

EFL Students' Language Learning Strategies in Argumentative Writing Class

Putri Amifalahiya Iqlima¹, Rissa Sofia², Risa Triassanti³, Christina Innocenti Tumiar Panggabean⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas PGRI Ronggolawe Tuban, Indonesia

¹putriiqlima25@gmail.com, ²rissafia27@gmail.com, ³triassantirisa@gmail.com, ⁴christina306.cp@gmail.com

Abstract

The focus of this research is on EFL students' language learning strategies used in Argumentative Writing class at UNIROW Tuban. It sought to determine the students' most frequent language learning strategies and the strategies' distinctions between students, both male and female. The descriptive qualitative was employed as the design of research for this study. The study's participants are 15 EFL students enrolled in Argumentative Writing class from English Language Education department undergraduate program of UNIROW Tuban. The questionnaire and interview data were qualitatively examined using Oxford's theories of language learning. It was identified that there were six kinds of language learning strategies used by the students, namely memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. The findings showed that in the Argumentative Writing class, both genders of students most frequently employed cognitive strategies. Additionally, it was discovered that female students employed more varied language learning strategies than male students. The cognitive strategies appear to be the finest support strategies employed in Argumentative Writing class that can overcome students' writing limitations, so that both teachers and students in Argumentative Writing class can develop this strategy to create better writing activity.

Keywords: *EFL Students, Language Learning Strategy, Argumentative Writing Class*

INTRODUCTION

One of four important skills in English is writing. Writing is complex skill, because students must think about some linguistic aspects such as grammar and vocabulary (Astrini, et al. 2020). Even though writing courses are meant to assist students develop great writing abilities, the majority of students still have trouble to write well (Junianti, et al. 2020). Many of their ideas do not come to them until they've already started writing, and some of them struggle with what to write (Ariyanti and Fitriana, 2017). The students repeated the process of going backward to edit and modify words or sentence orders before moving forward until they are satisfied with the outcome. In reality, a lot of students still find the writing activity frustrating (Yuliani and Fadhly, 2020). Flowerdew (1999) in one study mentioned that students who struggle to express themselves and have a limited vocabulary experience frustration and take longer time to write. Fajrina, et al. (2021) also stated that during writing, the students need high intelligence. Students may gradually develop their capacity for diverse thought, logical thought, imaginative thought, etc. Not only that, during writing process, students also

involve cognitive ability, including an activity of making decision and solving problem (Flower and Hayes, 1981).

Concerning to the difficulties of writing, the students can develop the writing skill by using learning strategies. Beside that, by applying learning strategies, students are going to be more awake of their active participant in studying (Panggabean and Triassanti, 2020). Oxford (1990) explained learning strategies as methods, attitudes, approaches to addressing problems, or study practices that increase the learning's effectiveness and efficiency. In outline, there are three categories of learning strategies. They are meta-cognitive, cognitive, and social strategies (Junianti, et al. 2020).

According to Oxford (1990), the types of learning strategies are divided into direct and indirect strategies. Each strategy has its own characteristic. There are three different categories for direct strategies as well. They are memory strategy, cognitive strategy, and compensation strategy. Just same as direct strategies, indirect strategies are divided into three too. The three sets of indirect strategies are metacognitive strategy, affective strategy, and social strategy. The researchers find that these strategies are effective in building the writing skills for students, because the strategies contain direct and indirect components.

If we talk about language learning strategies used by EFL students at universities, there are some factors such as age, gender, attitudes, stimulation, learning aim, motivational orientation, learning way, careergoal, national birth, tutoring techniques, work requirement, language being studied, period, and degree of awareness that influence the option of language learning strategies (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). The students of second year foreign language learners mostly used cognitive strategies (Khoshsima and Tiyyar, 2015). It can be claimed that university students pay close attention to their own thought processes when learning a subject, particularly in writing. The strategies that are used by successful and unsuccessful students are different. Gerami and Baighlou (2011) stated that the learning strategies utilized by EFL students were more varied and distinct from those frequently selected by their unsuccessful colleagues. The successful university students incline to use metacognitive strategy, meanwhile unsuccessful students prefer to use cognitive strategy (Gerami and Baighlou, 2011). The metacognitive strategy helps students to facilitate their own learning in writing (Bai and Guo, 2021).

