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## Language Learning Strategies in English Language Learning: A Survey Study

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### Abstract

Strategic competence involves a number of learning and communication strategies which can be learned by language learners. These behaviors and thinking process can help second language learners to accelerate their target language learning. Teachers' knowledge on these strategies will help language learners in overcoming the problems of their learning process. This survey study aims to describe students' profile of strategic competence by mapping their language learning strategies. The participants were 106 students of Department of English Language Education in academic year 2014/2015. The instrument used was Oxford's (1989) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Worksheet, Version 7.0 for Speakers of Other Languages Learning English. Students' profile of strategic competence in academic year 2014/2015 is: memory strategy (3.20), affective strategy (3.38), cognitive strategy (3.45), compensation strategy (3.46), social strategy (3.46), and metacognitive strategy (3.63). Therefore, the only strategy who has achieved high profile is metacognitive strategy (3.63). The other strategies are still on medium profile, which means all the students sometimes use the strategies. For the whole SILL strategies, students of Department of English Language Education, Universitas Islam Indonesia in academic year 2014/2015 get mean score 3.43, which also means on medium profile of strategic competence. From the result, it is recommended that the students need to develop the other five strategies from medium to high profile.

**Keywords:** *strategic competence, language learning strategies, survey study*

### INTRODUCTION

English has been a foreign language that has an important place in academic culture of Indonesia higher education system. English is an official language used by seventy-five countries in the world (Graddol, 2000) and language of instruction or international programs in academic culture used by 50 most reputable universities. In Universitas Islam Indonesia, English proficiency has been one of quality assurance target of the university. English proficiency- which is often presented as the scores of listening skill, speaking skill, reading skill, and writing skill- is determined by the speakers' English language competence. In the principles of language teaching and learning,

the goal is to achieve communicative competence. Some scholars have developed the model of communicative competence since the era of communicative language teaching in 1980s (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983; Celce-Murcia, 1995; Celce-Murcia, 2007). One of the aspects of communicative competence is strategic competence.

Strategic competence is part of communicative competence and involves a number of learning and communication strategies which can be learned by language learners (Celce-Murcia, 2007). In Indonesia where English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL), strategic competence is very important in language teaching and learning process. Even

though strategic competence is important, many language learners do not have awareness in this competence. They are lack of some parts of language learning strategies for examples: lack of memory strategy which is direct strategy in language learning. This lack of memory strategies will make language learners face obstacles in adding variety of vocabulary so that their reading and writing skills develop slowly.

In the field of applied linguistics and Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), strategic competence is an extensive and developing subject of research discussion. Dornyei & Thurrel (1991) discuss the strategic competence and how to teach it to language learners. There are many researches in second language acquisition and learning which indicate that the most significant factor for second language acquisition is the use of language learning strategies (Chamot, 2004; Ellis, 2008; Gardner, 2007). Therefore, many researchers and language educators consider language learning strategies more important than language teaching strategies. Rababah (2001) investigates how English language learners whose Arabic is the native language in Department of English Language Education in Yarmouk University, Jordania develop their strategic competence in order to know whether the message of language teaching is delivered to the learners effectively. Meenakshi (2015), in a study in India context, reveals that strategic competence is important in communication and helps language learners in real-world conversation.

The research done about English language teaching and learning in Indonesia generally focus on communicative competence as the goal of language teaching and learning. Mustadi (2012) stated the importance of redesigning English language teaching curriculum for pre-service English teachers for early childhood and primary education which sets

the goal on communicative competence. However, he did not discuss the components of communicative competence in details- which includes strategic competence. On the other hand, the research on language learning strategy and language ability in Nurhayati (2008) defines language learning strategies in relation to language performance, not to the model of communicative competence so that the research findings only elaborate language learning strategies such as demonstration, personal story telling, interview, calling a friend, story outline, group survey, short speech, filling speech bubbles, taking notes of song lyrics, and writing a list. Therefore, there should be research which discusses the aspects of communicative competence such as: linguistic competence, strategic competence, sociolinguistic competence, actional competence, and discourse competence for a successful language teaching and learning. Among the five aspects of communicative competence developed by Celce-Murcia (2007), studying strategic competence is important because understanding language learners' profile on strategic competence will help them to make the most efforts on their journey in language learning.

