PREFERRED STRATEGIES USED BY PEKANBARU SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT' TO LEARN INDIVIDUAL SKILLS OF ENGLISH

Fakhri Ras
English Study Program of FKIP Riau University

Abstract: The objective of this study is to investigate how Pekanbaru senior high school students learn various language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing as well as vocabulary and structure). One of the definitions of language learning strategies is defined by Oxford (1990b). She states that language learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more efficient, and more transferable in new situation. The needed data were collected by interviewing 10 selected students from five ethnic groups (Malay, Minangkabau, Javanese, Batak, and Chinese) at various senior high schools in Pekanbaru. The respondents were asked to answer the following question: If you are asked to increase the the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing as well as vocabulary and structure), what do you do? Inter-rater reliability was used to judge the answers of related respondents in the interview by the qualified inter-raters-that are master's degree in TEFL. The inter-raters modified the respondents' responses in casual English into acceptable written English without changing the concept of the expression. The highest frequency has been acknowledged. There are 67 strategies identified as the most-preferred strategies employed by the respondents to increase the language skills as well as vocabulary and structure. The use of these strategies can be grouped into once-mentioned, twice-mentioned, and more than twice-mentioned. Examples of strategies mentioned more than twice for improving for improving speaking skills, preparing as much vocabulary as possible (four times); and for improving writing skill, the strategy of writing procedurally (three times). Suggestions for further study are those the successful learners, less successful learners, and gifted learners should also be taken into account as crucial factors to investigate in the near future.

Key words: *strategies, skills, individual*

INTRODUCTION

Under the framework of the 1984 GBPP, new language learning strategies were introduced by teachers who were trained in the communicative approach. English was gradually used as the main medium of instruction, and both teachers and students were encouraged to use the language outside the classroom. The strategy included the use of English expressions, ideas, and vocabulary in suggested texts and authentic materials for speaking and writing activities, applied until it was replaced by the current approach delineated in the 2006 GBPP (DepartemenPendidikan&Kebudayaan, 2006). In this context, teacher-centred instruction was changed to student-centred learning (a shift in pedagogical focus from language teachers to language learners).

The language learners—limited to senior high school students—zeroed in on two important language learning targets: (a) the use of English and (b) the score in the final national examination, as stipulated in the 2004 GBPP (DepartemenPendidikan&Kebudayaan, 2004). The current curriculum provides a framework for developing the ability to use English. Learners have to adopt the genre of the text-descriptive, narrative, procedure, explanation, discussion, exposition, review, news items, etc., before they practice speaking and writing as required by the 2006 GBPP (Departemen Pendidikan & Kebudayaan, 2006). In addition, they are also asked to master the materials offered in the final national examination (35 items for reading and 15 items for listening). To achieve both targets, the students employ certain language learning strategies in the classroom, out of the class, and in the national examination.

The students normally do what the teachers assign to them, such as underlining the different language expressions in the text book; finding the meaning of certain words (conceptual, structural, and contextual words) in the dictionary (Nuttall, 1982); and identifying types of questions linked to the written text. They are also asked to read authentic materials form certain English newspapers (*The Jakarta Post* and *The Indonesia Times*) and magazines (*Hello*). A few months before the national examination, the learners are given a break-through program.

In other words, manner of learning English in Indonesia has been determined by the suggested teaching approach to curriculum practices from period to period (Tomlinson, 1990). For example, the students were asked

to concentrate on correct practice in the classroom even though such was not acknowledged in workplaces (Prabhu, 1989). Meanwhile, the students memorised the meaning of words in the textbook in order to understand the text and the vocabulary elements of the text, followed by memorising short dialogues in the textbook for speaking activities in the classroom. For their writing activity, the students imitated a certain model of written text in producing their own compositions. For their listening exercise, the students read the transcription of the spoken text. In addition, the spoken texts were spelled out more than once until the learners understood their meaning.

The students were familiarised with student active learning (SAL), in which they could choose the activity they wanted (Nunan, 1999). The bottom-up approach to teaching was picked over the top-down approach, under the guidelines of a learner-centred curriculum. The students were empowered to utilise teaching and learning resources existing in and outside schools. Authentic supplementary materials were part of the teaching and learning school aids, which were heavily filtered by the school board and school committee.

Several studies have shown that the use of language learning strategies (LLS) have made the learning of a language (in this case, English) more efficient and produced a positive effect on the learners' use of it (Wenden& Rubin, 1987; O'Malley &Chamot, 1990; Chamot 2004; Oxford, 1996; Cohen, 1998). Thus, the right choice of language learning strategies allows learners to improve their proficiency, overall achievement, or specific language skill areas (Wenden& Rubin, 1987; Oxford &Crookall, 1990; O'Malley &Chamot, 1990).

