THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY PREFERENCES TOWARDS STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION

Wiwit Rosyanawati & Kaswan
w.rosyanawati@gmail.com & kaswan_dewi@yahoo.com

STKIP SILIWANGI BANDUNG

ABSTRACT

Identified as the core skill, the importance of reading is deniable for some reasons. First, reading is a receptive skill in that people get a lot of information and knowledge through reading. Second, reading is the fundamental for more advanced skill - writing. However, the performance of reading comprehension differs from one learner to others. This study investigated the influence of gender and language learning strategy (LLS) preferences towards students' reading comprehension. The participants of this study are 155 students in 9th grade of SMP N 9 Cimahi who are divided into 68 males and 87 females. Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) proposed by Oxford (1990) and reading comprehension tests were used as the instruments. Employing causal comparative method, two way ANOVA was used in exploring 1) the differences between male and female in reading comprehension, 2) the difference between all of type LLS in reading comprehension, and 3) the interaction between gender and LLS towards reading comprehension. This study also examines what LLS most frequently used. To sum up, social strategy is the most one preferred by both male and female students. Statistically significant difference is not found both in gender (p= 0.133 > 0.05) and LLS (p=0.450 > 0.05). In addition, there is no significant difference in their interaction with regard to reading comprehension (p=0.103 > 0.05).

Keywords: gender, language learning strategies (LLS), reading comprehension

A. INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the language skills considered very important for a number of reasons. First, reading is a receptive skill in that through reading people can receive a lot of information and knowledge. Second, reading is a foundation for more advanced skill that is writing. However, sometimes the students find some difficulties in reading. As people learn to read, comprehension is the prominent aim has to achieve. Nation (1997) stated because of the complex nature of reading comprehension, it is not surprising that some individuals have difficulties in this area.

Johan (2006) in his research entitled *Typical Reading Comprehension Problems among Indonesian Advanced Learners* found that learners face some problems when they have to comprehend a written text. The problems include grammatical and lexical difficulties. It is also caused by difficulties of comprehending implicit meaning, understanding discourse markers, and knowing punctuation. Munro (1995) added that inadequacy in understanding the key idea will affect student's reading ability. Students who have a difficulty in identifying the topic of the text will have underachieving reading. Another cause is proposed by Stahl and Fairbanks (1986) who stated that limited vocabulary influenced student's reading comprehension. They conclude that in developing comprehension, vocabulary instruction is the most important element.

Furthermore, the difficulty in reading comprehension achievement is different based on gender (Asher, 1977). Gender refers to the social, cultural, and psychological differentiation of an individual that are imposed on the biological distinction (Bucholtz, 2002; .Coates, 2004; Saphiro, 1981 in Coates, 2008). Asher (1977) suggested that male in American elementary school have more serious reading problem than their counterparts. Based on result's survey by Blom (1971 in Asher, 1977) presented that 90% of remedial students are males. The finding about gender difference in reading comprehension is strengthened by Lynn & Mikk (2009) revealed that female get better result in reading comprehension test than male. In line with it, a research by Arellano (2013) found same result that males are behind females in achieving reading score.

However, learners have their own language learning strategies to help them developed their ability. Strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence (Oxford, 1990). Later, Wenden (1987) explained that language learning behaviors actually engage and regulate the learning of a language; these language learning behaviors have been called strategies.

Studies on reading comprehension and its strategies have been conducted in Indonesia context as well. Syafrizal (in Fazri 2000) found that the students reading comprehension achievement have connected with the appropriate language learning strategies that they employ. Then, Afdaleni (2013) held a research for college students and found that in order to comprehend texts the students used some strategies such as making schedule well to learn language, conducting self – evaluation to assess how far their progress is, and so on. Meanwhile, Yusuf & Amanda (n.d) conducted a research for junior high school and their finding revealed that most of their participants are used cognitive strategies as their most appropriate strategy.

