

# Skill-based Categories: An Alternative of Language Learning Strategy Measurement

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**Abstract**—Many studies have been conducted to identify and classify language learning strategies (Rubin, 1975; Naiman et al, 1978; Fillmore, 1979; O'Malley et al, 1985 and 1990; Politzer and Groarty, 1985; Prokop, 1989; Oxford, 1990b; and Wenden, 1991a). Different studies have used different classifications and different ways of measuring learning strategies. This study attempted to explore what language learning strategies employed by students at EFL setting and to propose an alternative of learning strategy measurement for learners who study English as a foreign language. In the current study a total of 88 enrolled at English Department participated. After a series of reliability and correlation analysis the current study proposes an alternative of language learning strategy measurement. The learning strategy measurement in this study consists cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies which are grouped under skill-based categories: listening category, listening category, reading category and writing category.

**Index Terms**—learning strategy, strategy classification, learning strategy measurement, learning strategy in EFL context, skill-based strategy

## I. INTRODUCTION

It seems obvious that there is no second language learning acquisition without learning strategies, either conscious or unconscious. This is the area to which the research conducted by Rubin (1975), Naiman et al. (1978), Fillmore (1979), Politzer and McGroarty (1985), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford and Nyikos (1989) and Wenden (1991b) has been devoted. They have elaborated on language learning strategies and suggested different ways of classifying language learning strategies. Some studies on language learning strategies have shown that the learning strategies contributed to the success in learning English. A study suggesting that learning strategies affect language achievement was conducted by Bialystok and Frohlich (1978). Their study, which explored variables of classroom achievement in second language learning, showed that many factors were correlated with language achievement, but only two of them: aptitude and strategy use were significant in predicting performance. Another study by Dreyer and Oxford (1999, p.73) also provides evidence on a significant relationship between strategy use and ESL proficiency. The studies have proved that the use of learning strategies discriminates between successful and unsuccessful learners.

*Learning strategies*, which are defined as steps or actions taken by language learners to enhance any aspect of their learning (Oxford 1990a, p. 70), seem to be more than a reflection of learning style. It seems difficult to categorize whether certain learning strategies of an individual are originally his/her own, or developed and adapted from certain external factors. Oxford's definition implies that learning strategies are conscious activities because students are learning a language while they are conscious of the process. However, not all writers agree with a concept that learning always takes place while subjects are conscious or aware of this. Some researchers have argued over the conscious-unconscious distinction (McLaughlin, 1990, Krashen, 1979). Kihlstrom (1996, p. 33) states that subjects may be simply unaware of some stimulus response, or of what they are learning; subjects can engage in learning when they are not conscious at all, for example when they are asleep or anaesthetized. Referring to Oxford's definition (1990a), in this study, learning strategies refer to conscious activities since students seem to be aware what actions or steps they are taking to enhance their learning process to acquire another language. Or, at very least the students initiate the use of those strategies purposively and they may later be said to have become an automatic part of the students' repertoire of behavior for learning. This concept of learning strategies is also commonly used by many researchers, providing a framework for their predefined questionnaires of language learning strategies (Oxford and Nyikos, 1989; and Awang Hasyim and Syed Sahil, 1994; Green and Oxford, 1995; Park, 1997; and Kaylani, 1999).

Different researchers have proposed different ways of classifying learning strategies and different ways of measuring the strategies. One of the most commonly used measurements was the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which has been introduced by Oxford. This measurement has been used around the world (Awang Hasyim and Syed Sahil, 1994, Oxford, 1996, Vahid Baghban, 2012, and Nosidlak, 2013). However, Park (1997), who conducted a research on the English learning strategies used by Korean students, provides an argument that not all strategies the students used in learning English were inventoried in Oxford's SILL (p.217). That the SILL might be inadequate in accurately reporting strategy use was also suspected by Grainger (1997, p.383), who explored the relationship between strategy use and ethnicity of learners of Japanese. He suspects the inadequacy of the SILL since he found that in

learning Japanese the students of Asian backgrounds do not follow traditional patterns of strategy use as identified in other major studies of language learning strategies.

Learners from different cultures seem to learn a foreign language in different ways; learners who live in a society where the target language is spoken as a foreign language, like Asian students, may use different learning strategies; therefore, we need a measurement of learning strategies that provide them with enough choices of strategies employed in their learning. This study is aimed at developing a measurement of learning strategies of tertiary EFL students.

II. METHODOLOGY

The participants of this study were 88 English Department students who had been enrolled for 6 semesters at the Faculty of Education of the University of Lampung, Indonesia. The reason for selecting such a sample was that all subjects were studying English in an EFL tertiary setting.

