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Language learning strategies of Indonesian primary school students: In relation to self-efficacy beliefs



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ABSTRACT

This study examined Indonesian primary school students' strategy use in learning English. It also explored how these young learners' strategy use relates to their self-efficacy beliefs. The Indonesian Children's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and the Children's Self-efficacy in Learning English Questionnaire (C-SELEQ) were administered to 522 sixth graders. The young learners reported high use of socio-affective and metacognitive strategies and moderate use of cognitive strategies. The preferred strategies involved learning with/from others and regulating one's own learning, while the less preferred strategies mainly dealt with memorizing words and practicing outside the classroom. The results also indicated significant differences in strategy use between students who perceived themselves capable of performing English tasks and self-regulating their learning and students who did not. The study contributes to knowledge on the influential roles of self-efficacy — particularly self-efficacy in self-regulated learning.

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1. Introduction

Learning strategies have been a major focus in second language acquisition (SLA) studies over the last four decades. The main driver of interest in the topic is the belief that strategy use contributes to language learning. Language learners need to adopt active roles in their learning and, accordingly, they need to be equipped with strategies that allow them to regulate their own learning (Griffiths, 2013; Oxford, 2011). Research evidence has shown that the distinction between proficient and less proficient learners lies not only in the frequency of the strategy use but also in the flexibility and appropriateness of strategy use (Bruen, 2001; Vandergrift, 2003; Zhang, Gu, & Hu, 2008). Studies have also revealed that strategy use relates to various factors other than proficiency, such as gender (Khalil, 2005; Lan & Oxford, 2003), learning styles (Jie & Xiaoqing, 2006), beliefs (Yang, 1999), and nationality (Griffiths, 2003; Nguyen & Godwyll, 2010).

The participants in most studies investigating language learning strategies have been adolescent and adult learners. Only a small number of participants in studies have been young learners, especially in a foreign language context (Gunning, 2011; Kirsch, 2012; Macaro, 2007). Students of different ages are believed to approach language learning differently. Older learners are more likely to employ cognitively complex strategies, while their younger counterparts tend to opt for less complex (and surface) strategies (Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Tragant, Thompson, & Victori, 2013). The difference suggests that, to some

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extent, the capacity to exercise learning strategies is dependent on cognitive and motoric development (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997).

Strategy use is determined by the students' belief in their own capability, the so-called self-efficacy (Usher & Pajares, 2008; Zimmerman, 2000). Self-efficacy provides learners with “staying power” that means they persist longer in the face of obstacles and distractions (Caprara et al., 2008, p. 526). Possessing strong self-efficacy could allow the learners to persist with particular strategies. However, despite its pivotal role, self-efficacy has received only little attention in both second language research and strategy research (Kim, Wang, Ahn, & Bong, 2015; Woodrow, 2011). The current study extends the work on learning strategies by exploring primary (or elementary) school students' strategy use and examining how their strategy use relates to self-efficacy beliefs.

2. Literature review

2.1. Language learning strategies

Second language (or L2) strategy research has lacked agreement on how to define and classify learning strategies. That is why Ellis (1994, p. 529) viewed this construct as fuzzy, and Tseng, Dörnyei, and Schmitt (2006) even advocated a shift from learning strategies to self-regulation. However, fuzziness cannot justify discarding four decades of strategy research, and the shift to self-regulation will lead only to more fuzziness (Gu, 2012).

In her latest work, Griffiths (2015, p. 426) defined language learning strategies as “actions chosen by learners (either deliberately or automatically) for the purpose of learning or regulating the learning of language”. This definition underscores the notion that being self-regulated requires strategy use (Gao, 2007; Griffiths, 2013; Oxford, 2011). Different models of strategy classifications have also been developed (e.g. Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Rubin, 1981). Oxford's (1990) model, which groups strategies into six categories (i.e. memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, social, affective), draws upon an eclectic theoretical foundation (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014). The model has been widely used and is considered comprehensive (Radwan, 2011). Even so, the model lacks empirical support. Much research seeking the factor structure of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) across learning contexts has failed to fit with the six-category model (e.g. Heo, Stoffa, & Kush, 2012; Robson & Midorikawa, 2001; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993; Woodrow, 2005). For this reason, Griffiths (2013) suggests that strategy researchers not use predetermined strategy classification models.

2.2. Self-efficacy beliefs

Self-efficacy refers to people's perceived beliefs in their capability to perform specific tasks (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy, according to Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003), enables learners to be more cognitively, behaviourally, and motivationally engaged in their learning processes. This means that self-efficacy has a significant role in determining the learners' achievements, along with skill and knowledge (Bandura, 1993; Pajares, 2002). Further, self-efficacy might explain why different individuals' performances differ markedly despite them possessing similar knowledge and skills (Bandura, 1986, 1993), or why the same learners perform differently at different times (Bouffard-Bouchard, 2001).

Self-efficacy is a distinct construct and should not be confused with related constructs. Clear distinctions of the constructs are crucial for appropriate and sound measurements. On one hand, self-efficacy is context-specific, and it is assessed on the basis of individuals' perceived competence to perform specific tasks in specific situations (Bong, 2006; Pajares, 1996). On the other hand, self-concept can be domain-specific and a global assessment of competence (Bong, 2006), and individuals assess it by comparing their performance with that of others or with their own in other areas (Marsh, Walker, & Debus, 1991). Self-efficacy also differs from linguistic self-confidence in that the latter is a stable personal trait composed of perceived L2 competence and L2 anxiety (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clement, & Noels, 1998). Unlike self-efficacy, which is mainly determined by mastery experience, vicarious experience, and social persuasion, self-confidence is more determined by the frequency and quality of previous contacts with the L2 community (Clement, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994).

Extensive studies, mostly undertaken with university and high-school students, demonstrate that self-efficacy in general academic and L2 tasks is a significant predictor of academic achievement across subjects other than L2 learning (Afari, Ward, & Khine, 2012; Al-Harthy, Was, & Isaacson, 2010; Bouffard-Bouchard, 2001; Yeo & Neal, 2006; Zimmerman, 2000) and L2 achievement (Hsieh & Kang, 2010; Hsieh & Schallert, 2008; Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2007). Similarly, self-efficacy for self-regulated learning, understood as beliefs in the capability to employ learning strategies appropriately (Bandura, 1995), is linked with learning achievements, learning goals and other motivational constructs (Mills et al., 2007; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

2.3. Language learning strategies and self-efficacy beliefs

Despite a growing interest of SLA researchers in self-efficacy beliefs, only a few have examined how L2 learners' self-efficacy beliefs relate to their learning strategies. For instance, Li and Wang's (2010) study of Chinese students of English revealed that reading self-efficacy was significantly associated with not only overall reading strategies but also with all three learning strategy categories (i.e. metacognitive, cognitive, and socio-affective strategies). The study further showed that learners of high self-efficacy tended to be more self-regulated in their own learning through goal setting, time management,

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