The present study aims at finding most frequently reading strategies used by third grade students of junior high school and discovering the significant difference between gender and language learning strategies preferences towards students reading comprehension. It also aims at examining the interaction between gender and language learning strategies preferences in terms to reading comprehension.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Gender

Gender is considered as a variable that can influence achievement in reading comprehension. But its terminology often interchanges with sex. Sex refers to the biological differentiation of individual (Bucholtz, 2002; .Coates, 2004; Saphiro, 1981 in Meyerhof, 2008). While gender refers to social, cultural, and psychological differentiation of an individual that are imposed on the biological distinction (Bucholtz, 2002; .Coates, 2004; Saphiro, 1981 in Coates, 2008).

2. Language Learning Strategies

In the field of language learning, various definitions of learning strategies can be found. A learning strategy is a method of perceiving and storing particular items for later recall (Brown, 1980). In 1987, Rubin proposed, "language learning strategies are strategies which contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly." Rubin also suggested that learning strategies includes any set of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval and use of information. Chamot (1987) wrote that learning strategies are "techniques, approaches, or

deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recalls of both linguistic and content are information."

O' Malley and Chamot (1990:1) revealed that learning strategy is "the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information. Oxford and Croockall (1989) identified learning strategies as operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information. Then Oxford (1990:8) expanded the definition by saying that learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferrable to new situation.

Though many various definition given by experts, they draw commonly thing. The broad accepted use of the term learning strategies refers to particular techniques, approaches, thoughts, and / or behaviors which used by the learners to gain their aims in learning a language both with their awareness or not. The learning strategies are hoped can help them easier and more effective. That's why, the use of learning strategies is important in learning language.

3. Classification in Language Learning Strategies

Oxford (1990) on her book *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know* divided language learning strategies into two main classes: direct and indirect. These two classes then classified into six groups as follows

a. Memory strategies

They are techniques that facilitate the process of recalling new input. These strategies help the learners store new information and skills in memory so as to retrieve them later whenever they are needed.

Memory strategies comprise four sets of learning strategies; creating mental linkages (covering grouping, associating / elaborating; and placing new words into a context); applying images and sounds (including using imagery; semantic mapping; using keywords; and representing sounds in memory); reviewing well (structured reviewing); and employing action (involving using physical response or sensation and using mechanical techniques).

b. Cognitive strategies

They involve manipulation and transformation of the language in some direct ways for processing language input and preparing for language output. Cognitive strategies are built up of four sets of learning strategies; practicing (including repeating; formally practicing with sounds and writing systems; recognizing and using formulas and patterns; recombining; and practicing naturalistically); receiving and sending messages (involving getting the idea quickly and using resources for receiving and sending messages); analyzing and reasoning (implicating reasoning deductively; analyzing expressions; analyzing contrastively across languages; translating; and transferring); and creating structure for input and output (covering taking notes; summarizing; and highlighting).

c. Compensation strategies

They are behaviors that help learners overcome any gaps in knowledge of the target language. Compensation strategies are classified into the strategies of guessing intelligently depending on different types of clues like the linguistic ones and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing (including switching to the mother tongue; getting help from others; using mime or

gestures; avoiding communication partially or wholly; selecting the topic; adjusting or approximating the message; coining words; and using a circumlocution or synonym). These strategies are commonly manipulated for the skills of listening comprehension, reading comprehension, speaking and writing activities and vocabulary learning.

d. Metacognitive strategies

They are described as the *" beyond – the – cognitive "* strategies since they are used to provide *" executive control "* over the learning process. By possessing these strategies, the learners would be able to determine their learning objectives and monitor their understanding about materials being learned and evaluate what they have learned and how well they have done it (Wenden, 1999 : 436).

