

YOUNG INDONESIAN STUDENTS' LEARNING STYLE AND STRATEGIES IN ACQUIRING ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Learning strategies and style are intentionally used and consciously controlled by the learner. Learning strategies and style can also enable students to become more independent, autonomous, and lifelong learners. This qualitative study investigates some styles and strategies used by Indonesian learners who are learning English as their second language. The findings from this study show that some Young Indonesian learners link social strategy to cognitive strategy to learn English.

Keywords: second language, learning strategy, learning style, English language.

INTRODUCTION

Introducing English to young learners is important since it is believed that second language is, to certain extent, better to be established in the childhood era (Slattery and Willis, 2001 cited in Hakim 2011). The earlier a language is introduced to children, the better input as well as output will be obtained. In relation to this, Chomskyans (Ellis, 1994) claim that human brain has the-so-called innate capacity which comprises the prior knowledge and universal grammar of any languages meaning that there is a system which is able to automatically grasp the pattern of any novel language being learned or acquired. This innate capacity tends to have better performance in early stage of human development.

However, young learners are very unique; the way they learn, including learning language(s), is not similar to that of adults (Pinter, 2006). For instance, children are active learners and thinkers (Piaget, 1970). They usually grasp a new knowledge through active engagement of certain activities. They are also more

interested in concrete and fun things or activities when thinking.

Young learner is categorized as students from ages three to eight years old (Wilson, 2003; Alianello, 2004). Pinter (2006) limits the age groups of young learners from five to fourteen years old. However, she offers an idea that age of categorization is not a big deal in teaching language to young learners. Moreover, Paul (2000) adds that all children deserve the chance to achieve their potential both as learners and as whole people, and become broad-minded members of a truly international society.

Further, Harmer (2007b: 82) classifies the characteristics of young learners as follows: (1) They respond to meaning even if they do not understand individual words; (2) They often learn indirectly rather than directly; (3) Their understanding comes not just from explanation, but also from what they see and hear, and crucially, have a chance to touch and interact with; (4) They find abstract concepts such as grammar rules difficult to grasp; (5) They generally

display an enthusiasm for learning and a curiosity about the world around them; (6) They have a need for individual attention and approval from the teacher; (7) They are keen to talk about themselves and respond well to learning that uses themselves and their own lives as main topics in the classroom; and (8) They have a limited attention span unless activities are extremely engaging, they can get easily bored.

From education point of view, it is interested to reveal young Indonesian students’ style and strategies in acquiring English as second language, and what factors influence their learning strategies. These considerations become the main concern of this research.

Context

Learning Style

Learning Style is the characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological behaviors that serve as indicator of how learner think, interact, and react to the learning environment (Keefe, 1979 cited in Elis 1994). An individual learner style, therefore, is viewed as relatively fixed and not readily changed. Reid (1987) distinguished four perceptual learning models:

- Visual Learning (for example, reading and studying charts)
- Auditory Learning (for example, listening to lectures or to audio tapes)
- Kinesthetic Learning (involving physical responses)
- Tactile Learning (hands-on learning, as in building model)

In line with Reid (1987), Cornett (1983), in Oxford 2003, argues that learning style provides general direction to learning behavior. He also mentions four classifications of learning style which strongly associated with L2 learning involving; sensory preferences, personality

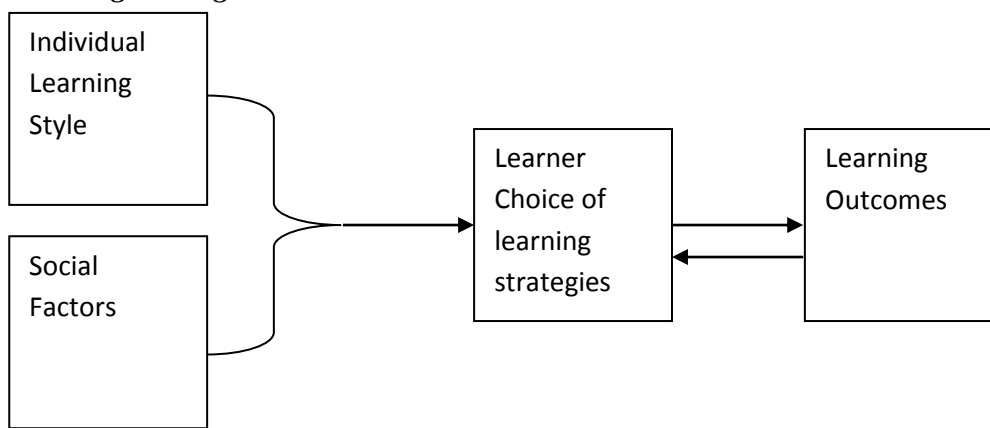
types, desired degree of generality, and biological differences.