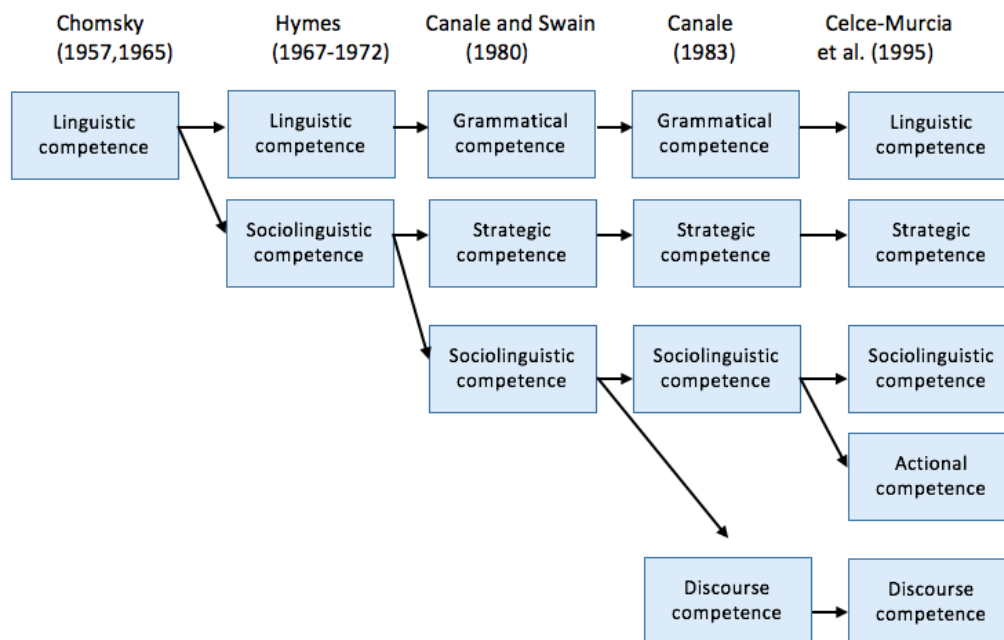
In order to understand which strategies have been developed properly, Oxford (1990) develops instruments to identify language learners profile on strategic competence which can be used by the teachers as a reference to develop learners' strategic competence in classroom teaching and learning. This research aims to describe Department of English Language Education strategic competence profile by mapping each category of language learning strategies. The findings of this research can be used as the reference to plan workshop or motivational program to optimize the aspects of the students' language learning strategies which have not developed properly.

## Review of literature

### Strategic competence as a part of communicative competence

Communicative competence is the goal of language learning. In the field of second language acquisition, communicative competence has been an important discussion among scholars and practitioners in language teaching. The theory on communicative competence has been developing since Dell Hymes, a sociolinguist, criticizes Chomsky's definition on language competence, which was limited to grammar and thus insufficient to explain a language learner's language proficiency (Brown, 2007). A language learner who knows grammar accurately may not communicate fluently. Hymes' critics to Chomsky makes second language acquisition scholars develop a model of communicative competence as the target of language learning (Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983; Celce-Murcia, 1995; Celce-Murcia, 2007).

Communicative competence has some definitions which are developed as the development of the model by linguists and language teaching scholars. Paulston (1974) and Hymes (1967) as cited in Brown (2007), for example, points out the definition of communicative competence on the difference of knowledge of language form and function. This highlight makes the development of communicative competence involves several aspects of competence. Canale dan Swain (1980), as cited in Celce-Murcia (2007) defines communicative competence consisting of three aspects of competence: linguistic competence, strategic competence, and sociolinguistic competence. Canale (1983), as cited in Celce-Murcia (2007), adds discourse competence. Meanwhile, Celce-Murcia (2007) adds actional competence which makes the model of communicative competence has five aspects which shape the definition of communicative competence as seen in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** The development of communicative competence models (Celce-Murcia, 2007)

As seen in Figure 1, strategic competence is one of the aspects of communicative

competence which is interested to be explored.