To collect data about language learning strategies, a questionnaire has been developed in a predefined questionnaire of language learning strategies and it is measured in a Likert-scale. The classification of the language learning strategies in the questionnaire was based on theory driving decision making and theories of skill-based learning strategies. These strategies cover four areas of the language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing and each area consists of 20 items (see Appendix A). In each category, the language learning strategies were classified into cognitive processes, metacognitive processes, and social processes (see Appendix B).

In this study the items were grouped into one single scale that was called *Language Learning Strategy Classification* (LLSQ). Some items of the LLSQ have been taken from the previous researchers (Rubin, 1975; Fillmore, 1979; Naiman et al., 1978; Politzer and McGroarty, 1985; and Oxford and Nyikos, 1989) and some others have been newly developed based on interviews with English learners and teachers (for detail information, see Setiyadi, 1999). Inspired by the SILL of Oxford, the questionnaire measures learning strategies employed by English learners by providing choices ranging from “never “ to “always” and the scores range from 1 to 5.

To increase the internal consistency of the hypothesized scales, Cronbach Alpha coefficients of internal consistency were computed for the scales of skill-based areas, namely: speaking, listening, reading and writing, and then continued to measure how the items of the LLSQ measure the same construct, namely learning strategies of students in EFL tertiary setting. An effort was also made to inspect correlation matrix to see if justified to consider the concept of the four skill areas of English included in the LLSQ.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research has been initiated with students taking a three-month English course at Language Centre, numbering 79 participants (Setiyadi, 2001 and 2004). The study showed that the Cronbach alphas of sub-scales of the LLSQ were .73, .67, .69 and .80 for speaking, listening, reading and writing respectively (Setiyadi, 2004) . The Cronbach's alpha of the strategies were not high and the intercorrelation among the strategies developed in the LLSQ was not measured in the study. This recent research was conducted with English Department students who had learned English for six semesters in EFL context. The participants were assumed to have enough exposure to English learning. Compared to the original study, the recent research shows that the Cronbach alphas of the recent research are higher: the alphas of the strategies are .75, .71, .77 and .72 for listening, speaking, reading and writing respectively. The finding of this research also shows that all items of the LLSQ are highly correlated with the Cronbach's alpha is 0.88.

To measure the reliability of the strategies of listening, reliability analysis was run. The criteria on reliability of internal consistency with the Cronbach's alpha 0.75 were met in this analysis (see Table 1). The strategies of this category were justified to be grouped into one single scale that was called listening strategies. The listening category of the LLSQ has 20 learning strategies (see Table 2).

TABLE 1:  
THE CRONBACH ALPHA OF LISTENING STRATEGIES

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.753	.750	20

TABLE 2:  
ITEM-TOTAL STATISTICS

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
L1	63.1932	63.422	.213	.222	.750
L2	62.5227	63.816	.197	.491	.751
L3	62.0114	64.471	.170	.509	.752
L4	62.5341	63.999	.167	.270	.753
L5	64.3295	61.304	.275	.418	.746
L6	64.0114	62.678	.239	.393	.748
L7	63.5341	63.286	.207	.414	.751
L8	62.7273	60.568	.387	.356	.737
L9	62.4545	63.009	.221	.361	.750
L10	62.5909	60.819	.353	.355	.740
L11	63.3068	64.008	.189	.315	.751
L12	63.3182	59.277	.390	.461	.736
L13	63.5795	58.798	.378	.409	.737
L14	63.3523	60.829	.326	.372	.742
L15	62.7841	58.010	.523	.567	.726
L16	62.5682	57.880	.565	.675	.723
L17	62.7386	60.655	.369	.429	.739
L18	62.1023	61.633	.322	.403	.742
L19	62.3068	61.043	.459	.466	.734
L20	62.7841	62.217	.307	.356	.743

The Cronbach's alpha for the 20 items of speaking category was 0.52 (see Table 3). Since the criteria on reliability of internal consistency were not met, speaking strategy no. 1 was evaluated and justified to be dropped from the scale (see Table 4) and the speaking category has 19 strategies with the Cronbach's alpha 0.71 (see Table 5) and the speaking category of the measurement has 19 learning strategies (see Table 6).

