THE CONTRIBUTION OF GENDER DIFFERENCES ON THE VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES

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Abstract

(Title: *The Contribution of Gender Differences on The Vocabulary Learning Strategies*). The present research study describes the contribution of gender differences on the vocabulary learning strategies. The purposes of this research are to reveal whether male and female learners use the vocabulary learning strategies at the same rate as well as to compare the differences in vocabulary learning strategies used by both male and female learners. A questionnaire was used to obtain the data. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively. There were 20 respondents participating in this research study. They were the students of MTs Negeri 6 Gunungkidul. The results show that there are generally insignificant differences in terms of vocabulary learning strategies used by male and female students. Female students are at the higher use of determination strategies and males are higher at social strategies.

Keywords: vocabulary learning strategies, gender differences, L2 learners

INTRODUCTION

Language is the most important means of communication because through language individuals shape their thoughts and convey them to others (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2011). Related to the function of language in this globalisation era, people interact more intensively with other people around the world. The advancement of technology makes people get easier and closer to communicate with people over the world. Indeed they need a language that can bridge a gap among them. This brings people to learn foreign language.

Additionally, learning second or foreign language (from hereby called as L2) is considered as a long and complex process where a person must struggle to reach the ability beyond the boundary of the first language. Brown (2000, p. 1) states that many variables are involved in L2 learning and it requires steps that cannot be programmed as a quick 'do-it-yourself' kit. Total commitments and physical, intellectual, and emotional involvement are the necessary to be successful at L2 mastery. Therefore, research in the fields of language acquisition and learning has been going on continuously and researchers have been working on L2 learning, which is quite complex.

In relation to the complexity of L2 learning, the concern on the way of learning is interesting to discuss. The importance of learning strategy for English education students is indeed crucial. As it has been mentioned above in regard with given the benefit of learning strategies, learners who have already equipped with the knowledge of learning strategies need to be able equipped their future students with the same knowledge which is very useful for effective and efficient learning. Research for effective L2 learning has pushed researchers and educators to examine the relationship among language acquisition and gender considering the differences between male and female L2 learners (Brown, 2000; Kaiser, Haller, Schmitz, & Nitsch, 2009; Shakouri & Saligheh, 2012).

Regarding L2 learning and acquisition, there are language components including pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar should be acquired by the L2 learners. Vocabulary is believed as the core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners speak, listen, read, and write. It means that to be successful in language learning, learners must master vocabulary. Furthermore, vocabulary mastery has always been an essential part of learning a foreign

language. Inadequacy vocabulary will obstruct the learners' chances to communicate in the target language. Thus, vocabulary mastery plays an important role in the four language skills. 'It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate vocabulary from comprehension' (Hiebert & Kamil, 2005, p. ix).

Based on the above background, this present research intends to explore whether males and females learn differently. The present study aims at studying the contribution of gender differences on vocabulary learning strategies. The research question for this study is "Are there differences in vocabulary learning strategies used by male and female students?" From this study, educators can have ideas about how to determine language teaching strategies by taking into consideration gender-based differences.

The goal of this research is to explore the contribution of gender differences on vocabulary learning strategies. Therefore, it is important to consider the research in the fields of gender differences in learning language, vocabulary learning, and learning strategies. In addition, there will also be the conceptual framework in the end of this section.

First, Gender differences in Language Learning. The differences between the male and female brains have implications for education as well because they give clear ideas about the different patterns of perception and learning of the two genders. Moreover, since these differences have biological support, they propose different strategies for teaching and personal relations in the classroom.

In terms of language learning, women are said to learn and speak new language easier than men (Kaiser et al., 2009). Further, they quote psycholinguistic research by Harpen (1992) and Hyde and Linn (1988) stating that women have the advantage in language production and verbal fluency, while men are stated to be superior in the comprehension of verbal analogy.

While the concept of language acquisition and gender is differently interpretted, Ellis (1994) demonstrates that though gender is likely variable determining language proficiency, it is not always the case that females outperform males. In Britain, male students achieve the higher proficiency level of L2 English than females since their jobs bring them into contact with the majority English speaking groups (Shakouri & Saligheh, 2012).

Based on the above theories, both males and females have different style in using language and the same opportunity to achieve high-quality of language proficiency not merely because of the gender. It is all about the learning strategies and how they work with language.

Second, vocabulary learning. According to Nation and Newton (2009), vocabulary is knowledge of words and word meanings. Actually vocabulary is more complex, vocabulary mastery is not only knowing the words and its meanings, but also knowing about how the words sound and how the words are used in the context.