### **Strategic competence and language learning strategies**

Strategic competence develops as the development of the model of communicative competence. Canale dan Swain (1983), as quoted in Brown (2007), define strategic competence as verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which appear in action as compensation of communication problems as a result of developing language competence and performance. Oxford (2001) states that strategic competence in language learning is specific behavior or thinking process used by language learners to facilitate language learning of the target language. Celce-Murcia (2007) adds that those specific behaviors can be in the form of learning strategies and communication strategies. From those three definitions, it can be concluded that strategic competence is specific behavior or action which has several aspects related to learning and communication strategies as compensation of communication problems caused by unattainable appropriate target language performance and competence.

### **The classification of language learning strategies**

Oxford (1990) classifies language learning strategies in two classes: direct strategy and indirect strategy. Moreover, Oxford (1990) elaborates these two classes of strategies in six groups; each group consists of specific behavior and thinking process. Direct strategy consists of memory strategy, cognitive strategy, and compensation strategy (Oxford, 1990). Memory strategy helps language learners to store new information, cognitive strategy helps language learners to understand and use target language in many ways, and compensation strategy keeps language learners using target language even though their knowledge in target language is still insufficient (Oxford, 1990). Indirect strategy consists of metacognitive strategy, affective strategy, and social

strategy (Oxford, 1990). Metacognitive strategy enables language learners to control their cognition independently, affective strategy helps self-regulation on emotion, motivation, and attitude, and social strategy makes language learners learn language through social interaction among their peers (Oxford, 1990).

### **Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) version 7.0 (ESL/EFL)**

Based on classification of language learning strategies, Oxford (1989) develops an instrument to identify what strategies tend to be used by language learners called *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)*. SILL is a reference for language teachers on what strategies that have been used by their language learners. From English language teachers in EFL context's perspective, Hapsari (2013) states that nonnative speaker instructors of English have better strategic competence to teach English than native speaker instructors. Nonnative speaker instructors of English have both the knowledge of language structure from their native language (if it is in Indonesia, then the native language is Bahasa Indonesia) and English as the target language. In addition, nonnative speaker instructors of English can do code switching and code mixing to explain the aspects of English language which is the target language of their language learners.

Meanwhile in the perspective of language learners' strategic competence, Oxford (2001) as cited in Celce-Murcia (2007) states that language learners who use a variety of language learning strategies learn language faster than those who only use particular kind of strategies. Sadighi dan Zarafshan (2006), for example, explore the effect of attitude and motivation in language learning strategies of 126 Iranian students who learn EFL by using modified Oxford (1989)'s SILL Worksheet. Other studies which use Ox-

ford's (1989) SILL Worksheet are Deneme (2008), Wu (2008), Yang (2010), Bodian (2015), and Kunasaraphan (2015). Deneme (2008) maps strategies used by 50 Turkish English language learners and reveals that metacognitive and compensation strategies are the least used by most of the students while memory, cognitive, affective and social strategy are frequently used. Wu (2008) maps strategies used by Taiwanese English language learners and reveals that language learners who have better English language proficiency use more strategies than those who score lower and the most frequently used strategies are cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. Yang (2010) maps 300 Korean English language learners in a university in Korea. The study reveals that language learners use the strategies on medium scale, the most frequently used strategies is compensation strategy and the least used is memory strategy. Bodian (2015) finds that language learners in Universitas Kelantan, Malaysia, applies more indirect strategies than direct strategies in learning French. Finally, Kunasaraphan (2015) identifies language learning strategies

used by 290 Thai English language learners in their first year in Suan Sunadha Rajabhat International College and reveals that the respondents use the six language strategies on medium scale. From previous studies for language learners in EFL context, it can be concluded that the use of language learning strategies can be different depending on the characteristic of language learners.

