Gender and Age Differences in the Use of Language Learning Strategies by Junior and Senior High School Students

Finaty Ahsanah
finaty.ahsanahzaini2202@gmail.com
Univeristas Muhammadiyah Lamongan
Lamongan, Indonesia

Abstract

In learning English as a foreign language, language learning strategies (LLS) is undoubtedly important. Therefore, most language learners need to employ LLS in learning language effectively. However, LLS have a uniqueness that is each learner may employ LLS differently and it usually depends on some factors. The factors which usually affect LLS preferences among others are motivation, socioeconomic status, parental support, age, gender, etc. This current study tries to explore this phenomenon by administering the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) to 118 participants, consisted of 66 junior high school students and 52 senior high school students in Paciran, East Java. It is used for measuring the strategies that were used by the language learners in learning English. An interview was also administered, to collect, the information which could not be obtained through the SILL. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between male and female students in LLS preferences, but there was a statistically significant difference between younger and older learners in employing LLS for the young learners tended to use LLS more frequently than the older. Therefore, it can be strongly assumed that the age factor is more important than the gender factor in terms of LLS preferences, because the study showed that both male and female language learners tend to employ LLS at the same frequency level.

Keywords: *age, differences, language learning strategies (LLS)*

INTRODUCTION

Learning English, in non-English speaking countries, is a complex thing for many language learners. Most of them cannot learn English effectively because English is not used for everyday communication. As stated by many researchers that in non-English speaking countries, English does not require as a vital function in people's everyday life and communication, English is learnt for educational or academic purposes and it is usually learnt through classroom instruction (Behroozizad, Nambiar, & Amir, 2014). In this kind of situation, the language learners automatically cannot learn English effectively since they learn English for instrumental reasons only such as applying for a job or enrolling to university; it means that the willingness of the learners in learning English depends on the situation they need. Dealing with this issue, learning English should be a continuous activity, for continuity in learning English has a power to make them became

a good language learner. The lack of having the correct pattern in learning language is the core issues in this current study. In this case, the correct pattern means the strategies they use in learning a language; the less information they know about LLS, the less effective they become in learning English.

Various expertise have drawn some theories of LLS. Yet, the theory of LLS commonly used by many researchers is the one proposed by Oxford (1990). LLS itself is best known as the beneficial tool or important key for many language learners to learn English effectively. LLS are also found the best way to help learners in learning English effectively (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). These authors believe that LLS play a vital role in learning a second or foreign language, as they may help the students in mastering English skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) and thus may affect their language performance and achievement. It can be assumed that LLS is the gateway for most foreign language learners to learn English more effectively and efficiently. Therefore, identifying the kinds of LLS that mostly used by language learners is very important due to the fact that it may identify and figure out their learning problems so that teachers can overcome the difficulties of the students in learning English. The interesting issue related to the use of LLS is every single person may employ different strategies in learning English. In other words, different students may employ different LLS. They may use the strategies in the same or different manner, and it is usually affected by some factors such as gender or age.

In general, the factors which may affect LLS preferences such as degree of awareness, stage of learning, task requirements, teacher expectation, age, gender, nationality and ethnicity, general learning style, personality traits, motivation level, and purpose for learning the language. Understanding the extent to which these factors affect the use of LLS may provide the insights for the teacher to help the students learning English effectively. In this case, the factors selection of LLS use in this study is based on some considerations. Gender and age are chosen as the factors of LLS use in this current study since it is less time consuming so that teaching and learning process should not be disturbed. Beside, these factors are less time consuming, it is also easily identified.

In LLS perspective, gender and age factors have a power in affecting LLS preferences. Students who have different gender and age may employ LLS differently. Many studies conducted in investigating these issues, for the examples, several studies conducted by many researchers concerning the relationship of gender and LLS use (Aydogan & Akbarov, 2014; Bonzinovic & Sindik, 2010; Tam, 2013; Xiying, 2010). Specifically, they investigated the role of gender and the use of LLS, some of the results reported that there were significant differences in the use of LLS between male and female language learners, female language learners tend to use more LLS than male language learners (Bonzinovic & Sindik, 2010; Tam, 2013; Xiying, 2010). However, the other findings found out that there were no significant differences in LLS preferences between male and female language learners (Aydogan & Akbarov, 2014; Rahimi, Abdolmehdi, & Shahrzad, 2008). In particular, they found that female learners tend to use the same learning strategies respectively at the same frequency with the male learners while learning English. In other words, even though women or female are famous as an outstanding language learner, yet, in LLS scope not only female but also male has the same portion to become an outstanding language learner.