Vocabulary mastery plays the important role in understanding language holistically. Thus, it cannot be separated from the language skills that should be mastered by the learners. The primary thing in learning a language is the acquisition of vocabulary. Therefore, success in learning English requires vocabulary acquisition. A large vocabulary cannot guarantee the learner's competence in learning English, but inadequacy of vocabulary will obstruct their chances to make success in learning English. Rivers in Nunan (1998:117) argues that the acquisition of an adequate vocabulary is essential for successful second language use because without an extensive vocabulary, one will be unable to use the structures and functions.

Furthermore, Nunan (1998, p. 118) affirms that the development of a rich vocabulary is an important element in acquisition of a second language. It is important for a learner to master the vocabulary of the target language because it is an essential part of communication.

Third, Learning Strategies.

There are mainly six learning strategies which are called the "Six Strategy Groups", which are divided into two groups; they are direct strategies and indirect strategies. The

direct strategies are (1) cognitive strategies, (2) memory strategies, (3) compensation strategies; meanwhile the indirect strategies are, (4) social strategies, (5) affective strategies, (6) metacognitive strategies (Brown, 2000; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). They are: (a) cognitive strategies are useful for understanding and recalling new information; (b) memory strategies are highly useful for understanding and recalling new information- important functions in the process of becoming competent in using the new language; (c) determination strategies aid learners in overcoming knowledge gaps and refer to such skills and they facilitate gaining knowledge of a new word; (d) social strategies provide increases interaction and more empathetic understanding, two qualities necessary to reach communicative competence; (e) affective strategies develop the self-confidence and perseverance needed for learners to involve themselves actively in language learning, a requirement on attaining communicative competence; (f) metacognitive strategies help learners to regulate their own cognition and to focus, plan, and evaluate their progress as they move toward communicative competence.

The aim of this research is at studying the contribution of gender differences on vocabulary learning strategies. Hence, it is necessary to explore different vocabulary learning strategies used by L2 learners. Through the quantitative approach, this research will reveal the contribution of gender in vocabulary learning strategies.

METHOD

This research study was categorized as quantitative research because of the uses of questionnaires in describing the vocabulary learning strategies used by both male and female L2 learners. The 5-scale method used in the questionnaires is said to be *Likert* method (Best & Kahn, 2006, pp. 181-182).

The subjects of this study were the students of MTs Negeri 6 Gunungkidul. Considering the feasibility, the samples used were students of grades 9 (N=20, Female=8, Male=12). The obtained data in the form of numeric one from the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively using the SPSS. Table 1 shows the organisation of the questionnaire.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the findings of this study will be described and discussed in details steps as what had been planned.

Findings

The reliability analysis of questionnaires distributed to the participants shows a high reliability level. Below is the table of reliability analysis.

Table 2. The Reliability Analysis of the Questionnaire

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.827	.828	25

The above table shows that the questionnaires distributed to the participants were reliable with the coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha of 0.827. The data obtained from the questionnaires are presented in Table 3.

From Table 3, there is some possibility that vocabulary learning strategies used by

Table 1. The organization of the questionnaire for vocabulary learning strategy

No	Question numbers	The purpose of the questions
1	1 – 8	To find some information regarding determination strategies
2	9 – 10	To find some information about social strategies
3	11 – 17	To find some information about memory strategies
4	18 – 22	To find some information about the cognitive strategies
5	23 – 25	To find some information about the metacognitive strategies

