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LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY OF STUDENTS IN INTENSIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTITUTE (IELI) OF FLINDERS UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the influence of gender and nationality on the use of language learning strategies. The population of this study was the students who enrolled and studied in IELI of Flinders University and 34 students became the convenience samples. Strategy Inventory for Language Learner (SILL) questionnaire version 7.0 developed by Oxford (1990) was used as the main instrument of the research. The data analysis in this research used quantitative approach with Cronbach's α for measuring item reliability, descriptive statistics for demographic data and Independent-Samples T-test for gender differences, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) for nationality differences. The results showed that gender and nationality has had an insignificant effect in the use of language learning strategies.

Keywords: *language learning strategies; strategy inventory for language learner (SILL); gender; nationality*

INTRODUCTION

Learning is fundamental to human nature, along with the need to keep developing and improving. One indication of learning is change in behavior resulting from gain in knowledge, skills and attitudes. However, to be successful in learning, capacity to learn and intelligence are not the only influencing factors. There are many others factors that can influence success in learning such as educational background, motivation, and strategies, among others. Using

appropriate learning strategies is one factor that can facilitate learning, making the process easier, more pleasant, organized and effective. Oxford (1990, p. 8) defines learning strategy as "…specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations". Therefore, to be successful in learning, it is important to use the most effective strategies to gain knowledge and skills.

In language learning, the use of strategies need to be taken into account since many studies have found that success in language learning is associated with the use of strategies (Green & Oxford, 1995; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Park, 1997). Those studies point out that the more strategies a language learner uses the more successful he or she could be at acquiring the language. However, choices of preferred strategies might be different among language learners and might depend on the context within and externally to the learners themselves. Factors such as gender and nationality might influence the choice of strategy used by learners as suggested by some studies (Aliakbari & Hayatzadeh, 2008; Green & Oxford, 1995; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006, 2007).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Learning Strategies

It is important to emphasise the meaning of language learning strategies to give a standard in measuring the use of language learning strategies in this study. The definition of learning strategies or language learning strategies differs across many experts in education and language teaching. Weinstein and Mayer (1986, p. 315) considered learning strategies broadly as "behaviors and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning". According to Stern (1992), learning strategy concept depends on the theory that learners intentionally take on in activities to accomplish certain purposes and learning strategies can be regarded as broadly conceived intentional directions and learning techniques. However, those definitions lead to one point, which is how a learner tries to achieve information by using some ways during learning process. Specifically in learning language, Tarone (1983) defines it as attempts a learner tries to do to develop linguistics and sociolinguistic

skills in learning a certain language. Therefore, language learners usually use several ways or strategies to improve their language skill.

Classification of Language Learning Strategies

This study used a questionnaire developed by Oxford called Strategy Inventory for Language Learner (SILL). In SILL, Oxford (1990) classifies language learning strategies into six parts: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social. SILL consists of six dimensions of learning. The first part, memory, is something that is remembered in order to store and retrieve information. Cognitive is a psychological result of perception and learning, reasoning and thinking in order to understand and produce the language. Compensation is a defense mechanism that conceals undesirable shortcomings by exaggerating desirable behaviors in order to overcome limitations in language learning. Metacognitive can be defined as "above the cognition" used to plan and monitor learning. Affective is characterised by emotion and used to control emotions and motivation. Social is defined by friendly companionship with others used in order to cooperate with others in language learning

Stern (1992), however, states that there are five main language learning strategies: management and planning strategies, cognitive strategies, communicative – experiential strategies, interpersonal strategies and affective strategies. Even though the two classifications by Stern and Oxford seem different, their dimensions are similar upon closer examination of each strategy.

Factors in Language Learning Use

Language learning strategies is a broad topic that can include all types of a variety of ways in obtaining knowledge and information. It is important, therefore, that a teacher should be aware that students might have different learning strategies that are influenced by background differences. As Hong-Nam and Leavall (2006) state in their article, when the teacher interacts with students from different social and culture, they must assume that there are differences in thinking and behaviours of their students. This understanding will facilitate the respective learning process and will benefit both teacher and students. However, this study focuses only on gender and nationality differences.

Several studies have found that cultural background and nationality are some of the factors that influence language learning strategy use (Aliakbari & Hayatzadeh, 2008; Hong-Nam and Leavall, 2007; Mochizuki, 1999). Students from different countries supposed to have different cultures and languages as well. These culture differences might affect their preference in learning new language such as English. Some studies that focus on the correlation between the use of language learning strategy and nationality and culture have found that there are differences in using strategies among nationalities (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Wharton, 2000).

The possibility of gender influencing learning strategy use has been reported in several studies. In general, those studies report that females are considered to use more strategies than males (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). This might be moderated by the context or culture of language learning (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006).