## METHODS

The research design is survey. The instrument used was Oxford's (1989) SILL Worksheet Version 7.0 for Speakers of Other Languages Learning English to collect the data and map language learners' language learning strategies. The respondents of the research were 106 students of Department of English Language Education Universitas Islam Indonesia batch 2011/2014. SILL Worksheet consists of 6 parts of statement (A, B, C, D, E and F), each parts consist of 50 statements related to the aspects of Oxford's (1990) direct and indirect strategy as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** SILL Worksheet Version 7.0 for Speakers of Other Languages Learning English

Part	Strategy	Classification
A	Memory	Direct strategies
B	Cognitive	
C	Compensation	
D	Metacognitive	Indirect strategies
E	Affective	
F	Social	

The respondents should rate the statements from 1 (if the respondent considers the statement to be never) to 5 (if the respondent considers the statement to be always). After the respondents rate each statement, they should calculate the mean score for each part. Parts A, B, and C are groups of direct strategies which consist of statement related to "Remembering More Effectively" (memory strategy), "Using Your Mental Process" (cognitive strategy), and "Compensating for Missing

Knowledge" (compensation strategy). Parts D, E, and F are groups of indirect strategies which consist of "Organizing and Evaluating Your Learning" (metacognitive strategy), "Managing Your Emotion" (affective strategy), and "Learning with Others" (social strategy). After that, mean score for each category of strategy were calculated and the profile of strategic competence was mapped based on the mean score of language strategies that respondents use for language learning. The interpretation of the scale was based on Oxford's (1990) scoring conversion as seen on Table 2.

**Table 2.** Oxford's (1990) Conversion on Frequency of the Use of Strategy and Mean Score Scale

High	Always or almost always used Usually used	4.5 to 5.0 3.5 to 4.4
Medium	Sometimes used	2.5 to 3.4
Low	Almost never used Never used	1.5 to 2.4 1.0 to 1.4

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Findings**

The total population of this research was all students in academic year 2014/2015 consisting students batch 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. All the name of 132 students registered in academic year 2014/2015 were listed and invited to attend the workshop about language learning strategies in order to make the target respondents be aware of their language learning strategies. After the workshop, they were asked to fill Oxford's (1989) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Worksheet, Version 7.0 for Speakers of Other Languages Learning English. There were 106 of 132 students who completely filled and returned the

questionnaire. Because the size of the target population was considered small for a survey research (N= 106), the researcher decided to use total population sampling (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009).

The respondents of this research were 106 students of Department of English Language Education, Universitas Islam Indonesia in academic year 2014/2015 consisting of 11 students of batch 2011, 30 students of batch 2012, 35 students of batch 2013, and 30 students of batch 2014. The data were analyzed by using IBM SPSS Statistics version 20 and Microsoft Excell for Mac version 15.20. The profile of students' strategic competence was described on Table 3.

**Table 3.** Profile of strategic competence of students of Department of English Language Education Universitas Islam Indonesia in Academic Year 2014/2015

DESCRIPTIVES VARIABLES=A B C D E F WholeSILL  
/STATISTICS=MEAN STDDEV VARIANCE MIN MAX  
/SORT=MEAN (A).

➔ **Descriptives**

[DataSet1]

**Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Memory Strategy	106	2.1	4.4	3.200	.4936	.244
Affective Strategy	106	1.8	5.0	3.387	.5930	.352
Whole Strategy	106	2.5	4.5	3.438	.3660	.134
Cognitive Strategy	106	2.5	4.5	3.452	.4129	.171
Compensation Strategy	106	1.8	5.0	3.461	.6004	.360
Social Strategy	106	2.0	4.8	3.464	.6067	.368
Metacognitive Strategy	106	2.6	4.9	3.635	.5118	.262
Valid N (listwise)	106					