- **Sensory preference** is associated to visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile preference of learning.
- **Personality types** can be classified into four categories: extraverted vs. introverted; intuitive-random vs. sensing-sequential; thinking vs. feeling; and closure-oriented/judging vs. open/perceiving. Extraverted student get their motivation from the external world. They want to interact and communicate with people. In contrast, introverts gain their energy from the internal world, seeking privacy and willing to have just a few friendships, which are often very strong and deep.
- **Desired degree of generality** discusses about the differences of the idea of learners who concentrate on detail; they are *holistic* and *analytic* learners. *Holistic* students like socially interactive, communicative events in which they can emphasize the main idea and avoid analyzing about grammatical feature. In comparison, *Analytic* students tend to concentrate on grammatical feature and often avoid more free-flowing communicative activities. Generally, Analytic learners do not take the risks necessary for guessing from the context unless they are fairly sure of the accuracy of their guesses.
- **Biological factors**, such as biorhythms, sustenance, and location. *Biorhythms* expose the times of day when students feel comfortable and perform their best. Some L2 learners are morning people, whereas others are not willing to start learning until the afternoon, and still others are creatures of the evening, and like to study at night when necessary. *Sustenance* refers to the need for food or drink while learning. A number of

L2 learners do not feel comfortable learning without a cup of coffee, or a soda in hand, while others do not feel comfortable from study by food and drink. *Location* deals with the nature of the environment: temperature, lighting, sound, and even the firmness of the chairs. L2 students differ widely with regard to these environmental factors.

L2 learners manifest different learning styles, but it is not clear whether some styles produce better result than others. In many studies, it does not take part as a major factor which contributes to good performance of learners in acquiring English as second language.

Learning Strategies



The relationship between learning style, social factor, learning strategies, and learning outcomes

Learning strategies are the behaviours and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning that are contributed to influence the learner's encoding process (Weinstein and Mayer, 1986). In line with Weinstein and Mayer (1986), Rubin (1987) comes up with the idea that learning strategies are strategies which contribute to the development of the language system which the learner develops and constructs learning directly.

In learning the second language, learners will have specific learning strategies. According to O'Malley and Chamot's (1990), there are three characteristics of L2 learning strategies, involving: cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies.

Cognitive strategy deals more with manipulating language materials in direct way through reasoning, imitating, note-

taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, elaborating information, practicing in natural setting, practicing structures and sounds formally. Cognitive strategies as these appear to be directly related to the performance of particular learning task. While metacognitive strategy is about making use of knowledge about cognitive process to regulate language learning by means of planning, monitoring, and evaluating.

The last is social strategy. It deals with the ways in which the learner work with other learners and native speakers and understands the target culture as well as the language (e.g. asking question to get clarification, asking for clarification of a confusing point, asking for help in doing a language task, talking with a native-speaking conversation partner and exploring cultural and social norms.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative method as the fundamental aspect of the study. Ethnographic data collection techniques were gained through interview and questionnaire. This research involved two young Indonesian students who take an English course as the participant; they are Adi and Iqbal (pseudonym name). They are students of Junior high school in Bandung grade 8 and they are 13 years old. Adi has been learning English for 1 year intensively in an English course in Bandung, while Iqbal has been learning English intensively in an English course for more than 4 years. The procedures of the research were described as follows:

- a. Finding out some theories and concepts related to second language acquisition, learning strategies, aspects related to learning strategies
- b. Selecting participants. This study chose two Indonesian students who take an English course.
- c. Preparing interview guideline.
- d. Preparing questionnaire.
- e. Asking respondents to fill in the questionnaire
- f. Analyzing the obtained data from interview and questionnaire by referring to theories.
- g. Interpreting the data and drawing conclusion based on the obtained data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Students Learning’ Strategies and Style *Students Learning’ Strategies*

Learning English is not that easy. This condition happens to the two respondents of this research who admit that they find several difficulties in learning English. Each respondent has different motivation of learning English. Adi is interested to continue his study to Bilingual School, while Iqbal’s motivation emerged

when his mother forced him to learn English since he was in elementary school.