TABLE 3:  
THE CRONBACH ALPHA OF SPEAKING STRATEGIES WITH 20 ITEMS

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.528	.698	20

TABLE 4:  
ITEM-TOTAL STATISTICS

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
S1	62.7159	58.757	-.015	.190	.717
S2	62.0341	77.298	-.035	.248	.539
S3	61.9432	72.307	.257	.447	.506
S4	62.8636	72.855	.260	.403	.507
S5	62.5000	72.667	.226	.459	.509
S6	62.4432	73.330	.168	.312	.516
S7	64.2159	75.413	.131	.233	.522
S8	61.8409	73.147	.180	.255	.515
S9	62.4091	74.796	.110	.428	.524
S10	62.8295	70.005	.336	.415	.492
S11	62.0114	69.988	.381	.470	.489
S12	61.9545	71.377	.376	.509	.495
S13	62.2955	67.544	.527	.514	.469
S14	62.0455	71.745	.304	.343	.501
S15	62.3864	67.918	.431	.468	.477
S16	62.5682	72.524	.189	.473	.513
S17	62.2955	72.096	.250	.505	.506
S18	64.0000	75.563	.042	.430	.533
S19	62.7727	74.844	.148	.373	.520
S20	62.2045	69.682	.356	.365	.489

TABLE 5:  
THE CRONBACH ALPHA OF SPEAKING STRATEGIES WITH 19 ITEMS

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.717	.714	19

TABLE 6:  
ITEM-TOTAL STATISTICS

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
S2	58.9432	58.077	-.005	.248	.729
S3	58.8523	53.116	.331	.447	.703
S4	59.7727	54.224	.292	.402	.706
S5	59.4091	54.176	.244	.458	.710
S6	59.3523	54.254	.215	.312	.714
S7	61.1250	56.364	.179	.219	.715
S8	58.7500	55.017	.168	.235	.718
S9	59.3182	54.633	.228	.389	.712
S10	59.7386	52.908	.284	.372	.707
S11	58.9205	50.304	.513	.467	.685
S12	58.8636	52.924	.412	.509	.697
S13	59.2045	49.084	.598	.505	.676
S14	58.9545	52.343	.403	.336	.696
S15	59.2955	49.544	.481	.464	.685
S16	59.4773	52.873	.275	.435	.708
S17	59.2045	53.084	.308	.500	.705
S18	60.9091	57.417	.010	.418	.733
S19	59.6818	56.082	.172	.366	.715
S20	59.1136	51.274	.394	.360	.696

The criteria on reliability of internal consistency for the reading strategies were met in this analysis. The strategies were justified to be grouped into one single scale that was called reading strategies. The reading category has 20 learning strategies with the Cronbach's alpha 0.77 (see Table 6 and 7).

TABLE 6:  
THE CRONBACH ALPHA OF READING STRATEGIES

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.770	.771	20

TABLE 7:  
ITEM-TOTAL STATISTICS

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
R1	62.6136	62.194	.196	.327	.770
R2	62.8295	62.764	.197	.240	.769
R3	63.4659	57.884	.405	.320	.756
R4	63.0114	61.804	.251	.308	.766
R5	63.1591	60.434	.267	.253	.766
R6	62.5682	60.363	.410	.419	.757
R7	62.5455	62.963	.165	.317	.771
R8	63.7045	62.739	.130	.257	.775
R9	63.2841	56.872	.441	.368	.752
R10	63.4886	58.575	.481	.437	.752
R11	63.0341	58.700	.437	.520	.754
R12	62.7955	60.647	.334	.364	.761
R13	63.2159	58.079	.420	.355	.754
R14	63.1023	54.966	.627	.569	.738
R15	62.9091	57.716	.507	.416	.749
R16	63.2841	61.010	.332	.302	.761
R17	63.1023	62.920	.128	.139	.775
R18	63.1591	58.871	.415	.508	.755
R19	62.6136	60.723	.282	.407	.764
R20	64.3182	59.507	.237	.292	.771

The criteria on reliability of internal consistency of the learning strategies of writing skill were met so that the strategies under the writing category introduced in the LLSQ were justified to be grouped into one single scale that was called writing strategies. The Cronbach's alpha of the writing strategies was 0.71 (see Table 8) and the writing category of the LLSQ has 20 strategies (see Table 9).

TABLE 8:  
THE CRONBACH ALPHA OF WRITING STRATEGIES

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.718	.728	20

TABLE 9:  
ITEM-TOTAL STATISTICS

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
W1	60.3636	54.280	.220	.392	.713
W2	60.5114	52.437	.335	.459	.702
W3	61.9545	51.354	.291	.304	.708
W4	60.9886	52.379	.381	.328	.699
W5	61.0000	54.529	.314	.340	.706
W6	61.0455	52.067	.422	.513	.696
W7	61.9659	53.275	.279	.588	.708
W8	60.6932	57.479	.013	.337	.728
W9	61.4773	52.942	.245	.563	.712
W10	61.8409	53.882	.252	.300	.710
W11	60.1023	54.116	.300	.340	.706
W12	61.5909	53.118	.333	.455	.703
W13	60.4091	52.888	.470	.524	.695
W14	60.9205	54.948	.243	.454	.711
W15	61.0341	53.413	.340	.376	.703
W16	60.3750	54.329	.223	.530	.713
W17	60.6591	52.871	.374	.449	.700
W18	61.1364	55.315	.139	.359	.720
W19	62.3409	52.434	.267	.396	.710
W20	60.7727	51.856	.350	.384	.701