METHOD

Purposes and research questions

This study concerns on the use of language learning strategies. The purposes of the study are to investigate the main language learning strategies used by Intensive English Language Institute (IELI) students of Flinders University and to investigate any differences in the use of the strategies by gender and nationality. The study examines two questions related to the dependent variable (strategies used) and independent variables (gender and nationality). To make clear the issue at hand, the statement of problem is formulated in the form of two research questions.

a. What are the *language learning strategies* used by students at IELI?
b. Are there differences in the use of language learning strategies because of gender or nationality?

Participants

A convenience sample of 34 former IELI students participated in language learning strategy survey by using questionnaire based on a modification of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learner (SILL) questionnaire version 7.0 developed by Oxford (1990). The students involved in this study were either studying or had

completed level 5 and 6 at IELI during the time of research period. Based on the demographic questionnaire, all 34 participants (11 males and 23 females) aged between 18-45 years (18-25 years = 18 people, 26-35 years = 14 people and 35-45 years = 2 people). Participants were recruited through telephone and email.

TABLE 1. Demographic Description of Participants

	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender		
Male	11	32.4
Female	23	67.6
Total	34	100.0
Age		
18-25 years	18	52.9
26-35 years	14	41.2
36-45 years	2	5.9
Total	34	100.0
Nationality		
Chinese	1	2.9
Colombian	2	5.9
Indonesian	11	32.4
Japanese	9	26.5
Korean	3	8.8
Persian	1	2.9
Philippines	1	2.9
Saudi Arabian	4	11.8
Taiwanese	1	2.9
Thai	1	2.9
Total	34	100.0

Intensive English Language Institute (IELI) is a not-for-profit educational association located on the campus of Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia. IELI offers six levels of English ranging from the beginning level to the Academic Proficiency level. It provides many English learning programs, which can be chosen by students based on their need, such as General English, Academic Preparation, English for Business and IT and English for Medical and Nursing. In general, IELI students undertake fulltime study. In one day, there are three classes which include Communication, Reading and Writing and Listening Class. In each class, there are only a maximum of 10 students. IELI offers 6 levels of English from beginning to Academic Proficiency. Students undertake a placement test before starting study at IELI. The placement test includes a reading and writing test, listening test and communication test. Any TOEFL, IELTS or English language certificate cannot be

used to determine placement certain level. The level will only be decided based upon the result of the placement test. Students who have completed the six levels are eligible to study at Flinders University. In other words, they have met the necessary English language requirements required by Flinders University (Intensive English Language Institute [IELI], 2009).

Measures

A questionnaire called Strategy Inventory for Language Learner (SILL) version 7.0 and designed by Oxford (1990) was used in this study. SILL is a self-report questionnaire and uses a Likert-scale ranging from "never true of me" (1) to "always true of me" (5). The SILL is widely used as a key instrument in research with good reliability ranging from .85 to .98 (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2007; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Park, 1997). A Cronbach's α calculated in this study also revealed an acceptable reliability (.91). Therefore, SILL is considered as a trusted questionnaire for determining language learning strategies.

In measuring language learning strategies, SILL divides the items in six sections. The brief details of SILL are given in Table 1. Once completed, the SILL data can be analyzed by using a reporting scale developed by Oxford (1990) to provide information to teachers and students about which group of strategies they use the most in learning English. The scale is (1) "High Usage" (3.5-5.0), (2) "Medium Usage" (2.5-3.4) and (3) "Low Usage" (1.0-2.4).

TABLE 2. Strategies, Number of Items within Each Section, and One Sample Item for Each Section.

Strategies		Items	Sample item
A	Memory	9	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them
B	Cognitive	14	I try not to translate word-for-word.
C	Compensation	6	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.
D	Metacognitive	9	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.
E	Affective	6	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.
F	Social	6	I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.

For the demographic data, the questionnaire requested information about gender, nationality and home language(s). The complete questionnaire was

distributed online through Survey Gizmo. The invitation of joining the survey was sent through their emails and Social Network such as Facebook.

Item Reliability

Cronbach's α coefficient was computed to determine an internal consistency reliability of the SILL (50 items) for each group. The reliability of SILL for IELI students was .91 on 34 cases. The high α indicated that the students' responses to the items in SILL were relatively consistent. According to Pallant (2007), an acceptable alpha level is above .7 but values above .8 are preferable.

For item reliability, some items have "Cronbach's α if item deleted" higher than the final alpha value (.91). These items are considered to be removed from the scale; however, for an established, well-validated scales, the items are removed only if the alpha value was low or less than .7 (Pallant, 2007). Since the Cronbach's α of SILL in this study was higher than .7, these items were not removed. The table 3 shows the items that have higher "Cronbach's α if item deleted".