Afterwards, regarding the age issues and LLS use, many studies claimed that older language learners employ more language learning strategies than younger language learners (Chen, 2014; Sepasdar & Soori, 2014). They reported that the older learners learn

a language the more strategies they employ, Sepasdar and Soori (2014) found that older learners (19-23) tended to use compensation strategies more than younger learners (12-16). In the same year, Chen (2014) reported the same result on research among Taiwanese students where the students are likely to use the compensatory strategy more than the other strategies. As far as the investigation of the relationship of age and Language learning strategies, it showed that most of the studies reported the same finding which is older language learners employ more language learning strategies than younger language learners. Voluminous studies regarding this issue led to the discrepant findings. Hence, based on the background of the study and the previous studies mentioned, some problems to be tackled in this study were formulated in the following questions: (1) is there any significant difference between male and female students in employing language learning strategies? (2) is there any significant difference between junior and senior high school students in language learning strategies preferences? Then, referring to the questions, the hypotheses to be tested were formulated as follows: (1) there is a significant difference in the choice of language learning strategies between male and female students, (2) there is a significant difference between younger and older language learners in language learning strategies preference.

METHOD
Participant of the Study
The participants of this study were 118, consisting of 63 junior high school students and 53 senior high school students. In terms of gender, they consisted of 47 males and 71 females.

Research Instrument
The main instrument for collecting the data was the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL). It was used to the collect the primary data. To obtain the data that SILL could not collect, an interview was administered.

The SILL was designed to be responded by choosing one of the options provided 5 point Likert-Scale range, in which 1 means never or almost never true of me, 2 – usually not true of me, 3 – somewhat true of me, 4 – usually true of me, 5 – always or almost always true of me. The SILL was distributed to participants of the third grade junior and senior high school students. The items was translated it into Bahasa Indonesia in order to avoid misleading information.

The focus of the interview was the participants' preference in using language learning strategies and their reasons. It was used to gain a better understanding of the LLS employed by the students, therefore some students was interviewed. The question was adapted from the SILL questionnaire. Although not all of the SILL items were asked to the students, the questions represented the whole concept of the LLS. This was aimed to let the students express their feelings towards language learning strategies in more informative way. The interview was also used to verify data previously obtained in the questionnaire. During the interview, the participants' answers were recorded and then transcribed for further data analyses.

Procedure
This study was designed to discover the gender and age differences in the use of language learning strategies by junior and senior high school students. Therefore, the basic design was quantitative study which explores the differences among the subjects in using LLS.

The site of this study was in Paciran, East Java, Indonesia, a village on the north shore of the Java Sea. Then, as stated earlier that the participant of this study was junior and senior high school students; total of the participant is 118 students. The main instrument that was used in collecting the data is Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL). SILL was used to the collect the primary data, and then another instrument is interview; interview was administered to the participant in order to gain the missing information.

After getting the data needed in this study, the first step was checking the normal distribution and also the homogeneity of variances of the data; the normal distribution and homogeneity of variances. The data of SILL has to meet the assumption of the normality and the homogeneity. As can be seen in the following table:

Table 1 Normal Distribution of LLS

	Sig ᵃ	Sig ᵇ
LLS	.200	.304

Sig ᵃ: Kolmogorov-Smirnov
Sig ᵇ: Shapiro-Wilk

Table 1 indicates that the data of LLS was normally distributed by the significant value of .200 for Kolmogorov-Smirnov and .304 for Shapiro-Wilk which was greater than *p*. 05. It means that the data was perfectly met the assumption of normal distribution. Hence, the Independent samples t-test that related to this data can be applied. Moreover, to know the normally of the each categories of LLS was presented in the following table:

Table 2 Normal Distribution of Each LLS Categories

LLS	Sig ᵃ	Sig ᵇ
Memory	.098	.359
Cognitive	.200	.628
Compensation	.004	.049
Metacognitive	079	058
Affective	.200	.068
Social	.033	.017

Sig ᵃ: Kolmogorov-Smirnov
Sig ᵇ: Shapiro-Wilk

Table 2 describes the normality of the each categories of LLS. It can be seen that not all of the strategy met the assumption of the normality. There were three strategies use that indicated normal which was memory strategy *p*. value of .359, cognitive strategy *p*. value of .628 and affective strategy *p*. value of .200 which were greater than significant level of .05. However, the other three strategies did not met the assumption of the normality, they were compensation strategy *p*. value of .004, metacognitive strategy *p*. value of .079 and social strategy *p*. value of .003 which were less than the significant level of .05. It means that the statistical test should be done in non-parametric way, in other words, instead of using Independent samples t-test the data should be test by using the Mann Whitney U-test. Therefore, to know the differences of the overall strategy use by the students, the Mann Whitney U test was applied.

Table 3 the Homogeneity of Variances of LLS

LLS	Sig
Levene Statistic	
1.167	.282

As shown in Table 3, the data of language learning strategies met the assumption of the homogeneity of variances by the significant level of .282 which was greater than *p*. value of .05. The next part was testing the homogeneity of the overall language learning strategies.