Metacognitive strategies are divided into centering the learning, arranging and planning the learning and evaluating the learning. Centering strategies comprise three subsets of strategies that deal with behaviors which focus the learners' attention on the materials that they are going to learn and the ones they have learned. Arranging and planning strategies guide the learners to set their learning goals, organize and plan their learning activities in an efficient and effective ways, and seek the opportunities to practice the target language especially in genuine situations. Finally, evaluation strategies facilitate the learners to monitor the ongoing learning process and to evaluate the progress of learning the target language. Oxford's evaluation learning strategies cover the meanings of self – monitoring and self – evaluation.

e. Affective strategies

They are those employed for controlling emotions, attitudes and motivation that influence the success or failure of language learning process. Three groups of learning strategies are included under the label affective language learning strategies. They are; lowering anxiety strategies, which implicate following certain ways for making the learning process to be in a relaxed situation and conditions such as practicing relaxation exercises, taking deep breath, listening to music, … etc.; encouraging strategies, which lead the learners to have more confident and risks in language learning so that they would not be afraid of making mistakes; and taking emotional temperature strategies that help the learners discern negatives attitudes and emotions

f. Social strategies

These strategies implicate engaging in interactions the learner with other people in the language learning process. Social strategies cover three sets of learning strategies: asking question, cooperating and empathizing with others. Asking question strategies are very useful to learners to clarify the materials that hey do not understand or to verify the materials for checking their correctness. Cooperative strategies, on their part, facilitate language learning process in peers or groups cooperatively through which each learners is held accountable for his / her own learning and is motivated to reinforce the principle of learning with others. Lastly, empathizing strategies aid learners to increase their ability to empathize by developing cultural understanding and becoming aware of the others' thoughts and feelings.

2. Reading Comprehension

Dorothy Rubin (1982:207) in Hendriana (2015:201) stated that reading comprehension is a complex intellectual process involving a number of abilities. He added that the two major abilities concern word meanings and reasoning with verbal concepts. Further definition is given by Pordo (2004) who stated that comprehension is a process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience,

information in the text, and the stance the reader takes in relationship to the text. Then Pordo added that the reader brings many things to the literacy event, the text has certain features, and yet meaning emerges only from the engagement of that reader with that text at that particular moment in time.

Generally, reading comprehension can be said as the essential of reading that is needed the learners to gain understanding of message in text by decoding the writer's words and then using background knowledge to construct an approximate understanding of the writer's message.

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study involved 155 students in 9th grade of SMP N 9 Cimahi who consisted of 68 males and 87 females. Using causal comparative method, this study employed Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and reading comprehension tests. The SILL was proposed by Oxford (1990) consist of 50 questions which divided into six parts where each part for each strategy. It was used to examine what language learning strategies preferred by the students. To help the participants answered those questions, it was rendered into Bahasa Indonesia. This questionnaire used scale of 5 –always, frequently, occasionally, rarely, and never- related in strategies employed in reading.

On the other hand, reading tests are given to know students' comprehension. The tests are conducted three times with different questions for each test to get more valid and reliable result. From those tests, the average score are used. Each test comprised of 40 multiple choice questions. Later, for analyzing the result, two way ANOVA was used.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Reading Comprehension Score and SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) Results

After checking the student's answers for three reading comprehension test and computing the SILL questionnaire, the results were given in the table below:

Table 1
Language Learning Strategies Used by Male and Female Students

No	Language Learning Strategy	Gender			
		(in number)		(in percentage)	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
1.	Memory	6	8	3.87	5.16
2.	Cognitive	4	2	2.58	1.29
3.	Compensation	7	10	4.52	6.45
4.	Metacognitive	4	17	2.58	10.97
5.	Affective	4	5	2.58	3.23
6.	Social	43	45	27.74	29.03
	Total	**68**	**87**	**43.87**	**56.13**

From the table above, it could be concluded that both male and female students were used social strategy as their main strategy in which $N_{male} = 43$ (27.74%) and $N_{female} = 45$ (29.03%). It also revealed that language learning strategy which the most frequently used by overall students was social strategy ($N = 88$ (56.77%)). Whereas the least frequently used by overall students was cognitive strategy in which only six students (3.87%) who chose this strategy in language learning. The table also indicate that female students were less prefer in cognitive strategy (1.29%). Indeed, male students were less prefer in cognitive, metacognitive, and affective ($N = 4$ (2.58%)).