TABLE 3. SILL Items that Have Higher Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted

Categories	Items	Final Alpha value	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
Cog6	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	.919	.921
Cog8	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	.919	.920
Cog10	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	.919	.922
Comp3	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	.919	.920
Affe5	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	.919	.922

Mem (Memory strategies), Cog (Cognitive strategies), Comp (Compensation strategy), Meta (Metacognitive strategies), Affe (Affective strategies), Soc (Social strategies), Cog1 (item 1 of Cognitive strategies)

Data Collection and Analysis

The SILL was administrated to IELI students online through SurveyGizmo. The full descriptive instructions regarding the procedures of answering the questionnaire were given in the introductory email, which was sent to their private emails and social network such as *Facebook*. The students were told that there were no right or

wrong answers and their answers would be kept confidential as well as their responses would be used for research purposes only. They were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the survey anytime.

Data analysis included the use of statistical methods consisting of descriptive statistics (means, standard deviation and frequencies and percentages) to compile information about the demography of the participants and to calculate overall strategy use. Cronbach's α was used to test the level of internal consistency within the questionnaire. To investigate gender differences in the frequency of language learning strategy use, Independent-Samples *T-test* was used because gender has two groups (male and female). According to Pallant (2007, p. 232), "an independent-samples *t-test* is used to compare the mean score, on some continuous variables, for two different groups of subjects". To determine any variation in strategy use because of nationality differences, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted because nationality has more than two groups. Pallant (2007) states in her book that analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used in comparing the mean scores of more than two groups. The six categories of language learning strategies in the questionnaire are considered as dependent variables while nationality and gender as independent variables. All data analysis utilized the SPSS package version 17.0.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overall Strategy Use

The overall use of strategies by participants is presented in Table 2. The most preferred group of the six strategy categories were social strategies ($M = 3.90$) followed by metacognitive strategies ($M = 3.75$), cognitive strategies ($M = 3.55$), and compensation strategies ($M = 3.53$). The least preferred strategies were memory ($M = 3.00$) and affective ($M = 3.25$).

TABLE 4. Descriptive Statistics for the Variables of the Six Strategy Categories

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Rank
Memory	1	4	3.00	.611	6
Cognitive	3	5	3.55	.470	3
Compensation	3	5	3.53	.630	4
Metacognitive	2	5	3.75	.609	2
Affective	2	5	3.25	.621	5
Social	2	5	3.90	.672	1

The finding of the least favored strategies of memory and affective was similar to several studies about language learning strategies (Hashim & Sahil, 1994; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). The mean scores of all items in six categories of SILL are reported in Table 5. All mean fell between 4.35 and 2.03 on a scale of 1 to 5. According to Table 5, metacognitive strategy item "*I pay attention when someone is speaking English*" (M = 4.35) was the most frequently used strategy for the participants, and memory strategy item "*I use flashcards to remember new English words*" was the least frequently used strategy

TABLE 5. Preference of Language Learning Strategies by IELI Students

Strategy category	Strategy Statement	Rank	Mean
High usage (M = 3.50 or above)			
Meta3	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	1	4.35
Soc5	I ask questions in English.	2	4.24
Soc6	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	3	4.18
Cog5	I start conversations in English.	4	4.15
Meta4	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	5	4.15
Comp6	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	6	4.09
Cog6	I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English.	7	4.03
Soc1	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again.	8	4.00
Mem1	I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	9	3.91
Comp2	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	10	3.91
Meta2	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	11	3.91
Meta9	I think about my progress in learning English.	12	3.91
Soc3	I practice English with other students.	13	3.91
Affe2	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	14	3.85
Meta6	I look for people I can talk to in English.	15	3.79
Meta8	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	16	3.76
Soc4	I ask for help from English speakers.	17	3.74
Cog2	I try to talk like native English speakers.	18	3.71
Cog3	I practice the sounds of English.	19	3.71
Comp1	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	20	3.71
Mem2	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	21	3.68
Affe1	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	22	3.68
Cog9	I first skim an English passage (read it quickly) then go back and read carefully.	23	3.65
Meta1	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	24	3.62
Cog8	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	25	3.59
Cog11	I try to find patterns in English.	26	3.59
Cog1	I say or write new English words several times.	27	3.53
Medium usage (M = 2.5 – 3.4)			
Cog4	I use the English words I know in different ways.	28	3.41
Cog7	I read for pleasure in English.	29	3.41
Meta7	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in	30	3.41