Table 4 the Homogeneity of Variances of the Overall LLS

LLS	Levene Statistic	Sig
Memory	.479	.490
Cognitive	.803	.372
Compensation	.144	.705
Metacognitive	.934	.336
Affective	1.077	.302
Social	.106	.745

Table 4 indicates the result of homogeneity of variances test of the overall language learning strategies and the data met the assumption of the homogeneity of variances. It can be seen by the significant level of the data (Memory .490, cognitive .372, compensation .705, metacognitive .336, affective .362 and social .745) which was greater than *p*. value of .05. The data of normal distribution and homogeneity of variances showed that not all of the data was normally distributed. Therefore, the data was analyzed by using software Package Used for Statistical Analysis 20.0 (SPSS) Independent Samples T-test and the Mann Whitney U Test'. Things that need to be noted: **1)** Independent samples t-test is used to know the general differences of language learning strategies use because the data is normally distributed and, **2)** The Mann Whitney U test is used to know the differences of the overall LLS because the data is not normally distributed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
This part presents the findings and interpretation of the findings. There are two main topics that are discussed in this part. The first is the significant difference between male and female students in employing language learning strategies and the second is the significant different between junior and senior high school students in employing language learning strategies use of language learning strategies by junior and senior high school students.

Gender Differences and the Use of Language Learning Strategies
The first part is discussing the differences of male and female students in employing language learning strategies. The findings of the first research problem indicated that there was no significant difference between male and female students in language learning strategies preferences. Table 5 showed the data of language learning strategies by male and female students of junior and senior high school students.

Table 5:
The Data of Language Learning Strategies Used by Male and Female Students

Data	Male		Female		Sig
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	
LLS	2.86	.6283	2.98	.5615	.278

As shown in Table 5, the data of the differences between male and female students in employing LLS. The data pointed out that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female students in using language learning strategies. It can be seen by the significant value of .278 which was greater than *p* .05. As remembered if the sig. value is greater than .05 it means that there is no statistically significant difference between the groups. In other words, both male and female students used language learning strategies in the same frequency level respectively. Hence, in order to strengthen the finding, the test of the overall language learning strategies was applied.

Table 6:
Language Learning Strategies Used by Male and Female Students

LLS	Mann-Whitney U-test	Asymp. Sig (2-tailed)
Memory	1492.000	.331
Cognitive	1505.000	.368
Compensation	1605.000	.726
Metacognitive	1443.000	.215
Affective	1532.500	.454
Social	1437.000	.201

Table 5 represents the findings of the each language learning strategies which was memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. This data was also analyzed in order to strengthen the main data. As expected, the findings of these data also indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female students in employing language learning strategies. The data obtained, all of the sig. value were greater than .05 (memory .330, cognitive .368, compensation .726, metacognitive .215, affective .454 and social .201 > .05). It means that in employing memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies male and female students tended to use these strategies respectively in the same frequency manner. At last, this findings wa not in-line with the first hypothesis of this research which is there is a statistically significant difference between male and female students in employing language learning strategies. Therefore, first the hypothesis was rejected.

Discussing this current study and comparing to the previous studies revealed various discrepant findings. First, this current finding is contrary to the previous studies conducted byBonzinovic and Sindik (2010); Tam (2013); Xiying (2010) reported that there was a significant difference between male and female language learners in employing LLS. They believed that female language learners employ language learning strategies more than male language learners. On the other hand, this current finding is in line with the studies conducted by Aydogan and Akbarov (2014). They reported that there was no statistically significant different between male and female students in using LLS. They found out that female language learners used the same language learning strategies respectively at the same frequency with male language learners while learning English. It

cannot find out clearly the reason behind this issue, the most logical explanation that can be attributed to this issue may be the needs of the students. By looking at this phenomenon of male and female students in employing language learning strategies respectively in the same frequency level, then it can be assumed that the needs of the students in learning language has no connection to their gender so that they tend to employ language learning strategies in the same way. For the example, the male students of engineering vocational school may be used different language learning strategies to the female students of culinary vocational school because their needs is different. Hence, the students of public school may have the same needs so that they employ language learning strategies similarly.

Aiming to obtain more findings, the interview session was administered to the participants in order to get the detail idea of the some particular strategies used by them. Both male and female students showed almost the same responses when questions were being asked. For the example when they asked "do you like watching English movies?" most of male and female students said that they love to watch English movies even though they do not know the meaning, they usually watch by applying the subtitle on. Or, when they were asked "what do you do when you do not know an English word?" both of them simply answered that they will open their dictionary and look for the meaning, few of them said that they will just guess the meaning. Almost all of the male and female students responded the same in interview session. At last, the findings of the interview administered to the participant is strengthened the findings that is no statistically significant difference between male and female students in using language learning strategies; both of them use strategies in the same manner.