2. Descriptive Statistics

"The major advantage of descriptive statistics is that they permit researchers to describe the information contained in many, many scores with just a few indices, such as the mean and median (more about these in a moment)" (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2008:185). The results were presented in table below:

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Reading Test Score

Gender	Language Learning Strategies	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Female	Memory	5.5125	1.17448	8
	Cognitive	5.1250	1.70413	2
	Compensation	6.4420	1.57086	10
	Metacognitive	6.2265	1.24080	17
	Affective	5.7320	.89951	5
	Social	6.2267	1.22930	45
	Total	6.1320	1.26005	87
Male	Memory	6.6100	1.55486	6
	Cognitive	7.0625	1.20964	4
	Compensation	6.3800	1.10377	7
	Metacognitive	6.8100	1.19649	4
	Affective	5.3325	1.01562	4
	Social	5.7928	1.21793	43
	Total	6.0328	1.26619	68
Total	Memory	5.9829	1.41077	14
	Cognitive	6.4167	1.56837	6
	Compensation	6.4165	1.35863	17
	Metacognitive	6.3376	1.22537	21
	Affective	5.5544	.91417	9
	Social	6.0147	1.23610	88
	Total	6.0885	1.25960	155

Table 2 illustrated about the data set for which descriptive statistics had been calculated. This table showed the mean, standard deviation, and total number for each factor. The highest mean was gained by female students (6.4420) with Compensation as their language learning strategy. On the other hand, the lowest one was 5.1250 which was obtained by Cognitive strategy. In the contrary, cognitive strategy which was employed by male students get the highest mean (7.0625). While the lowest mean for male students was acquired by Affective strategy (5.5325).

Ignoring language learning strategies which were used by students, the total means for females was 6.1320, meanwhile their counterparts got 6.0328. Whereas, by ignoring male or female students, the grand mean was obtained by Cognitive strategy (M= 6.4167, SD= 1.56837) and the least mean was found at Affective strategy (M= 5.5544, SD= 0.91417).

3. Test of Normality

Before conducting two-way ANOVA, it should be tested whether the data have normal distribution or not. It can be seen from the result below:

Table 3
Tests of Normality

	Gender	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Stat.	df	Sig.	Stat.	df	Sig.
Reading	Females	.047	87	.200[*]	.990	87	.734
Test	Males	.075	68	.200[*]	.978	68	.264
Scores							

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction
*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

Based on the table 3 above, it could be concluded that both females and males were normal due to Sig. K-S and S-W exceeds 0.05. Besides that, test of normality also conduct for the other variables that is language learning strategies. The result is as follow:

Table 4
Tests of Normality

	Language Learning Strategies	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Stat.	df	Sig.	Stat.	df	Sig.
Reading	Memory	.114	14	.200[*]	.965	14	.802
ng	Cognitive	.209	6	.200[*]	.957	6	.796
Test	Compensation	.104	17	.200[*]	.958	17	.597
Scores	Metacognitive	.155	21	.200[*]	.966	21	.644
	Affective	.172	9	.200[*]	.946	9	.642
	Social	.070	88	.200[*]	.984	88	.360

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction
*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

According to table 4, the six variables (Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, Metacognitive, Affective, and Social) were normal, it was shown by the Sig value of K-S and S-W that were greater than 0.05. To analyze the data further, it needs analyzing through test of homogeneity of variances.

4. Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Table 5
Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances[a]
Dependent Variable: Reading Test Scores

F	df1	df2	Sig.
.321	11	143	.980

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the ependent variable is equal across groups.
a. Design: Intercept + Gender + LLS + Gender * LLS

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances provides a test of one of the assumption underlying analysis of variances (Pallant, 2010). From the table above, it could be said that the data were equal because the significant value (0.980) was greater than 0.05. As the homogeneity of variance assumption is met, the result of the two way ANOVA could be examined.