Table 3. Data of Responses from Students
Group Statistics

	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Dets_Analyzing part of speech	Female	8	2.7500	.70711	.25000
	Male	12	2.6667	.77850	.22473
Dets_Analyzing affixes and roots	Female	8	2.7500	.88641	.31339
	Male	12	2.5000	.79772	.23028
Dets_Associating the meaning in Bahasa Indonesia	Female	8	4.3750	.74402	.26305
	Male	12	3.9167	.79296	.22891
Dets_Analyzing any available pictures	Female	8	3.3750	.74402	.26305
	Male	11	3.1818	.87386	.26348
Dets_Guessing from textual context	Female	8	3.5000	1.06904	.37796
	Male	12	3.0833	.90034	.25990
Dets_Consulting the dictionary	Female	8	4.3750	.74402	.26305
	Male	12	3.8333	1.02986	.29729
Dets_Writing word lists	Female	8	3.3750	1.18773	.41993
	Male	12	3.2500	.96531	.27866
Dets_Taking notes	Female	8	3.6250	.91613	.32390
	Male	12	2.7500	.86603	.25000
Sos_Asking classmates for the meaning	Female	8	3.6250	.51755	.18298
	Male	11	3.2727	.90453	.27273
Sos_Asking directly to the lecturer/teacher	Female	7	3.0000	1.15470	.43644
	Male	12	3.2500	1.28806	.37183
Mems_Memorizing the meaning of the word using pictures in mind	Female	7	3.0000	.81650	.30861
	Male	12	2.5833	1.08362	.31282
Mems_Imagining the meaning of the word	Female	8	2.3750	.74402	.26305
	Male	12	2.1667	.93744	.27061
Mems_ Connecting the word to personal experience	Female	8	2.3750	.51755	.18298
	Male	12	2.5833	.90034	.25990
Mems_ Connecting the word using synonym and antonym	Female	8	2.3750	.91613	.32390
	Male	12	2.1667	.83485	.24100
Mems_Grouping the words to study them	Female	8	3.0000	1.06904	.37796
	Male	12	2.4167	.90034	.25990
Mems_Studying the spelling of the word	Female	8	2.6250	.74402	.26305
	Male	12	2.1667	1.11464	.32177
Mems_Studying the sound of the word	Female	8	3.3750	.74402	.26305
	Male	12	2.7500	1.21543	.35086
Cogs_Saying aloud the word	Female	8	3.2500	.70711	.25000
	Male	12	3.3333	1.15470	.33333
Cogs_Using verbal repetition	Female	8	3.3750	.91613	.32390
	Male	12	2.5000	1.00000	.28868
Cogs_Using written repetition	Female	8	2.5000	.53452	.18898
	Male	12	2.2500	.96531	.27866
Cogs_Using word lists	Female	8	3.3750	.51755	.18298
	Male	12	2.4167	1.37895	.39807
Cogs_Using the vocabulary section in the book	Female	8	3.2500	1.48805	.52610
	Male	12	2.5000	1.31426	.37939
Meta_Taking a vocabulary test	Female	7	3.0000	1.15470	.43644
	Male	12	2.6667	1.15470	.33333
Meta_Using songs, movies, newspapers, etc.	Female	8	2.5000	.92582	.32733
	Male	12	1.8333	1.19342	.34451
Meta_Skipping or passing the new word	Female	8	4.0000	.53452	.18898
	Male	12	2.8333	1.02986	.29729

Table 4. Results of ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Dets_Analyzing part of speech	Between Groups	.033	1	.033	.059	.811
	Within Groups	10.167	18	.565		
	Total	10.200	19			
Dets_Analyzing affixes and roots	Between Groups	.300	1	.300	.432	.519
	Within Groups	12.500	18	.694		
	Total	12.800	19			
Dets_Associating the meaning in Bahasa Indonesia	Between Groups	1.008	1	1.008	1.682	.211
	Within Groups	10.792	18	.600		
	Total	11.800	19			
Dets_Analyzing any available pictures	Between Groups	.173	1	.173	.255	.620
	Within Groups	11.511	17	.677		
	Total	11.684	18			
Dets_Guessing from textual context	Between Groups	.833	1	.833	.887	.359
	Within Groups	16.917	18	.940		
	Total	17.750	19			
Dets_Consulting the dictionary	Between Groups	1.408	1	1.408	1.631	.218
	Within Groups	15.542	18	.863		
	Total	16.950	19			
Dets_Writing word lists	Between Groups	.075	1	.075	.067	.799
	Within Groups	20.125	18	1.118		
	Total	20.200	19			
Dets_Taking notes	Between Groups	3.675	1	3.675	4.683	.044
	Within Groups	14.125	18	.785		
	Total	17.800	19			
Sos_Asking classmates for the meaning	Between Groups	.575	1	.575	.972	.338
	Within Groups	10.057	17	.592		
	Total	10.632	18			
Sos_Asking directly to the lecturer/ teacher	Between Groups	.276	1	.276	.179	.678
	Within Groups	26.250	17	1.544		
	Total	26.526	18			
Mems_Memorizing the meaning of the word using pictures in mind	Between Groups	.768	1	.768	.771	.392
	Within Groups	16.917	17	.995		
	Total	17.684	18			
Mems_Imagining the meaning of the word	Between Groups	.208	1	.208	.277	.605
	Within Groups	13.542	18	.752		
	Total	13.750	19			
Mems_ Connecting the word to personal experience	Between Groups	.208	1	.208	.347	.563
	Within Groups	10.792	18	.600		
	Total	11.000	19			
Mems_ Connecting the word using synonym and antonym	Between Groups	.208	1	.208	.277	.605
	Within Groups	13.542	18	.752		
	Total	13.750	19			
Mems_Grouping the words to study them	Between Groups	1.633	1	1.633	1.738	.204
	Within Groups	16.917	18	.940		
	Total	18.550	19			
Mems_Studying the spelling of the word	Between Groups	1.008	1	1.008	1.035	.323
	Within Groups	17.542	18	.975		
	Total	18.550	19			
Mems_Studying the sound of the word	Between Groups	1.875	1	1.875	1.677	.212
	Within Groups	20.125	18	1.118		
	Total	22.000	19			
Cogs_Saying aloud the word	Between Groups	.033	1	.033	.033	.858
	Within Groups	18.167	18	1.009		
	Total	18.200	19			
Cogs_Using verbal repetition	Between Groups	3.675	1	3.675	3.920	.063
	Within Groups	16.875	18	.938		
	Total	20.550	19			
Cogs_Using written repetition	Between Groups	.300	1	.300	.441	.515
	Within Groups	12.250	18	.681		
	Total	12.550	19			