The criteria on reliability of internal consistency for the 80 items were actually high in this analysis (see Table 10) but, referring to one dropped item from the speaking category, the internal consistency was measured only for 79 items so that the strategies in this measurement were justified to be grouped into one single scale that was called Language Learning Strategy Classification or the LLSQ and the Cronbach's alpha of the items was 0.90 (see Table 11).

TABLE 10:  
THE CRONBACH ALPHA OF ALL ITEMS (BEFORE 1 ITEM OF SPEAKING STRATEGIES DROPPED)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.881	.904	80

TABLE 11:  
THE CRONBACH ALPHA OF ALL ITEMS (AFTER 1 ITEM OF SPEAKING STRATEGIES DROPPED)

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.905	.905	79

Since the classification of the language learning strategies in the recent study was based on theory driving decision, correlation analysis was run to consider the concept of the four skill areas of English. As shown in Table 12, the four skill-based categories of the strategies are positively and significantly correlated. The relatively high levels of Cronbach's alpha showed that the scales were internally consistent.

TABLE 12:  
CORRELATIONS AMONG THE FOUR SKILL STRATEGIES

		mean of speaking strategy	mean of listening strategy	mean of reading strategy	mean of Writing strategy
mean of speaking strategy	Pearson Correlation	1	.528**	.521**	.445**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	88	88	88	88
mean of listening strategy	Pearson Correlation	.528**	1	.739**	.481**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	88	88	88	88
mean of reading strategy	Pearson Correlation	.521**	.739**	1	.664**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	88	88	88	88
mean of Writing strategy	Pearson Correlation	.445**	.481**	.664**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	88	88	88	88

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

After a series of reliability, the items under the skill-based categories were assumed to belong to the hypothesized scales. Language learning strategies grouped under listening category, reading category and writing category consist of 20 items and speaking category consists of 19 items. Speaking strategy no.1, namely *I use rhymes to remember new English words*, was dropped since the item was not very correlated with the other strategies grouped under the speaking category. In total, the measurement has 79 language learning strategies even though, considering the high magnitude of Crobach's alpha of the 80 item reliability. To measure the use of learning strategies, we may use 80 language learning strategies introduced in the LLSQ. The classification of the strategies suggested in this study is probably not final and the dropped strategy from the speaking category may be evaluated. There may also be overlap between the strategies classified under different categories. It needs to be confirmed with other future studies on language learning strategies.

The intercorrelations among the categories mean that increased frequency of strategy use under one skill-based category is associated with an increase in the use of those of the other categories. This is interesting because originally the strategies were developed in different areas of the language skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The findings in this study, supported by Purpura (1997) and Wenden (1991b), may be interpreted as a sign of mutual conceptual dependence among strategies that language learners use in learning the target language. This is probably understood as evidence that, in learning a foreign language, they do not rely on a single category or certain groups of strategies only, but they employ many strategies. This calls for further studies to determine whether the use of strategy combination in a certain way plays an important role in the successful learning of a foreign language and, if so, how the strategies are effectively combined. Further research also needs to explore how differently successful learners learn a foreign language from less successful ones.

#### APPENDIX A. LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY QUESTIONNAIRE (LLSQ)

##### Directions

You will find some statements about learning English. On the separate worksheet, write the response (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) that tells HOW TRUE OF YOU THE STATEMENT IS.

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

##### In Listening

1. I try to guess what somebody is saying by using grammatical rules.
2. I learn English by watching English TV programs.
3. I learn English by listening to English songs or other listening scripts.
4. I try to understand what somebody is saying by translating into Indonesian.
5. I draw an image or picture of the word in order to remember the word.

6. I connect the pronunciation of the word with the Indonesian word which has a similar sound.
7. I concentrate on the grammar rather than on the communication.
8. I try to understand the idea by referring to previous experiences I have had.
9. I try to guess by using a word (s) that is familiar to me.
10. In Listening, I take notes to remember ideas.
11. I try to understand every individual word to understand the passage
12. I listen to what I say to practice my listening skill.
13. Before practicing my listening skill, I prepare a topic, pronunciation or grammatical rules which give me the greatest trouble.
14. I try to remember a sentence(s) spoken face-to-face or on cassettes and analyze them by myself.
15. After a listening practice, I check and recheck my understanding.
16. I correct the mistakes that I produce orally.
17. I try to be aware of which sounds give the greatest trouble. In this way I can pay special attention to them while I listen and practice.
18. If I cannot understand what somebody is saying, I ask him/her to slow down or say it again.
19. Listening to what somebody is saying improves my listening skill.
20. In a group discussion, my listening skill is improved.

