and lack the ability to excel in learning. This stereotype indirectly discriminates against them. However, each student has their own strengths and weaknesses, especially in learning English. Based on the scientific field, English is included in the social sciences and humanities, therefore, English is taught more specifically by social students with compulsory English and specialization. On the other hand, science students only have English as compulsory subject. Indirectly, social students are expected to be more competent in mastering English but this depends again on their language learning strategies and interest in learning English, because it does not rule out the possibility that science students are more proficient in English.

English is a subject which is studied formally in almost all schools in Indonesia because Indonesia is not a country that uses English as its mother tongue but as a foreign language. Brown (2007) states that English as a foreign language always refers specifically to English taught in certain countries (such as Egypt, Japan, and Venezuela) where English is not the primary language of commerce and

education. They can be obtained through language clubs, special media, opportunities, books or occasional travelers, but it takes effort to create those opportunities. According to Harmer (1998), English is learnt by almost all of students around the world as a foreign language, probably, because it is a requirements of the school curriculum. Therefore, Indonesian students are required to learn English as foreign language both formally and non-formally. High school students must already learn English formally since elementary school, but in reality, learning English in elementary schools cannot be said to be adequate. Therefore, the effectiveness of students learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia starts from junior high school and they are considered as beginners of English learners.

For students who are still in the level of beginners in learning English as a foreign language, of course there are several factors that can support their success in learning. One of them is the role of the teacher in the foreign language classroom which has function to guide and assist in the completion of language tasks and the creation of language through interaction. Linked to language learning in different social contexts, the classroom as a social context is a sub-society consisting of teachers and learners with a specific cultural system in which Roles, functions, and goals are different (Sundari, 2017). According to Seedhouse & Jenks (2015), language classroom is a place that aspects of language are learnt and taught, method, syllabus and materials are applied, theories and practices are met, social identity and affective factors are affected, and classroom is a site where interaction and education unite. Related to this situation, to provide a quality learning, a program should be supported by such other factors as institution, teachers, teaching process and learners. Among those factors, teachers hold prominent role in teaching (Richards, 2001). It means, the teacher is considered as an important factor in the ongoing teaching and learning activities. The qualified teachers are able to develop an innovative method used for teaching and learning activities. These factors can help increase student interest and learning abilities in the classroom. In addition, student learning can be directed by the learning strategies they use. With the right teaching method implemented by the teacher, students are expected to be able to understand the learning material well in learning English.

Even though the supporting factors have been fulfilled, sometimes students still find some difficulties to understand and even master English subjects. To overcome those difficulties, students need to use some strategies in learning English. As O'Malley & Chamot (1990) define, learning strategies are special thoughts or behaviors that learners use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information. In other words, learning strategies is a process in which students have the ability to find critical thinking related to learning by utilizing existing sources to find various information when solving a problem in learning a language. Oxford (1990) also defines learning strategies as specific actions taken by learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more autonomous, more effective and transferable more in new situations. According to Saroh (2019) language learning strategies are specific action, behaviors, tactics, or technique, facilitating the learning of the target language by language learner. Based on the definitions above, it can be concluded that learning strategy is a process in which students have the ability to find critical thinking related to learning by utilizing existing sources to find various information when solving a problem in learning a language. Based on the importance of learning strategies in solving the students' problem in learning, this research tried to investigate students' learning strategies in EFL learning.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is classified as qualitative research using questionnaire and interview to analyze the problems being investigated. According Latief (2015) qualitative research is a process of inquiry aimed understanding human behavior by building complex, holistic pictures of the social and cultural setting in which such behavior occurs. More specifically, this research belongs to the qualitative descriptive method which described and discussed the different interests and learning strategies used by social and science students in learning English. It is supported by Sugiyono (2016) who defined qualitative descriptive method as a research method based on the philosophy of post-positivism used to examine the condition of natural objects (as opposed to experiments) where the researcher is the key instrument of data collection techniques carried out by triangulation (combined), data analysis is inductive/qualitative, and the results of qualitative research emphasize meaning rather than generalizations.