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Cogs_Using word lists	Between Groups	4.408	1	4.408	3.482	.078
	Within Groups	22.792	18	1.266		
	Total	27.200	19			
Cogs_Using the vocabulary section in the book	Between Groups	2.700	1	2.700	1.409	.251
	Within Groups	34.500	18	1.917		
	Total	37.200	19			
Meta_Taking a vocabulary test	Between Groups	.491	1	.491	.368	.552
	Within Groups	22.667	17	1.333		
	Total	23.158	18			
Meta_Using songs, movies, newspapers, etc.	Between Groups	2.133	1	2.133	1.772	.200
	Within Groups	21.667	18	1.204		
	Total	23.800	19			
Meta_Skipping or passing the new word	Between Groups	6.533	1	6.533	8.605	.009
	Within Groups	13.667	18	.759		
	Total	20.200	19			

male and female students at nearly the same frequency. In general, both male and female students are low at Statements 1, 2, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 20, 23, and 24, with the scores of 3 or lower. The mean total of female students' response is 3.17 with the higher response is 4.38 on Statement 3 and the lowest response is 2.38 for Statements 12, 13, and 14. On the other hand, mean total of male students' response is 2.75 with the higher response is 3.92 for Statement 3 and the lowest response is 1.83 for Statement 24. Therefore, it can be concluded that both male and female students are high in Statement 3 (Associating the meaning in Bahasa Indonesia) in learning vocabulary.

In addition, ANOVA was performed to determine the degree of signifycances between the strategies used by male and female students in learning vocabulary. It is to compare the mean scores of two or more different groups of people (Pallant, 2010, p. 105). Below is the results of the analysis.

From Table 4, it can be inferred that both male and female students were not of different strategies in vocabulary learning determined from insignificant correlation coefficients of most statements are more than 0.05, except for Statements 8 and 25 with the significant values of 0.04 and 0.01, respectively ($p < 0.05$). It shows that female students use the strategies of taking notes and skipping new words more than of males.

Discussion

When looked from a broader perspective, females reported to use a wider range of strategies regarding vocabulary learning than males. They scored higher than males in all strategies including determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. Both male and female students are low in memory strategies with the average scores of 2.40 and 2.73, respectively. The most frequently used strategies for male students are social strategies with the average response scores of 3.26, while female students mostly use determination strategies with the average score of 3.51. The less frequently used strategies in learning vocabulary by male and female students are memory strategies with the average response scores of 2.40 and 2.73, respectively.

The result stating that female students are higher in using determination strategies to learn vocabulary are in accordance Kaiser et al. (2009) who state that to women are said to learn and speak new language easier than men. Further, there is also a claim that women have the advantage in language production and verbal fluency, while men are stated to be superior in the comprehension of verbal analogy. It can be seen from the response scores of males' 2.58 for Statement 13 comparing to females' 2.38.

In addition, female students uses social strategies higher (mean=3.31) compared to males (mean=3.26). This is in contrast to Shakouri and Saligheh (2012) stating that social relationship of male students in Britain brings them into a higher achievement in learning the language. The male participants tend to ask directly to the teacher when they learn new vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

The goal of the research is to determine the contribution of gender differences on vocabulary learning strategies. Based on the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that there are differences in terms of vocabulary learning strategies used by male and female students. Female students are at the higher use of determination strategies and males are higher at social strategies.

However, there are some limitations in this study. Further research is still needed. For further research with similar topic, it is suggested that researchers also consider the different strategy used between male and female learners. Also, it is suggested that further research will add more participants, not only from MTs students, but also from other departments employing more participants for both quantitative and qualitative methods in order the data can be more generalised.

The scores shown in the tables above indicate the low variety of strategies used by the participants (Students of MTs Negeri 6 Gunungkidul). Based on the fact, it is recommended for the teachers to conduct instructions involving various strategies in vocabulary learning so that the learners could have more opportunity to develop their learning autonomy. Further research on effects of training students with vocabulary learning strategies is considered as an important insight in the development of EFL learning.

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