### **In Speaking**

1. I use rhymes to remember new English words.
2. I try to remember new English words by pronouncing them.
3. I speak a word or a sentence several times to remember it.
4. I try to learn a new pattern by making a sentence orally.
5. I try to translate Indonesian sentences into English sentences and produce them orally.
6. I try to remember what the English word equivalent to Indonesian word is.
7. I tape record the sentences I produce.
8. I mix Indonesian words and English words if I do not know the English words.
9. I put words into rules that I know in speaking.
10. Before I respond orally to questions, I write out the answers.
11. I try to correct my mistakes that I produce orally.
12. I try to speak with myself to improve my speaking.
13. I try to evaluate my utterances after speaking.
14. I notice my English mistakes, and use that information to help me do better.
15. I prepare a topic or grammatical rules in speaking practice.
16. I ask somebody to correct me when I talk.
17. I practice speaking with my friends or my teachers.
18. I practice English with native speakers.
19. I ask questions in English.
20. If I cannot think during a conversation in English, I use gestures.

### **In Reading**

1. To understand unfamiliar English words while I am reading, I guess from available clues.
2. I learn English by reading English books or magazines.
3. I connect the spellings of English words with similar Indonesian words to understand the meanings.
4. I try to understand sentences by analysing their patterns.
5. I try to translate word for word.
6. I try to understand the passage by using my general knowledge and experience.
7. I use the key words to understand the whole ideas.
8. I read the passage aloud.
9. I take notes to remember the ideas.
10. While I read a text, I try to anticipate the story line.
11. I read a text more for ideas than words.
12. I correct my mistakes by rereading the text.
13. I choose a topic or certain materials for my practice.
14. I check and recheck my understanding after reading a passage.
15. If I cannot understand a reading passage, I try to analyse what difficulty I actually have.
16. In reading, I pick out key words and repeat them to myself.
17. I try to be aware of which words or grammar rules give me the greatest trouble. In this way I can pay special attention to them while I read and practice.
18. I discuss reading passages with my friends.
19. If I do not understand the content of a reading passage, I ask my friends or my teachers for help.
20. I improve my reading skill by reading letters from my friends.

**In Writing**

1. If I do not know how to express my ideas in English while writing, I keep writing using certain rules that I know.
2. I write what I am thinking about.
3. I keep a diary.
4. I try to remember the meanings of words or the patterns by writing them
5. I write sentences to apply certain rules.
6. I try to translate word for word.
7. I mix Indonesian words and English words in writing.
8. I write the main ideas first as a guideline.
9. I use Indonesian words if I do not know the English words.
10. I use Indonesian patterns to keep writing in English.
11. I consult a dictionary to find out the meanings of words.
12. I write out new material over and over.
13. I try to memorize the meanings of words.
14. I rewrite my composition by correcting the mistakes that I notice.
15. I choose a topic to improve my writing skill.
16. I read my writing and correct the mistakes.
17. I try to be aware of which words or grammar rules give the greatest trouble, this way I can pay special attention to them while I write and practice.
18. I write a message to my friends in English for practice.
19. I write letters in English to my friends.
20. I ask my friends or my teachers to correct my writing.

**Worksheet**

Name:

IN LISTENING		IN SPEAKING		IN READING		IN WRITING	
1		1		1		1	
2		2		2		2	
3		3		3		3	
4		4		4		4	
5		5		5		5	
6		6		6		6	
7		7		7		7	
8		8		8		8	
9		9		9		9	
10		10		10		10	
11		11		11		11	
12		12		12		12	
13		13		13		13	
14		14		14		14	
15		15		15		15	
16		16		16		16	
17		17		17		17	
18		18		18		18	
19		19		19		19	
20		20		20		20	

**APPENDIX B, CATEGORIES OF SKILL-BASED STRATEGIES**

	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
Cognitive Strategies	Item nos 1-10	Item nos 1-11	Item nos 1-11	Item nos 1-13
Metacognitive Strategies	Item nos 11-15	Item nos 12-17	Item nos 12-17	Item nos 14-17
Social Strategies	Item nos 16-20	Item nos 18-20	Item nos 18-20	Item nos 18-20

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