There are four previous studies about language learning strategies that researchers used to conduct this research. All of them employed Oxford Language Learning Strategies as main theory in order to investigate language learning strategies used by EFL the students. The first research was done by Junianti, Pratolo, and Wulandari in 2020. The finding showed that there are three strategies usually used by the students in writing. The different percentages were showed in each strategy; 79% for metacognitive strategies, 74% for cognitive strategies, and 81% for social strategies. The difference between the first previous study with this research is that the previous study focuses on writing course in general, meanwhile this research focuses on argumentative writing course. The second research was conducted by McMullen in 2009. In this research, McMullen (2009) found that male Saudi EFL students reported implementing language learning strategies less than female students at all three universities polled in Saudi Arabia. The second previous study focuses on improving the writing skill by using language learning strategies, whereas this research focuses on finding out the most frequently strategies used by students in argumentative writing class. The next research

was done by Bessai in 2018. This research showed that female students showed a greater frequency of strategy use in all types (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, social and affective strategies), and all categories of LLS than did male students. Bessai focuses on the first and third year students, meanwhile this research focuses on second year students. The fourth research was done in 2020 by Yuliani and Fadhly. Yuliani and Fadhly (2020) found that the strategy that is used the most by respondents in writing English text is compensation strategy. The finding of this research also reported that female respondents are the most frequent implementer in the overall writing strategies. The difference between the fourth previous study with this study is the previous study studied writing strategies in senior high school students, meanwhile this research used college students.

Based on the background above, the researchers do believe that all students need language learning strategies to develop the writing skill, so they are able to write well. In this research, the researchers are going to inspect the language learning strategies used by EFL Students in Argumentative Writing Class at UNIROW Tuban that they can use to help them in writing English easily. Besides, the researchers also want to know about the difference in using language learning strategies between male and female students, because gender has important part in the implementation of language learning strategies in writing process (Getie, 2020). Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) also stated that the application of strategy in the learning process can vary by gender. Thus, the research questions of this study are: (1) What are the most frequent language learning strategies used by EFL students in Argumentative Writing class?; (2) What are the differences between language learning strategies used by male and female EFL students in Argumentative Writing class?

RESEARCH METHOD

In order to discover the most frequent language learning strategies utilised by EFL students and the distinctions in language learning strategies applied by both male and female EFL students while writing, a case study was employed in this research, whereas the data were analysed qualitatively. Qualitative research is a sort of empirical study that seeks deeper comprehension of a particular study issue or subject through the perceptions of the local community (Mack, et al., 2005). Gay, Mills, & Airasian (2012) said, case study research is the qualitative research methodology that involves researchers concentrating on an entity of subject matter designated as an enclosed framework. In line with Creswell (2002), a case study is an issue to be explored that aims to show a thorough comprehension of a “case” or restricted system that requires comprehending an occurrence, movement, process, or individual in question.

To determine the participant, the researchers used purposeful sampling. 15 EFL students from English Language Education department undergraduate program of UNIROW Tuban that consist of 11 female and 4 male students were involved as research subject. All of them are second year students from one class in Argumentative Writing class and assumed to have same proficiency.

The researchers employed questionnaires and interviews to obtain data. The questionnaire used in this research was SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) version 7.0 (ESL/EFL) adapted from Oxford (1990). Based on Oxford’s original identification and classification system, the SILL was divided into six strategies consist of memory strategies (items number 1-5; 5 items), cognitive strategies (items number 6-17; 12 items), compensation strategies (items number 18-21; 4 items),

metacognitive strategies (items number 22-28; 7 items), affective strategies (items number 29-35; 7 items), and social strategies (items number 36-40; 5 items), so there are 40 items in total. The SILL Likert scale was designed to provide variety among potential answers in the form of 1 (never), 2 (rare), 3 (sometimes), 4 (often), 5 (always). The students filled out the questionnaires online. The researchers moved the SILL into Google Form, then the form was distributed through WhatsApp group by one of the students.