Age Differences and the Use of Language Learning Strategies

The next part is discussing the differences between younger and older students in using language learning strategies, in this case the students is junior and senior high school students. The findings of the second research problem indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between junior and senior high school students in employing language learning strategies. As shown in table 7 the data of the overall language learning strategies by junior and senior high school students.

Table 7:
T-test of Language Learning Strategies by junior and senior high school students

Data	Younger		Older		Sig
	Mean	**Std. Dev.**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev.**	
LLS	3.25	.2730	2.68	.5546	.000

a. Younger: junior high school students
b. Older: Senior high school students

Table 7 indicates there was a statistically significant difference between junior and senior high school students in employing language learning strategies. The data showed the significant value was .000 < .05. Moreover, when we look at the mean of the groups (junior and senior high school students) it is clearly showed that younger students or junior high school students got higher mean by 3.25 than older or senior high school students by 2.68. It can be assumed that younger or junior high school students employed more language learning strategies than older or senior high school students. Thus, in order

to strengthen the findings, the following table was the data of each language learning strategies used by junior and senior high school students.

Table 8:
Language Learning Strategy Use by junior and senior high school Students

LLS	Mann-Whitney U-test	Asymp. Sig (2-tailed)
Memory	911.500	.000
Cognitive	808.500	.000
Compensation	988.500	.000
Metacognitive	862.000	.000
Affective	823.000	.000
Social	991.500	.000

As shown in Table 8, the significant value of each LLS which was memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies between junior and senior high school students. The findings reported that there was statistically significant difference between junior and senior high school students in employing language learning strategies and it can be seen from data of table 8. All of the strategies use (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social) was in the significance level of 0.000 which is lower than *p.* value 0.05. It means that there was a statistically significant difference between junior and senior high school students in using language learning strategies. At last, this findings was in-line with the hypothesis of this study which is there is a statistically significant difference between junior and senior high school students in language learning strategies preference; therefore, the second hypothesis of this current was accepted.

Relating these current findings to the previous studies obtains the same phenomenon; yet there was a slightly difference in the findings. First, this current finding of age differences was in line with the previous studies conducted by Chen (2014); Sepasdar and Soori (2014). They reported that there was a significant difference between younger language learners and older language learners in employing LLS. Moreover, they believed that older language learners employ LLS more frequently than the younger language learners. On contrary, this current findings obtained different phenomenon even though this current study was in-line with the previous studies that claimed there was statistically significant difference between younger and older language learners yet this current study reported that younger language learners or junior high school students employed more LLS than older language learners or senior high school students. The younger language learners employ more strategies begin with metacognitive strategy, cognitive strategy, affective strategy, social strategy, memory strategy and social strategy.

Current study related to age and the use of language learning strategies is quite new. It is not possible that junior high school students tend to use more language learning strategies with no reasons. After getting the interview data, the general factors that can be assumed from this phenomenon is motivation. When they were being asked "do they often review English at home?" Most of senior high school students stated that they rarely reviewed the lesson at home unless there was homework. On the contrary, the junior high school students claimed that they frequently review the lesson at home and most of them also showed their passion in learning English, they showed their excitement while being interviewed, they stated that they also took an English course so that it could help them to learn English easier with a tutor. However, the senior high school students did not

review the lesson if there was no homework; most of them almost never review it again at home. They said that English was too difficult and they were bored learning English. They preferred to study Math or Biology instead of English; most of the senior high school students do not show any passion in learning English. Then, since they were at senior high school level, they did not take any English course. As they stated that there was no course for senior high school level in their village. Due to the lack of motivation that they have, it caused they employed less strategies than the younger students. The negative thought of students creates the low motivation in learning English so that they prefer not to learn English and chose to learn any other subjects; the result was every time they learn English they cannot learn effectively. In other words, the senior high school students have to be more motivated in learning English so that they can learn English effectively by using more LLS.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussion above, some conclusions were drawn. First, between male and female students does not show any differences in employing language learning strategies, both male and female students employ language learning strategies in the same frequency manner. Second, the contrary is found related age and the use of language learning strategies, junior and senior high school students employ language learning strategies in different manner which is junior high school students tend to employ language learning strategies more than senior high school students. Finally, based on those findings, it can be strongly concluded that the dominance factor which may affect the use of LLS preference is the age of the students rather than the gender of the students. Moreover, it can be seen that the gender factor does not give any big impact to LLS preference; both male and female students employ almost the same strategies when they are learning English. However, this current study is disagreeing to the claim that the older you learn the language the more strategies you use. Therefore, one thing should be noted is the maturity of the students or language learners is not a guarantee that they are more outstanding in learning language compared to younger students or language learners. In fact, younger language learners have more passion and they tend to not worry in making mistake while learning language than older language learners; they are outstanding in learning language and also outstanding in using language learning strategies compared to the older language learners.

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