This research was conducted in one of senior high schools in Jatinangor. Students at grade 11 were chosen as the participants of this research in reason that, according to the English teacher's explanation, there are many students in this class are considered as students who have involved actively in the learning process. It is hoped that they would be able to give true picture of the use of learning strategies in EFL learning. Grade 11 itself consists of 5 social classes and 7 science classes, but not all classes were selected as research subjects.

The researcher only took the samples which consist of 1 social class and 1 science class. The researcher chose these two classes because these classes were active and dominant when learning English took place. this was also supported by suggestions from the English teacher who taught at the school. The participants of this research consisted of 9 social students and 9 science students who selected by considering the competence analysis in the academic year 2022/2023.

To know the learning strategies used by students in learning English, several data collection techniques must be used. Gill & at al, (2008) suggested that there are several types of data collection methods in qualitative research, namely observation, visual analysis, literature study, and interviews (individual or group). Creswell (2010) also stated that in qualitative research, data collection approach includes in-depth interview, document analysis, observation, and audiovisual materials analysis. However, in this research the techniques and instrument used were questionnaires and interviews.

The questions in the questionnaire used in this study were adapted from modified questionnaire developed by Oxford (1990). The questionnaire consists of 40 questions as tabulated bellow.

Table 1. The Questionnaire Guidelines for Students

Categories	Questions
Memory Strategies	1-4
Cognitive Strategies	5-11
Compensation Strategies	12-19
Metacognitive Strategies	20-25

Affective Strategies	26-31
Social Strategies	31-40

Some of the strategies above are used by students. The results show which strategies are often used by students in learning English. The results of the questionnaire are taken by the average percentage of several indications contained in each strategy. After the result of questionnaire was obtained, semi structured interview was conducted to support the data. Some follow up questions related to learning strategies were proposed to confirm how they use certain strategies in the learning process.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to Oxford (1990), there are six categories of learning strategies: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. Therefore, following are the results of strategies analysis on student responses to each strategies category separately where the results are obtained from the questionnaire that given to selected students based on the document analysis. The results are the average percentage of the use of learning strategies by high, mid, and low score students There are six types of strategies used by students as follows:

The first strategy is memory strategy which refers to remembering and retrieving new information in learning English (Oxford, 1990). The strategies consist of several sub-strategies which are indications of students using memory strategies. Based on the results of the questionnaire, both social and science students used memory strategies. The differences are the sub-strategies used. There are 77.8% of social students use the rhyme to memorize vocabulary. There are also 77.8% of s social students tend to pronounce or write new English words/vocabulary several times Whereas 77.8% science students tend to use new words in a sentence so that they are easy to remember and practice speaking. This can be seen from the highest percentage of sub-strategies. It means, social students use memory strategies by using rhyme to memorize some new words and sometimes the student write the words and repeat to pronounce the words. It can make the social students easily to remembering the language. While science students more try to new words in a sentence and indirectly, they can more practice to pronounce and improve their speaking skills. When viewed based on the overall average regarding memory strategies, it can be concluded that social students more remembering and retrieving new information in learning English than science students. The data were supported by Tam (2013) that memory strategies frequently used by social students in this research, it is possible that students were familiar with some of the memory related items such as using flashcards to remember new words, physically act out new English word sand using rhymes to remember new words.

The second strategy is cognitive strategies which refers to understanding and producing the language in learning English (Oxford, 1990). The strategies consist of several sub-strategies which are indications of students using cognitive strategies. The data from questionnare shows that the two classes both have 100% pay attention to someone when speaking English and also have the same percentage (88.9%) in like to watch shows or movies in English. However, one of the sub-strategies

that differentiates it is that social students tend to try to find a pattern/formula in English (88.9%), while science students tend to use a dictionary in English (77.8%). This was followed by several other sub-strategies. When viewed based on the overall average regarding memory strategies, it can be concluded that social students more try to understand and absorb a lot of vocabulary in learning English than science. This is done in order to facilitate students in learning to speak. As well as Cohen (2010) stated that cognitive strategies were used more often by high school learners to improve their speaking skills in English.