5. Two way ANOVA

Table 6
Tests of Between-Subjects Effects
Dependent Variable: Reading Test Scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	21.728[a]	11	1.975	1.269	.248	.089
Intercept	2568.869	1	2568.869	1650.208	.000	.920
Gender	**3.550**	**1**	**3.550**	**2.281**	**.133**	**.016**
LLS	**7.399**	**5**	**1.480**	**.951**	**.450**	**.032**
Gender * LLS	**14.582**	**5**	**2.916**	**1.874**	**.103**	**.061**
Error	222.607	143	1.557			
Total	5990.068	155				
Corrected Total	244.336	154				

a. R Squared = .089 (Adjusted R Squared = .019)

Before examining the first and the second null hypotheses, test for assessing interaction of the two independent variables is performed first. In evaluating the last null hypothesis, that is, there is no significant difference in the interaction between gender and language learning strategies towards students' reading comprehension, it can be examined by the row labeled "Gender*LLS". Table 6 revealed that α value (0.05) was less than the significant value (0.103). It showed that there was insufficient evidence to conclude that there was statistically significant difference of the interaction between gender and language learning strategies in term to reading comprehension. It means that the last null hypothesis is accepted.

Indeed, the colomn "Partial Eta Squared" showed about the effect size, that is, the strength of the difference between group, or the influence of independent variable (Pallant, 2012: 207). Cohen's guidelines were taken in interpreting the result: small (0.01), medium (0.06), and large (0.138). The table presents that the influence of interaction between gender and language learning strategies towards reading comprehension score was categorized as moderate influence due to the effect size is 0.061.

Then, to examine the first null hypothesis that is there is no significant difference between gender towards students' reading comprehension, it can be tested by looking at sig. value of the row labeled "gender". The table above revealed that sig. (0.133) was greater than 0.05, so the null hypothesis was accepted. That was, there was no statistically significant difference between females and males in their reading comprehension. In addition, the effect size of gender is 0.16 in which it involved in small influence.

Later, to assess the second null hypothesis, the row labeled "LLS" must be paid attention. The table did not confirm any significant differences between memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategy with regard to reading comprehension, because sig. (0.450) exceeds 0.05. It indicates that the second null hypothesis, that is there is no significant difference between language learning strategies towards reading comprehension, is accepted. According to the table, language learning strategies had small effect (0.032) in regard with reading comprehension score.

Due to the results show that there was no significant difference in interaction of gender and language learning strategies towards students' reading comprehension, no further analysis of the factors was needed (Mendenhall, 2011: 660)

E. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

1. Conclusions

In sum, there are some conclusions which can be drawn:
a. The most frequently used strategy is social strategy. It was preferred both by male and female students (56.77%). OIn the contrary, the less frequently used strategies are cognitive, metacognitive, and affective strategies (2.58%) for males while their counterparts are less preferred to cognitive strategy (1.29%)
b. There is no statistically significant difference between males and females in achieving reading comprehension. The two way ANOVA shows that sig value (0.133) is greater than 0.05
c. In addition, statistically significant difference is not found between all type of language learning strategies towards reading comprehension (sig > α; 0.450 > 0.05).
d. This study also reveals that the difference of gender and language learning strategies in regard with reading comprehension is not significant (sig > α; 0.103 > 0.05).

2. Suggestions

In spite of there are no significant results, the findings have several implications. Firstly, using the appropriate learning strategies is considerable matter for learners in which they choose learning strategies cappropriate for them to learn. Learners should also develop their comprehension by considering another factor such as enriching vocabulary, reviewing their learning style, or employing new reading strategies.

Secondly, in line with learners, teacher should also be aware of another factor that can affect their learners' comprehension beyond gender and language learning strategies in order to get better attainment. Finally, the further researchers should consider conducting research in different grade for instance in Senior High School or Vocational High School. Yet, each grade has its own characteristics in learning English.

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