

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Perceptions of language learning are not limited to the understanding of language learners learning receptive and productive skills of a language, which are listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills (Jaramillo and Medina, 2011). Language learning, comprehensively, involves the practice of interpretation and meaning making of everything around learners. Language learners are always actively engaged in the process of constructing and deconstructing meaning of any linguistic aspect (Charanchi, 2011). This activity creates meaningful representation for them, and in turn it enables them to understand topics and communicate with each other. Language, then, is essentially taught to language learners as a way for them to understand the world around them and communicate to other language users in a meaningful way; a way that enables them to make sense of everything around them. To learn a language is to acquire specific knowledge and skill sets through meaning making that are relevant to a particular language that will enable learners to behave and think in ways that show comprehension and proficiency of a language. This aspect is what underlies the receptive and productive aspects of language, and it cannot exist without firstly acknowledging that language learning is a process of meaning making.

An aim of language learning is to set up language learners to be skillful communicators of their target language. If the goal of language study for the

individuals is language use, then the basis of evaluation of a learner's competence should be judged by the learner's ability to communicate (Savignon 2018). Just as in naturalistic settings, human language communication taking place in non-naturalistic settings (in classrooms) can take form in both oral and written forms in a flexible manner. The ability of a language learner to exhibit a degree of proficiency in oral and written forms of their target language will allow them to be communicatively competent and meet their expectations in mastering their target language (Melvina et al., 2020).

Within the process of language learning, studies of cognitive psychology have exhibited language learners being involved in a direct and indirect manner of learning (Lestari and Fatimah, 2020). Prominence of this topic have gained traction around 1975 upon the release of a study by Rubin (1975, in Hismanoglu 2000), which centered around the discovery that language learners are involved in the process of 'planning' and essentially 'building strategies' surrounding how they approach learning materials. It cemented the existence of language learning strategies (LLS) and helped coin and popularize the term. Furthermore, successive studies have promoted the elaboration of the topic, as the concept of LLS was supported and further developed by many subsequent researchers in the field (Stern, 1975; Green & Oxford, 1995; Naiman et al., 1978; Rubin & Thompson, 1982). A shared understanding of LLS among earlier publications is that it provides learners to improve their learning by increasing language skills, enhancing confidence, and developing learners' motivation in the process of learning. Moreover, these strategies enhance learners to be independent,

autonomous, and responsible for their learning progress and achievement (Shi, 2017). Furthermore, it also can help learners to improve their ability or proficiency in using the language correctly and appropriately both oral and written. As a result, their communicative competence will develop and their expectations and goals in language learning can be met (Oxford, 1990).

These early research studies have set the scene for emerging interests in LLS and subsequent relevant studies. Particularly, several researchers in TEFL have studied the selection of language learning strategies (LLSs) and the language acquisition and adoption occurring in successful language learners (Chuin and Sarjit 2015). With the increase of the knowledge of second language acquisition during the 1970s, teachers and researchers concluded that no single method of language teaching and research findings would mark the start of universal success in teaching a second language (Brown, 2007), hypothesizing that the key for successful language learners to succeed in language learning lies in the individuals themselves. “Certain people appeared to be endowed with abilities to succeed; others lacked those abilities” (p.132). Observations and research studies led researchers (Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Rubin and Thompson, 1994) to describe ‘good’ language learners in terms of personal characteristics, styles, and strategies that can be used as a form of benchmark for other language learners in terms of the types of strategies they are taking advantages of. These discoveries allude to the idea that a ‘good’ language learner is essentially a successful language learner; a language learner that is successful and has met their own goals in language learning.

Numerous studies around the globe have contributed to the awareness of language learning strategy use and factors affecting learners' strategy choice. Empirical evidence has also lent strong support to significant relationships between (a) language learners' strategy use and (b) a variety of factors such as proficiency, achievement, motivation, learning styles, learning environment, and language tasks (Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999; Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; Green & Oxford, 1995; Park, 1997; Watanabe, 1990). Topical examples range from a study by Mayer (1996), concluding that learners using more learning strategies are generally more proficient and possess more responsibility in what they are learning, to a study by Lawson and Hogben (1996) which stated how learners using a wider array of learning strategies (or even any learning strategy compared to none) performed better than other learners on learning vocabulary who use less or even no learning strategies. Successive studies also emerged mainly concerning the concept of LLS in the context of EFL who have different first language backgrounds, such as studies by Hsu & Huang (2004), O'Malley & Chamot (1990), and Oxford (1990 in Hismanoglu 2000). While the concept of LLS applies to any language, significant advancements have been made specifically within the ESL and EFL bubble (Hismanoglu 2000).