The researchers applied three procedures to analyze the questionnaire results: calculating and assessing the percentage of language learning strategies used in writing, interpreting, and drawing conclusion. In calculating the percentage of each strategy obtained by each individual, the researchers use the following formula:

$$P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100\%$$

(Sudjana, referenced in Muljanto, 2012)

Where:

P = The rate of every strategy (%)

f = Total learner responses

n = Total points requirements

In the interest of gathering extra data, four respondents consist of two male and two female students were selected for the interview. The four respondents are the representation of overall students' language learning strategies in writing users. These students got the higher score among all research subjects in each strategies. The questions given in the interview were arranged according to the questionnaire findings. The interview was conducted through WhatsApp personal chat using English.

On the other hand, to analyze the interview results, the researchers sorted the data needed, interpreted, and then drew conclusion. In order to draw the conclusion, the researchers used meaning condensation method. "Meaning condensation is the shortening of significance presented in the interviews. Long sentences are condensed into shorter statements in which the primary point is communicated in a few words" (Kvale, 1996). This means that the researcher reread the chat from the interviews process, then write the respondents' answers into brief statements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

After totalling and analyzing the questionnaire and interview data, it is known that students in Argumentative Writing class at UNIROW Tuban use multiple language learning strategy in writing course. Table 1 below shows the language learning strategies implemented the most by 15 students in Argumentative Writing Class at UNIROW Tuban.

Table 1. The rank of language learning strategies used by students

Rank	Strategies	Average	Percentage
1	Cognitive	41,3	30,1%
2	Metacognitive	25,5	18,6%
3	Affective	23,8	17,4%
4	Memory	17,4	12,7%

5	Compensation	15,3	11,2%
6	Social	13,8	10,0%
Total		137,1	100%

The data in table 1 showed the most frequent strategy implemented by students in Argumentative Writing class is cognitive strategy (30,1%). It is followed by metacognitive strategy (18,6%), affective strategy (17,4%), memory strategy (12,7%), compensation strategy, and lastly social strategy (10%).

After knowing the overall percentage of language learning strategies implemented by all respondents, the researchers attempted to categorize the respondents in order to discover the differences in the strategies used in writing English text. The results of classifying the respondents based on gender are shown in table 2 below.

Table 2. The percentages of language learning strategies used between male and female

No.	Strategies	Percentage	
		Male	Female
1	Memory	17,4%	17,2%
2	Cognitive	40,6%	43,2%
3	Compensation	15,3%	15,2%
4	Metacognitive	25,6%	25,0%
5	Affective	23,2%	25,5%
6	Social	13,2%	15,5%
Average		22,5%	23,5%

Table 2 above showed the overall strategies implemented by both students, male and female. From table, we can know that female students are the most frequent users of all six language learning strategies. The percentage of female students is higher than male students. The female students gain 23,5%, meanwhile the male students only gain 22,5%.

Discussion

Regarding to the questionnaires result, the researchers assumed the most frequent language learning strategy employed by EFL students in Argumentative Writing class of UNIROW Tuban is cognitive strategy (30,1%) followed by metacognitive strategy (18,6%), affective strategy (17,4%), memory strategy (12,7%), compensation strategy, and social strategy (10%). This result is in line with Khoshsima and Tiyyar (2015) research that university learners are more likely to use cognitive strategy. According to Hidayad and Purwanto (2022), the cognitive strategy is one of the three most commonly employed language learning strategies by students. The result of the research conducted by Junianti, Pratolo, & Wulandari (2020) discovered that each strategy appeared at different percentages: 79% in metacognitive strategies, 74% in cognitive strategies, and 81% in social strategies. In line with the statement, the finding of the research conducted by Bessai (2018) discovered that third year students applied metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social strategies far greater than first-year students. In contrast, McMullen (2009) stated in his study that the findings revealed that Saudi EFL students overall preferred social strategies, metacognitive strategies, and compensation strategies, ignoring cognitive strategies, memory strategies, and affective strategies. Meanwhile, in Yuliani & Fadhly (2020) research, the majority of commonly utilised strategies by subjects during the writing of English text were compensation strategies.