The objectives of this study is to investigate investigate how Pekanbaru senior high school students learn the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing as well as vocabulary and structure).

A very basic element in defining language learning strategies is the concept of the strategy itself (Chesterfield 1985). Various definitions of LLS have been formulated by researchers in relation to English as a second language (L2) or foreign language (FL).

Tarone (1983) bases her definition on the context of the use of communication strategies, in which two interlocutors agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared. Then

she differentiates communication strategy from production strategy, in which one linguistic system is used efficiently and clearly. She also clarifies the distinction between communication and learning strategy, by which linguistic and socio-linguistic competence in the target language was developed. On the other hand, Tarone (1978) ascertains the impossibility of separating communication and learning strategies because: (a) it is difficult to measure an individual's purposes, whether in communication or learning; (b) the purpose might be both; and (c) even if the person just wants to communicate and not learn, learning often occurs anyway.

Ellis (1994) listed two types of learning strategies similar to Tarone's concept: skill and language learning. The two are interchangeably used; otherwise, it could be fruitful to differentiate them for the purpose of investigation and employment (Abdullah Hussein El-Saleh El-Omari 2002). The other concept of learning strategies is the specific action used by second-language and/or foreign-language learners to control, improve, and enhance their own learning or progress in developing L2 skills, or make learning easier, faster, or more enjoyable (Tamada, 1997; Oxford, 1996; Donato& McCormick, 1994; Nyikos& Oxford, 1993; O'Malley &Chamot, 1990; Oxford &Crookall, 1990; Wenden& Rubin, 1987).

Some researchers use other terms for the word 'strategy', such as: (a) steps and operations (Oxford 1989); and (b) any specific action (Oxford, 1990b). To a certain extent, the same can be said about other researchers (Ehrman, 1989; Nyikos 1987, 1993; Chamot 1987, 1990; Donato& McCormick, 1994; Abdullah Hussein El-Saleh El-Omari, 2002).

Rubin (1975) defines language learning strategies as the techniques or devices that learners use to acquire second language knowledge. Stern (1975) calls them some general order of higher approaches to learning which govern the choice of specific techniques. Naiman et al (1978) define LLS as more or less deliberate approaches to learning. Rubin (1987) states that LLS are sets of operations, steps, plans, and routines of what learners do to facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information to regulate learning. Wenden& Rubin (1987) refers to them as behaviours, where learners engage in and regulate the learning of a second language. Chamot (1987) defines LLS as techniques, approaches, or deliberate actions that students take in

order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information.

Lan (2005) sees language learning strategies as terms applied to various behaviours used in learning: things people do that are relatively easy to change, vary according to their learning style, are effective or ineffective for specific situations, and are frequently under some level of conscious control. Some learning strategies are specific to each of the four language skills.

To summarise, constructing the definitions of language learning strategies includes various key elements, such as the context of using the strategies, the target of learning the language, and the suitable steps to be taken by the learners. These elements are reflected in the various LLS that have been formulated by experts such as Tarone (1983), Rubin (1975), Oxford (1989), Ellis (1994), Green &Hetch (1993), Mohammad Amin (2000), and Lan (2005).

In several noted research activities, the term 'language learning strategies' reveals at least in four different expressions: (a) learner strategy (Wenden& Rubin, 1987), (b) learning strategies (O'Malley &Chamot, 1990; Chamot& O'Malley, 1994), (c) language learning strategies (Oxford 1990a, 1996; Abdullah Hussein El-Saleh El-Omari, 2002), and (d) learning strategies and/or learning behaviours (Mohamed Amin Embi, 2000).

Wenden (1987) classifies language learning strategies into at least six elements: (a) specific actions or techniques, (b) observable activities, (c) problem-oriented characteristic, (d) direct or indirect contribution to learning, (e) automatic application after prolonged and repeated usage, and (f) behaviours that are amenable to change. Similarly, Lessard-Clouston (1997) created four reference criteria: (a) learner-generated activities (steps taken by the learners), (b) learner-enhanced language learning or help in developing language competence, (c) learners' visible actions (behaviours, steps, techniques, etc.) or unseen things (thought and mental processes), and (d) the involvement of information and memory of the learners.

According to Oxford (1990b), language learning strategies (a) contribute to the main goal—communicative competence, (b) allow learners to become self-directed, (c) expand the role of teachers, (d) are problem-oriented, (e) are specific actions taken by the learner, (f) involve many aspects

of the learner, not just the cognitive, (g) support learning directly or indirectly, (h) are not always observable, (i) are often conscious, (j) can be taught, (k) are flexible, and (l) are influenced by various factors.