Although previous LLS studies have mainly focused on adolescent and adult learners, researchers have also taken a new interest in children in elementary schools (Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999; Gunning, 1997; Kiely, 2002; Lan & Oxford, 2003). Younger EFL learners also encounter challenges in EFL learning just as much as other age subsets in EFL learning. Chamot and El-Dinary (1999)

suggested that children not only use an array of strategies to cope with language learning but are also capable of articulating the strategies used. However, not many studies have focused on elementary school students' English-learning strategy use in an EFL learning environment, i.e., a location in which English is not the main language used for everyday communication (Lan & Oxford 2003). The realities of EFL learning in elementary school students are as challenging as their older counterparts when taking into account that the realities and the challenges of EFL learning in younger EFL learners are just as, if not more, diverse than other age subsets (Lestari and Fatimah 2020). An example can be found in Indonesia, where English as a subject for elementary school students has been put into a process of restructuring due to the emergence of the K-13 curriculum framework. Through SK Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan No. 060/U/1993 dated February 25th, 2012, English as an elementary school subject can be held in the form of *muatan lokal*, which are curricular activities that are adapted to the characteristics and potential of a particular region that do not fit into primary K-13 subjects (Hapsari 2012, Wijaya 2015). The implementation, however, initially was only mentioned for fourth to sixth-grade elementary school students but has found its way to be implemented to all elementary school grades in some schools due to the nature of *muatan lokal* subjects that need to be adjusted to particular regions.

Within the scope of EFL learners in Indonesia, a common conception shared among the general Indonesian EFL learners is that younger EFL learners seem to exhibit greater degrees of EFL proficiency in day-to-day use, a case

example being how children today are more accustomed to seeing and using English in their day-to-day life than ever before (Melvina et al. 2020). It is also important to note that children's attitude toward EFL usage has slowly shifted to be more relaxed and more casual than older generations that, even if their EFL proficiency is not significantly different than their older counterparts, they have come to embrace it in a more upfront way (Lestari and Fatimah 2020). However, in reality, younger EFL students are presented with challenges in learning English. The majority of the outlook from research analyzing the proficiency of younger EFL learners seems to be volatile, researchers are also constrained by the limited number of studies available, and the preceding conceptions are most likely attributed to the advent of globalization and the increasing commonality in using English within today's society (Savignon 2018, Melvina et al. 2020).

The need to accommodate EFL learning in young students is becoming more pressing (Lestari and Fatimah 2020, Melvina et al. 2020). The challenges faced by young EFL learners can be seen through many examples that exhibit the realities of EFL learning in Indonesia, as shown by an example from a survey conducted by EF EPI (EF English Proficiency Index), reported in 2021 (EF EPI 2021). The EPI is an index that ranks countries by their equity and proficiency in English measured through an online-based test, where the 2021 edition was produced using data from 2 million online worldwide test-takers in 2020. The test results were separated into subsections based on their gender, age group, region, and cities, where the results can be either one of the five main proficiency bands:

very high proficiency, high proficiency, moderate proficiency, low proficiency, and very low proficiency.

Specific to the Asian region, Indonesia is situated within the proficiency band of low proficiency countries, having only managed to score 466 points, 2 points lower than Japan which is also categorized into the band of low proficiency countries. In contrast, neighboring countries such as Singapore and Malaysia fared better; scoring 635 and 562 in the EPI, respectively. These scores are enough to put Singapore within the very high band of proficiency; the only country in Asia to manage that, and Malaysia in the high proficiency band along with the Philippines, who scored 30 points more in 592. Other countries in Southeast Asia fared similarly to Indonesia, with the only exceptions being Cambodia and Thailand which are categorized within the very low proficiency band. When compared to the greater picture of the global result, Indonesia managed to be in the 80th place, which is only a few numbers from being categorized among the very low proficiency countries (EF EPI, 2021).

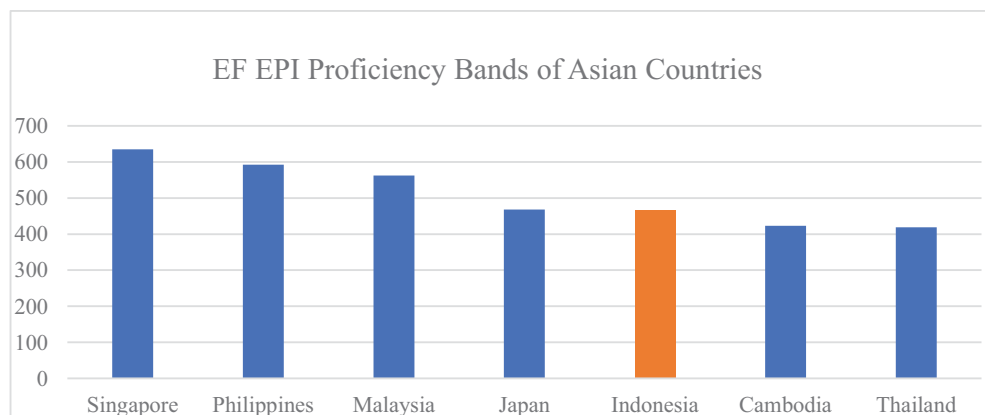


Figure 1.1 Comparison of English proficiency level of Indonesians to other Asian countries. (Graph adapted from EF Education First. In *EF English Proficiency Index 2021*. EF Education First, 2021, 20).