Cognitive processes may include every activity that occurs in the cognitive system for the purpose of learning foreign tongues (Anita as mentioned in Bai, Hu, and Gu, 2014). Sapitri (2017) stated that the use of cognitive strategy in students can produce different text quality. In cognitive strategies, the students learn about and compose English text by read and collect information regarding to the topic from various sources, in order to prevent the misleading information about the content in their writing and to ensure the data accuracy.

“To make sure the information about the topic that I write are correct and do not cause misunderstandings to the reader, because sometimes there are many sources of information that are unclear and inaccurate.” (S.3:Female, interview)

“I search for the information from different sources in order to clarify that what I know is correct as well as broaden my knowledge.” (S.2: Male, interview)

When they were unsure, students modify the text. They make sure that their writing is comprehensible by using common words or elaborate with particular situation.

“When I find something confusing in the statements that I write, I usually revise them and add situation to explain the meaning.” (S.4:Female, interview)

Furthermore, the research findings also revealed that male and female participants applied language learning strategies in writing, but with varying frequency. The female students scored 23,5%, meanwhile the male students only 22,5%. It indicates that female students are the most frequent users of all six language learning strategies. Language learning strategies’ differences of male and female EFL students while writing can also be seen from the interview results below.

“I can't mention what language learning strategy I used while writing. I think I started to write directly on the paper.” (S.1:Male, interview)

“I make an outline first before writing something down, and if I found some new vocabularies, I usually memorize and write it on my note book. I always reread my writing many times to ensure accuracy.” (S.3: Female, interview)

The prior research from McMullen (2009) also found that at all three Saudi Arabia universities, female Saudi EFL students identified employing language learning strategies in greater numbers compared to male students. Yuliana and Fadhly (2020) stated that female respondents are the majority of common users of overall writing strategies. Female students discovered a higher frequency of employing strategies of any kind (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, social and affective strategies), as well as all classification of LLS in comparison to male students (Bessai, 2018).

However, the differences between students’ writing strategies is possible through the influenced by some factors such as proficiency, gender, and academic major. According to Nambiar (2009), some factors have an impact on strategy preference, including competence, learning atmosphere, cultural background, age, gender, style of learning, motivation, and ideology. Gender, motivation, and prior language learning experience belong to the aspects that are asserted to have an impact on the decision to employ a certain language learning strategy when writing (Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2006). Rianto (2020), has continually discovered that female students are willing to spend and dedicate greater amounts of time and energy to language learning solely due to the

prospective advantages for their future. Female students have a greater hunger for social recognition and validation; they appear to be prepared to attempt higher grades and employ language learning strategies on a regular basis.

Oxford (1994) addressed the importance of perceiving the learner as an entire person as opposed to merely the intellectual facets of strategies. It indicates that every strategy has distinctions in regards to its capability to manage learning, the differences is in the learners' mental thinking. If students can decide which strategies are most suitable for them, it will be highly advantageous to their learning. Therefore, these research findings provide knowledge regarding EFL students' language learning strategies in writing for English teachers as well as learners, particularly for the process of classroom instruction and learning. Considering the importance of language learning strategies in developing students' writing skill, on the other hand, inappropriate strategies may cause problem and unsuccessful learning.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis at the Argumentative Writing class in UNIROW Tuban, there are some conclusions that can be drawn; 15 EFL students there employed more than one language learning strategies when writing English text. The students employ memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensatory strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies.

As stated in this research, students most frequently used cognitive strategies (30,1%). With the use of this technique, students can use data from variety of sources to create well-written texts. The strategy of using a similar English word known (26,5%) that is the part of compensation strategy is the strategy that is most frequently used by students. The knowledge and state of mind or the pupils' feelings had an impact in writing.

The results of this study also revealed that both male and female students showed different percentages of strategy that they used. Female employed a wider variation of language learning strategies than male did. This finding support earlier research that indicated female students utilized strategies more often than male did. Through the result of this study, both teachers and students in argumentative writing class should develop the cognitive strategies better, so they can achieve better result in writing skill.

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