These respondents have different length time of study English. Adi has been learning English for 1 year intensively in an English course in Bandung, while Iqbal has been learning English intensively in an English course for more than 4 years. So it is obvious that both of them show different perspective and attitude. Adi is still dealing with many linguistic factors like grammatical rules. He also admits that sometimes he feels confused of learning English. In contrast, Iqbal seems to see it general. He mentions that English is already difficult and many people do not challenge themselves very much to handle that problem.

The media to support their learning are different. Adi gets a lot of benefits from reading Manga (Japanese Comic) in the internet, while Iqbal likes watching cartoon movies to get more exposure to English.

Even though they have different media in learning, somehow they have many similarities in learning strategies. Both of them linked the social strategy to the cognitive strategy as their learning strategy. It means they learn English through interaction with their community. The strategies to emerge were those based on interpersonal interaction (asking question to get clarification, asking for clarification of a confusing point, asking for help in doing a language task). Other strategies appeared were receptive and self-contained (repetition, memorization, and use of formulaic expressions).

Students’ Learning Style

The following table also show learning style similarities between two respondents. The categories below are taken from Ehrman (1999), as cited by Oxford (2003).

	Adi	Ikbal
<i>Sensory preferences:</i> Visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or tactile?	Visual	Visual
<i>Desired degree of generality:</i> Holistic/analytic	Holistic	Holistic
<i>Personality type:</i> Extrovert or introvert?	Extrovert	Extrovert
<i>Personality type:</i> Intuitive-random or sensing-sequential?	Intuitive random	Intuitive-random
<i>Personality type:</i> Thinking or feeling?	Feeling	Feeling
<i>Biological difference:</i> Biorhythms/sustenance/location	Biorhythms and location	Biorhythm

In learning style, Adi and Ikbal are classified as visual learners, they like to read and obtain a great deal from visual manipulation. For them, lectures, conversations, and oral directions without any visual aid can be very confusing and often make them get bored. By being extrovert learners, both of them gain lots of energy and motivation from the external world. They want to interact with people and have many friendships. Moreover, they are also intuitive-random learners.

Adi and Ikbal are also feeling learner. Feeling learners value other people in very personal ways. They show empathy and compassion through words, not just behaviors, and say whatever is needed to smooth over difficult situations. Holistic learners are socially interactive, communicative events in which they can emphasize the main idea and avoid analysis of grammatical feature. They are comfortable even when not having all the information and they feel free to guess from the context. It is also related with their extrovert style, who likes to socialize.

Finally, about biological differences, Adi admits than he cannot study in any time since he loses his focus after 10 PM.

He likes to have food or drinks during his study. The room should also quiet. Meanwhile, Ikbal is biorhythm learner. He can only study when everyone asleep, or at about 2 AM. That is the best time for him to study.

Some influencing aspects

In this case, it can be seen that some influencing aspects of learning English as second language is its environment. Both of respondents have different learning experiences. Both of them learn English for the first time in a language course in Bandung. Adi has shorter length time of study and he still has a problem in pronouncing English words and performing language. Therefore, he admits that pronunciation skill and speaking become the most difficult aspects to master. He is still in the early stage of his English learning, and he needs lots of exposures to master it.

However, Ikbal gets more exposure to English compared to Adi. He has been learning English intensively for more than four years in an English Course in Bandung. His mother is also an English language teacher that may become a crucial

factor that leads him to get better result in learning English.

CONCLUSION

Learning strategies and style are intentionally used and consciously controlled by the learner. Learning strategies and style can also enable students to become more independent, autonomous, and lifelong learners. The study found that the respondents have different learning motivation and exposure toward learning English as their second language. But they have some similarities in their learning style and strategies. Both of them are visual learners who link the social strategy to the cognitive strategy. This study reveals that even though two young learners have the same learning style and strategies, the result may be different.

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