Low scores in general proficiency across EFL learners can be attributed to unsuccessful EFL learning (Tabatabaei and Hoseini 2014, Wray and Hajar 2015, Nguyen and Terry 2017). Unsuccessful EFL learning can further be attributed to a plethora of factors, which in this case can be in the form of an LLS that is ineffective and unsuitable for young EFL learners. Harking back to the previous statements from early LLS scholars, the presence of a ‘good’ language learner criterion imagined by Rubin (1975) in essence hints at the existence of successful language learners that can utilize LLS effectively and efficiently to aid their learning process. In retrospect, this also suggests the existence of unsuccessful language learners or language learners that are unable to maximize LLS usage. Furthermore, in the context of the education profile of Indonesia, there has not been a significant advancement concerning adaptation to EFL learners’ learning profiles, despite the aspiration of K-13 and the background of K-13 creation sharing essentially similar sentiments. The focus of typical EFL teachers can also be taken into account, where EFL teachers have found challenges in acclimatizing with newer curricula and instead opting for an established focus on grammatical and reading skills development akin to previous curricula implementations (Melvina et al 2020). This potentially hinders the development of other language skills (Lan & Oxford 2003).

To determine the usage of LLS by successful learners, a benchmark is required. This benchmark can be in the form of acclaimed students that exhibit scores that are categorized as satisfactory filtered using a set of grading methods;

an example of a grading method to judge the range of competence EFL learners have in this case is accreditation grades. Kementerian Pendidikan dan Budaya Indonesia through the Badan Akreditasi Nasional Sekolah/Madrasah (BAN/SM) body has established accreditation grades of elementary schools in Bali that has been made available to the public in their official website. These accreditation grades are divided into eight main categories, with two of these scoring subsections – *Standar Kompetensi Lulusan* (Graduate Competency Scale/GCS) and *Standar Penilaian Pendidikan* (Education Grading Scale/EGS) – subject to a significant degree of relevancy in terms of this research. Sorted from the highest-scoring to the lowest-scoring school, SD Saraswati 6 Denpasar sits at the top of the rankings with their GCS and EGS scoring 100 and 98, respectively. While these grades are not an outright and objective accurate depiction of the quality of EFL learners per se, these scores can serve as an efficient way to determine whether the EFL learners in an institution is commendable or not. This research will utilize EFL learners in SD Saraswati 6 Denpasar to figure out the existence and ubiquity of LLS usage within the context of fourth-grade EFL learners.

1.2. Statement of the Problems

Based on the background above, there are three questions that will be answered in this research:

1. What are the language learning strategies (LLSs) that are used by fourth-grade students of SD Saraswati 6 Denpasar?

2. Why are the language learning strategies (LLSs) used in EFL learning by fourth-grade students of SD Saraswati 6 Denpasar?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

According to the statements of the problems, this research aims to:

1. To observe the Language Learning Strategies (LLS) used by fourth-grade students in SD Saraswati 6 Denpasar,
2. To find out the reasons of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) utilization by the fourth-grade students of SD Saraswati 6 Denpasar

1.4. Significance of the Study

In correspondence to the issues in the Background section, it is also important to realize that many research findings indicate the value and necessity of strategies for language learning (Oxford & Leaver, 1996; Chamot & O'Malley, 1996; Oxford, 1990). However, when compared to other education levels, there has been little research conducted in analyzing LLS in elementary school EFL learning (Lan & Oxford, 2003). This study is intended to fill a research gap by presenting the language learning strategy profiles of elementary school students shown through fourth grade EFL students of SD Saraswati 6 Denpasar. Expanding the research scope to the context of younger EFL learners, this study is also designed to contribute to preexisting bodies of literature. Furthermore, the study will have its own implications for EFL students and teachers of EFL students in an elementary school scope in regards to language learning strategies. Strategy

models described in this research can also provide an overview of strategy training for teachers to incorporate in their language classrooms (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Dickinson, 1987; Kidd & Marquardson, 1993; Oxford, 1990; Palincsar & Brown, 1986). Strategy instruction should be able to help EFL teachers better understand their students' needs, including the necessity of equipping students with the right tools for language learning.

1.5. Definition of Key Terms

EFL:	English as a Foreign Language. EFL refers to the role of English in countries where it is taught as a subject in schools but not used as medium of instruction in education nor as a language of communication (e.g. government, business, industry) within the country (Richards et al., 1992).
Language learners:	The term refers to individuals who have limited proficiency in a second or foreign language and includes children and adults of all ages (Oxford, 1990).
Language learning strategies:	Steps taken by students to enhance their own language learning. A more detailed explanation of language learning strategies, shown earlier in this chapter, indicated that these strategies are specific methods or techniques consciously used by individual learners to facilitate the comprehension, retention, retrieval and application of information for language learning and acquisition (Oxford, 1990).
SILL:	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, a questionnaire designed by Oxford (1990) to investigate learners' frequency of use of many language learning strategies, clustered into six strategy categories.