The third strategy is compensation strategies which refers to using the language despite knowledge gaps in learning English (Oxford, 1990). Based on sub-categories regarding compensation strategies, both classes use compensation strategies, but there are 100% of science students that if they can't think of English words to express a message, they create a simpler idea and 100% of science students are use the sub-strategies that they can't think of a word during an English conversation, they use Indonesian expressions. It means, science students are use Indonesian expressions several times and also create a simpler idea when they can't think of a word during an English conversation and express a message. While social students also have the same mostly used sub-strategies with science but it just 88.9%. However, 77.8% of social students are helped avoiding certain situations or topics that difficult during English conversations. More clearly, it can be seen from the highest percentage of sub-strategies on the table above. When viewed based on the overall average regarding compensation strategies, science students have the highest percentage. It can be concluded that science students more using the language despite knowledge gaps than social students.

The fourth strategy is metacognitive strategies which refers to more use able to coordinating the learning process in learning English (Oxford, 1990). Based on the dominant sub-strategies, the similarities between the two classes are trying to discover how to be a better learner in English (100%) and think about the progress in learning English (88.9%). On the other hand, there are 88.9% of social students and 77.8% of science students have a clear goal to improve their English skill, but what sets it apart is that science students are more looking for opportunities to read as much as possible in English. It can be seen from the highest percentage of sub-strategies for each class. When viewed based on the overall average regarding metacognitive strategies, science students have highest percentage in this strategy. It can be concluded that science students more able to coordinating the learning process in learning English than social students. This is in line with O'Malley et al. (1985) that metacognitive is a term to express executive function, strategies which require planning for learning, thinking about the learning process as it is taking place, monitoring of one's production or comprehension, and evaluation learning after an activity is completed.

The fifth strategy is affective strategies which refers to more be able to regulate their emotions in learning English (Oxford, 1990). Based on the sub-strategies, 100% of social students chose the statement that they notice if they are tense or nervous when study or speak English. While the highest percentage of science students is 77.8% on two sub-strategies namely, giving credit to themselves

when they succeed in studying and also notice if they are tense or nervous when study or speak English. It shows that both social and science students use these strategies. But what distinguishes it is based on the highest percentage of sub-strategies. The stark contrast in these strategies is that some social students write their feelings in an English learning diary while science students do not at all. Based on the average percentage on affective strategies, it shows that social students more be able to regulate their emotions, while science students pay less attention to the importance of affective strategies, they only think that learning English is only an obligation at school and for academic needs only. This statement is in line with the previous related research conducted by (Julianti, 2018) that students who pay less attention to affective strategies may consider learning a language as an academic or an intellectual process only and they are not aware of the power of affective strategies such as increasing motivation, lowering anxiety and having positive attitudes in learning a foreigner. language and therefore, ranked them as the least favored strategies.

The last strategy is social strategies which refers to more take advantage of the environment and the opportunity to learn English with others (Oxford, 1990). The highest percentage of the sub-strategies above is obtained by social students (100%), where they are talk to other people about how they feel when learning English. On the other hand, science students also have the highest percentage on asking the interlocutor to repeat what they said. It means, both social and science students use this strategy but they frequently use different sub-strategies. It can be seen from the highest percentage of sub-strategies for social students and it was followed by several sub-strategies, one of which was that both classes asked the interlocutor to speak a little slower when in a conversation. However, social students are helped by try to learn about culture in speaking English and asking for help from a native speaker. If we see the average percentage, social students are more intense in using social strategies based on the sub-strategies they often use. It means that social students more take advantage of the environment and the opportunity to learn English with others. The data is supported by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) that the students who has social strategies easily interacting with another person to assist learning or using affective control to assist a learning task, questioning for clarification cooperation.

4. CONCLUSSION

There are 6 strategies used by both social and science students. They are memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Based on the data found, the researcher concluded that most of social students frequently use social, cognitive, and affective strategies, while most of science students frequently use metacognitive, cognitive, and compensation strategies.

In essence, each student has a different way of learning. They have their advantages and disadvantages. It does not look at whether social or science students. Students who have an interest in a particular field will always try tomaximize the quality of their learning. On the other hand, if students already feel that they have an interest in English, the important thing to do next is to determine what learning strategies are appropriate to improve the quality of student learning. Because the learning strategies are very important because they are tools for active, self-directed movement, which is essential for developing communicative competence.

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