From Table 3, it is revealed that generally, students' profile of strategic competence academic year 2014/2015 from the lowest to the highest mean score is memory strategy (3.20), affective strategy (3.38), cognitive strategy (3.45), compensation strategy (3.46), social strategy (3.46). and metacognitive strategy (3.63). Therefore, the only strategy who has achieved high profile is metacognitive strategy (3.63). The other strategies are still on medium profile, which means all the students sometimes use the strategies. For the whole SILL strategies, students of Department of English Language Education, Universitas Islam Indonesia in academic year 2014/2015 get mean score 3.43, which also means on medium profile of strategic competence. From the result, it is recommended that the students need to develop the other five strategies from medium to high profile.

The mean score of indirect language learning strategies is higher than direct strategies. The mean score of direct strategies, which consists of:

"(A) memory strategy: grouping, create association, use new vocabulary in the new context to remember, use imaginary voice, use a combination of voice and image, use action to remember new expression, structured repetition, and review previous language lessons; (B) cognitive strategy, which consists of using mental process by repeating, practicing by voice and writing, using formula and patterns, combining familiar language items and new ones, practicing new language in diverse authentic situation involving four skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) , skimming and scanning for getting ideas , using resources as reference, taking note, summarizing, deductive reasoning, analyzing expression, analyzing differences between languages, translating, recognizing

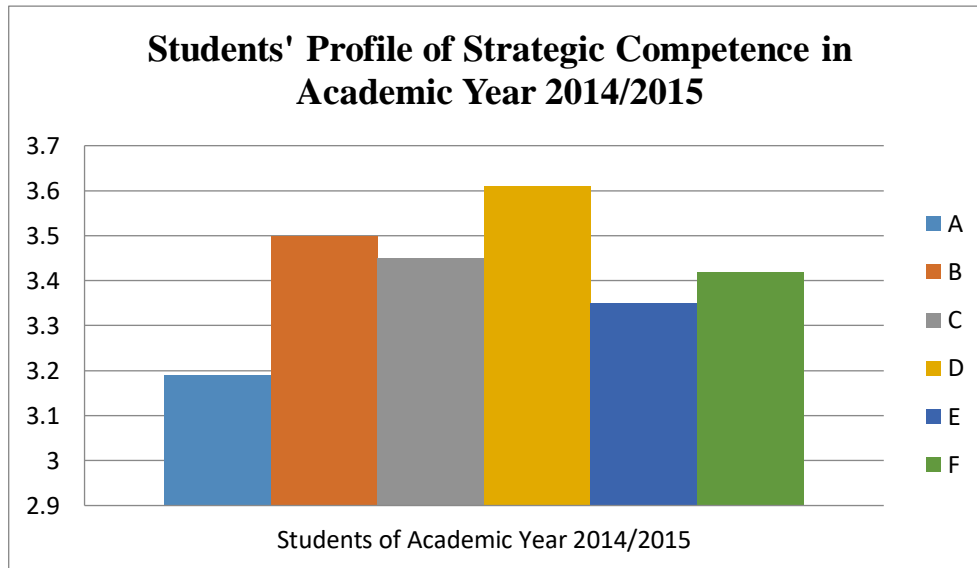
language patterns, understanding new information; and (C) compensation strategy consisting :using all clues to guess meaning in listening and reading in the target language, understanding words as a whole, not an individual entity, finding ways to get the message in speaking or writing in spite of the limitation of knowledge of the target language by using gesture, code-switching, description, synonym," (Oxford, 1990)

is 3.36, so it belongs to medium profile. The mean score of indirect strategies, which consists of:

(D) metacognitive strategy , which includes connecting materials which have been discussed, taking decision to notice, taking decision to pay attention on details, finding out how language learning happens, managing learning (schedule, environment, notebooks), setting purpose of language task, planning language task, finding opportunities to practice, noticing and learning from mistakes, evaluating progress; (E) affective strategy consisting of: decreasing anxiety, helping one self by using positive affirmation, taking risk wisely, giving self- reward, noticing physical stress, keeping language learning journal, talking about feeling and attitude to others; and (F) social strategy consisting of : asking for clarification and verification, asking feedbacks, cooperate with friends, cooperate with naïve speakers, developing cultural awareness, and being aware of others' feeling and thought," (Oxford, 1990)

is 3.49, so it almost belongs to high profile.