Cohen (1996) suggests that language learning strategies (a) have the explicit goal of assisting learners in improving their knowledge; (b) include cognitive processing strategies, strategies for solidifying newly acquired language patterns, and strategies to determine the amount of cognitive energy needed; (c) encompass language performance and communication strategies; and (d) can be further differentiated into cognitive, metacognitive, affective, or social.

METHODOLOGY

There were 10 interview respondents out of the 400 students, who were chosen purposively by considering various factors, including gender, ethnicity, parents' economic background, academic background, and type of school.

Purposive sampling is often used in qualitative research designs when the researcher is seeking people or other sampling groups. The researcher selects a person or site to be included in the study because the person or site is thought to be typical of the study being investigated (Keyton, 2006). Table 1 shows the profile of the interview respondents.

Table 1.Profile of the Interview Respondents

No.	Factors	Sub-factors	Number
1.	Gender	Male	3
		Female	7
Total			10
2.	Ethnicity	Riau Malay	2
		Minangkabau	2
		Javanese	2
		Batak	2
		Chinese	2
Total			10
3.	Parents' Economic Background	High	5
		Medium	5
		Low	None
4.	Academic Background	Natural Science	6
		Social Science	4
Total			10
5.	Type of School	State School	6
		Private School	4
Total			10

The purpose of all research interviews is to obtain certain kinds of information. The purpose of the explanatory interview is essentially heuristic: to develop ideas and research hypotheses rather than gather facts and statistics (Oppenheim, 2000). Interviewing, one of the most common and powerful ways to try to understand human beings, has a wide variety of forms and a multiplicity of uses. The most common type is individual, face-to-face verbal interchange, but it can also take the form of face-to-face group interviewing, mailed or self-administered questionnaires, and telephone surveys. The interview can be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (Denzin& Lincoln, 1998).

Interviews can be classified into two: semi-structured/unstructured and structured. Many researchers prefer to go to the interviewees with a set of questions for them to answer, and then let the interview develop according to the situation that may arise. Such is a semi-structured interview (Mohamed Amin Embi, 1996), in which prepared questions serve as a guide for the conversation, but there is no fixed order as to how the questions are put to the

interviewees. Wenden (1985) used a semi-structured interview (like an open discussion) to investigate the strategies for her ESL students. In the interview, the students concentrated their discussion on the information about their daily activities and the kind of strategies they used in each one. Tyacke and Mendelson (1986) also used semi-structured interviews on four German groups of language learners and found that even though all of four groups were relatively successful language learners with the same background, each used significantly different strategies.

In this study, 10 students (purposively selected from the sample) were interviewed about how they learned English in general and their individual English language skills. Each of them was called to give responses on three parts of the interview protocol, Parts A, B, and C. Their responses were directly written down in the space below the questions. Most of them responded in English and the rest, in BahasaInddonesia. Part A was about learning English in general; Part B, the four individual language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing); and Part C, two individual language components (vocabulary and structure). The responses that were in Bahasa Indonesia were translated into English. The findings of the study will be quoted verbatim from the interview transcript to strengthen the basis arguments.

The interviews were conducted on the 10 students who were selected from the five ethnic groups (Malay, Minangkabau, Javanese, Batak, and Chinese). They were assigned to another venue soon after the questionnaires had been collected. Before they were asked questions, the respondents were given background questions to answer. The questions were designed to find out general strategies for learning English and individual language skills.

The 10 students tapped for purposive sampling were interviewed about the ways they learned English in general and their language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, structure, and vocabulary). Their responses were directly written down in the space below the questions; most were in English language and some, in Bahasa Indonesia. The responses that were in Bahasa Indonesia were translated into English.

Furthermore, the process of data interpretation was interactive and involved data reduction, examination, and conclusion verification by: looking for comments that described the ways language skills were acquired, looking

for comments that indicated strategies of language learning, and looking for new strategies that may not have been included in this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The response of the respondents to the research questions is discussed. In general, the strategies of highest frequency have been identified. There are three main strategies that have been employed by the respondents to improve their English language in general. These strategies are studying English outside school and at school, discussing lessons with English teachers and friends, and finding various English language sources.