	English.		
Comp5	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	31	3.38
Affe6	I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	32	3.38
Affe4	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	33	3.35
Soc2	I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	34	3.35
Mem8	I review English lessons often.	35	3.29
Cog12	I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	36	3.29
Cog10	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	37	3.26
Cog13	I try not to translate word-for-word.	38	3.24
Cog14	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	39	3.18
Mem4	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	40	3.09
Comp3	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	41	3.06
Comp4	I read English without looking up every new word.	42	3.06
Mem3	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.	43	3.03
Mem9	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	44	2.91
Affe3	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	45	2.91
Meta5	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	46	2.82
Mem7	I physically act out new English words.	47	2.68
	Low usage (M = 2.4 or below)		
Mem5	I use rhymes to remember new English words.	48	2.41
Affe5	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	49	2.32
Mem6	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	50	2.03

**Mem (Memory strategies), Cog (Cognitive strategies), Comp (Compensation strategy), Meta (Metacognitive strategies), Affe (Affective strategies), Soc (Social strategies), Mem1 (item 1 of Memory strategies)*

Differences in Strategies Use because of Gender

Table 6 shows the *t-test* results to determine any significant differences in the use of language learning strategies because of gender. There were no significant differences in scores for males and females in Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, Affective or Social categories of language learning strategies because the value of Sig. (2-tailed) was above .05. Therefore, there was no statistically significant difference in the mean language learning strategies scores for males and females.

TABLE 6. Independent-Samples T-Test Results to Determine Differences in Language Learning Strategies because of Gender

Strategies Categories	Gender				t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean		Std. Deviation			
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
Memory	3.04	2.99	.661	.601	.198	.844
Cognitive	3.69	3.49	.356	.511	1.158	.256
Compensation	3.62	3.49	.592	.656	.550	.586
Metacognitive	3.98	3.64	.663	.564	1.565	.127

Affective	3.53	3.12	.591	.602	1.889	.068
Social	4.00	3.86	.447	.761	.583	.564

Differences in Strategies Use because of Nationality

As shown in Table 1, the majority of the participants were from Indonesia, Japan and Saudi Arabia. Since come nationalities had very low representation, certain subgroups were combined in order to evaluate statistically possible differences in strategy use nationality. China and Taiwan have a similar language; therefore, they were combined in one group. The remaining participants were combined in one group as "Others" since the number of participant in each group was small. A one-way between-group analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of nationality on the use language learning strategies. Subjects were divided into six groups of nationalities. There was no statistically significant difference since the value of Sig. of each variable was above .05. Therefore, based on the ANOVA, the different nationalities did not have an impact in language learning strategy used by IELI students. The complete detail of ANOVA is presented in Table 7.

TABLE 7. Summary of Variation in Use of Strategy Categories by Nationality

Variables	Indonesian (n = 11)		Japanese (n = 9)		Saudi Arabian (n = 4)		Chinese/ Taiwanese (n = 2)		Korean (n = 4)		Others (n = 5)		*F*	Sig.
		D		D		D		D		D		D		
Mem	3.06	.660	2.74	.616	3.17	.799	2.67	.157	3.37	.501	3.14	.502	.772	.578
Cog	3.58	.473	3.48	.556	3.93	.425	3.18	.556	3.38	.251	3.57	.398	.880	.507
Comp	3.58	.534	3.46	.725	3.71	.774	3.33	.943	3.56	.481	3.50	.808	.120	.987
Meta	3.60	.561	3.65	.808	4.11	.791	3.61	.079	3.74	.321	4.02	.363	.650	.664
Affe	3.14	.581	.602	.908	3.75	.354	3.42	.289	3.50	.486	3.50	.621	1.545	.208
Soc	3.91	.681	3.89	.687	4.38	.534	3.75	.825	3.50	1.167	3.83	.441	.605	.697

**Mem (Memory strategies), Cog (Cognitive strategies), Comp (Compensation strategy), Meta (Metacognitive strategies), Affe (Affective strategies), Soc (Social strategies) Differences: $p < 0.05$*

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

IELI course is an important part for international students to prepare themselves to study in English speaking university although not all IELI students intend to continue to university. In other words, some students just want to learn or

to improve English in IELI. The review of literature suggests that there is little research focusing on language learning strategies in English program in the university context. Moreover, no research was located specifically regarding language learning strategies in IELI. This study has benefit for English language teachers and learners and for IELI administrators, in particular, to inform and provide information regarding language learning strategy use.

This study experienced limitations in terms of its process of answering questionnaire since the samples of this study came from many different countries and the questionnaire was presented in English. Furthermore, some participants were still studying English and had lower proficiency. This led to limitation in answering the questions because of language barrier. It was difficult for the researcher to translate the questionnaire in each home language of each participant since they came from many countries with different languages. The researcher minimized this limitation by introducing several difficult terms in the questionnaire to the participants before distributing it. Another limitation was the number of participants that was quite small (n = 34) to have a good statistical analysis. Therefore, the results of this survey cannot be generalized. Further research with an appropriate number of sample would be needed to give a clearer description of language learning strategies used by IELI students.

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