Overall, the profile of strategic competence of Department of English Language Education students in academic year 2014/2015 is described in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Students' profile of strategic competence in academic year 2014/2015

### Discussion

Metacognitive strategy is the only strategy that has achieved high profile in mean score (3.63) which means the students in academic year 2014/2015 usually use this strategy. Oxford (1990) states that metacognitive strategy is one of indirect language learning strategies which involve the ways language learners manage their learning, establishing cognition, creating plan, and evaluate learning progress. The reason why this strategy developed higher than the other five strategies is because the students did not only learn about English language and practice the four skills, but they also learned how to teach English in the curriculum framework. Some parts in metacognitive strategy (which includes: connecting materials who have been discussed, taking decision to notice, taking decision to pay attention on details, finding out how language learning happens, managing learning schedule, environment and notebooks, setting purpose of language task, planning language task, finding opportunities to practice, noticing and learning from mistakes, evaluating progress) are parts of language learning pedagogy.

Memory strategy has the lowest profile (3.20) among the five strategy

which belong to medium profile. Oxford (1990) states that memory strategy is direct strategy which relates to how language learners remember language in order to store or retrieve new information. The other two direct strategies: cognitive and compensation strategy are also in medium profile at 3.45 and 3.46. The other two indirect strategies (affective and social strategy) are also in medium profile at 3.38 and 3.46.

In comparison to Bodian's (2015) study on language learners' profile of strategic competence in learning French in a Malaysia context, there is a similarity. Bodian (2015) finds out that indirect strategies (3.37) scores higher profile than direct strategies (3.06) and metacognitive strategy becomes the highest profile of strategy (3.51). Since Bodian (2015) and this study involves language learners from South East Asia, this evidence strengthens the argument that language learners in South East Asia score higher in indirect strategies than direct strategies. Oxford (1990) mentions that indirect strategies support language learning process without involving target language being learned directly. This finding should bring awareness to language instructors that even though indirect strategies are important to



support learning process, direct strategies should also have special attention because these strategies support language accuracy and fluency in target language directly. In the era when English has been taught as an international language, Department of English Language Education students who will be pre-service English teachers, a good command on direct strategies will give them advantages as nonnative speaker instructors who teach English because they will support pre-service teachers knowledge on explaining how to remember new vocabulary (memory strategy), explain English language grammar (cognitive strategy) , and solving problems in daily communication (compensation strategy) both in English and in their native language.

## CONCLUSIONS

Generally, students' profile of strategic competence in academic year 2014/2015 is: memory strategy (3.20), affective strategy (3.38), cognitive strategy (3.45), compensation strategy (3.46), social strategy (3.46). and metacognitive strategy (3.63). Therefore, the only strategy who has achieved high profile is metacognitive strategy (3.63). The other strategies are still on medium profile, which means all the students sometimes use the strategies. For the whole SILL strategies, students of Department of English Language Education, Universitas Islam Indonesia in academic year 2014/2015 get mean score 3.43, which also means on medium profile of strategic competence. From the findings, it is also revealed that the mean score for indirect strategies (3.49) is higher than direct strategies (3.36). Several recommendations proposed as a result of the findings are: (1) it is important to create a workshop on strategic competence in language learning to enrich the students' - as future pre-service teachers- knowledge in language learning; (2) strategic-based instruction can be implemented to help the students in develop-

ing their direct strategies in language learning. Since direct strategies support the understanding of language being learned, strategic-based instruction can also strengthen students' linguistic competence; (3) cooperative or collaborative learning environment may facilitate the development of students' social strategy which further has the potential to strengthen language learners' sociolinguistic competence.

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