The strategy of discussing lesson with English teachers and friends has been used regardless of gender, ethnicity, parents' income, type of school attended, or academic stream, with a total frequency of 129. In term of gender, this strategy was used in equal frequency by male and female respondents, that is, by 13 and 13, respectively. Most ethnicity groups excluding the Batakstudents, also used the strategy more or less frequently, at 5, 3, 4, and 4. A similar trend of frequency was seen regardless of the income of the respondents' parents. On the other hand, a big difference of frequency showed in terms of type of school, with 22 and 9, and academic stream, with 16 and 8. In addition, the strategy of studying English outside school and at school was used only by female respondents, with a frequency of 13, while the strategy of finding various English sources was employed by two groups—Batak students and private-school students.

These usage figures show a big difference among the three strategies. This means that the strategy of discussing with teachers and friends is the most workable way for the respondents to improve their ability in English in general. It does not mean that the other two strategies (studying English outside school and at school and finding various English sources) are not fruitful for the respondents.

Focusing to the four language skills, vocabulary and structure, the highest-frequency use of the strategies has also been acknowledged. There are 67 strategies identified as the most-preferred strategies employed by the respondents to improve the four skills of English language as well as vocabulary and structure. The use of these strategies can be grouped into once-mentioned,

twice-mentioned, and more-than-twice-mentioned.

Examples of strategies mentioned more than twice for improving listening are concentrating on the spoken text (four times) and focusing on listening text (three times); for improving speaking, preparing as much vocabulary as possible (four times) and focusing on listening text (three times); for improving grammar, correcting the mistakes (four times); and for improving writing skills, the strategy of writing procedurally (three times).

In other words, the respondents have a certain belief in the above strategies. This does not mean that the rest of the strategies (the ones mentioned twice and once) are not workable. Regardless of variable, many strategies have been employed.

The first example is strategy by gender. Three of nine strategies are prominent. These strategies are concentrating on the spoken text, using vocabulary in various language contexts, and using the patterns of English. These three strategies can be said to be more useful than the others. This does not mean the rest strategies are and structure. The strategies are preparing as much vocabulary as possible, feeling nervous, reading aspects of the text, writing procedurally, and composing a piece of writing based on what they already know. Female students used most of these strategies more frequently compared to male students, in speaking (seven and six, respectively), in writing (seven and six), in vocabulary (20 and 110), and in grammar (17 and nine). On the other hand, the male students employed two of the nine strategies with more frequency compared to the female students (16 and 15, and seven and five).

The second example is strategy by ethnicity where the respondents, (Malay, Minangkabau, Javanese, Batak, and Chinese) have identified 27 most-preferred strategies in improving English ability. Most of these strategies were identified between two and seven times. In addition, among them there are two strategies used: the strategy of gathering information related to the topic and that of using new vocabulary learnt in speaking. This means that the rest of the strategies also used in a similar way.

The third example is usage based on parents' income, where the respondents (children of high-income and medium-income parents) have identified nine preferred strategies in improving English ability. The highest-

frequency strategy is concentrating on the spoken text, with 31 mentions. The other eight strategies have six and 20 mentions. This does not mean that these less-used strategies are not fruitful to these respondents. For the strategy of concentrating on the spoken text, students from high-income families use more strategies, with 20 compared to 19 in the middle-income group. For the strategy of doing one's best to speak, both groups practiced it with equal frequencies (six and six). In contrast, students with medium-income families employed the strategy of using vocabulary in various language activities at a higher frequency, with 12 mentions compared to the high-income group with eight.

The fourth example is usage based on type of school attended, where the respondents (private-school and state-school students) have employed nine preferred strategies to improve their English ability. There are two prominent strategies among these nine. They are using vocabulary in various language activities, with 25 mentions, and developing ideas to write, with 24. These two strategies go hand in hand when the respondents do writing activities. By mastering lots of vocabulary items, the respondents become flexible and can use them for various learning purposes, including developing ideas to write. This does not mean that the other seven strategies are not also workable. Private-school students more frequently used the strategy of focusing on listening ideas of listening text than state-school students did. On the other hand, state-school students more often mentioned the strategy of using vocabulary in various language activities than did the private-school students. The strategy of reading aspects of the text was employed by both groups of respondents in equal frequency.

The last example is strategy by academic stream, where the respondents (natural science and social science students) have employed eight preferred strategies in improving the their English ability. The strategy of using vocabulary in various language activities is the highest-frequency strategy used among these eight strategies. This means that the respondents are in a situation in which learned vocabulary should be practiced in English subjects. The other seven strategies go hand in hand in English learning. The natural science students more often used the strategy of writing procedurally, with 10 mentions, compared to five for the social science students. Similarly, with the strategy of

preparing as much vocabulary as possible, natural science students uses it more frequently than social science students (10 and 5, respectively). On the other hand, the social science students more often employed the strategy of using vocabulary in various language activities, with 11 mentions, compared to the natural science students with 10.

There are 67 strategies—9 are determined by gender; 28, by ethnicity; 9, by parents' income; 9, by types of schools; and 12, by academic streams—which are the most preferred in improving the the four language skills(listening, speaking, reading, writing as well as vocabulary and structure) English. These strategies can be grouped under once-preference usage, twice-preference usage, and more than twice-preference usage, for all study factors.

More than twice-preference usage refers to the following strategies: (1) expanding the vocabulary to improve speaking skills (gender, ethnicity, parents' income, and academic streams); (2) to improve writing skills: reading certain aspects of the text to improve reading skills (gender, parents' income, and types of schools), developing ideas to write (gender, ethnicity, parents' income, types of schools, and academic streams), and gathering sources related to the topic (ethnicity [Minangkabau and Javanese] and parents' income). In other words, the respondents relied on the said strategies to improve their speaking, and writing skills. Indirectly, using these strategies also improves the vocabulary.

Twice-preference usage refers to improving vocabulary by using it in various language activities (types of schools and academic streams); writing procedurally to improve writing skills (gender and types of schools); and learning structure through the understanding of the rules of language in improving grammar (ethnicity and types of schools). Even though these strategies deal with vocabulary and grammar directly, their usage has an indirect impact on the improvement of other language skills, such as speaking, and writing, due to the support function of vocabulary and grammar in the four language skills.

Once-preference usage involves improving the four language skills, as well as vocabulary and grammar. An example is the strategy of relaxing by listening to English music, used only by Batak students (ethnicity factor). This does not mean that only Batak students like to listen to English music; other students also do some listening, but not as often. Another example is the

strategy of reading the stories in English textbooks, which is employed by students from middle-income families. This does not mean, however, that students whose parents have high income do not perform this activity. This strategy can be helpful since the content of the story and the language usage is relevant to load of the curriculum. Any of the rest of the strategies can be applied by the respondents in coping with their language learning problems.

In line with the findings on speaking and writing, Mohammed Amin Embi (2000) has reported several preferred strategies by Malaysian studentsto improve speech – conversing in English with friends (good learners) and asking for clarification from teacher (poor learners).

In this section, the implications of the study are reflected as the consequence of the findings. To raise the use of language learning strategies to a high level, several steps should be taken by the said agencies in the Education Department in Riau Province, Indonesia. Firstly, the quality assurance board of education (LPMP) should include LLS as one of training programmes for a core group of English language teachers (MGMP) all over the province. These teachers are then expected to offer the LLS training materials to their counterparts in the regency level, who will, in turn, bring the concepts to their own school.

Secondly, Pekanbaru senior high school management should also make language learning strategies part of the practical training for their English teachers. Then, the English language teachers should go hand in hand with the English language learners. Several things can be done by English language teachers at the school level. For one thing, they should be exposed to the various LLS models; i.e. the models of O'Malley et. al. (1985a), Oxford (1990), Mohamed Amin (1996 & 2000), and Macaro (2001).

Language learning strategies training for English language learners.

Firstly, they should be instructed to effectively remember things (memory strategies) related to what they have learned concerning new teaching materials. Further, learners should be provided a series of training materials on English words, phrases, and sentences by using appropriate learning aids in order to ease them into the mastery of the four skills of English language, as well as vocabulary and grammar.Secondly, learners should be trained to harness all their mental processes (cognitive strategies) when they do language

tasks in classroom. The tasks include integrated English language skills and language components (vocabulary and grammar) (BambangYudiChayono, 2010).Thirdly, learners should be given exercises to compensate for missing knowledge (compensation strategies) when they face certain learning problems. For example, they are asked to guess the meaning of new words in a reading passage without consulting a dictionary. They are trained to relate the new words with other words in the passage.

Fourthly, learners should be assisted in organising and evaluating their knowledge (metacognitive strategies) when they are asked to enhance their learning achievement. For example, they are requested to find as many ways as possible of using English in and out of the classroom. If possible, they are asked to converse with native English speakers to practise what they have learned.Fifthly, the learners should be counselled to manage their emotions (affective strategies) when they feel discouraged about learning English. They should be assisted in surmounting the problem of getting on board to learn English, and given rewards for accomplishing the language tasks.Lastly, the learners should be motivated to learn with others (social strategies) when they need help. An academic atmosphere that is conducive to learning English should be created at school whenever or wherever possible.

CONCLUSION

Eventhough, there have been a lot of strategies used to improve the the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing as well as vocabulary and structure), it is possible to maximize other strategies. English language teachers should encourage the respondents in order they could create more strategies in learning speaking and writing.

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