

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background

Along with the trend of globalization, the demand toward English mastery as a common medium of communication is continuing to increase. More national and international institutions and companies require human resources that are proficient in English. Vocational school as the school which provide middle workers for national and international companies is expected to produce graduates who are proficient in English in order to be able to compete in the work field.

Given the need of vocational school students toward English in international communication, the government through Directorate of Vocational Secondary Education has been facilitating vocational school students' to have an internationally recognized certificate of achievement, which is known as TOEIC. It can show what students currently accomplish in English.

However, research to date shows that the general English proficiency of Indonesian students seems quite far to meet the global competency demand. Teacher Training Center and Development (PPP) in 2002 conducted a pilot project to describe the general English proficiency level of 140 students from seven outstanding Senior High Schools in Jakarta, Depok, and Bandung as indicated by their TOEIC scores. The study showed that 39% of the students were categorized as Intermediate level and the rest were categorized into Elementary and Novice level.

This condition could be due to various factors. One of them might be caused by the English instruction, which was still focused mostly on grammar, with little consideration on developing other language skills (Depdiknas, 2002:2). It might be also worsened by the focus of classroom which tends to be teacher-centered rather than student-centered, where teachers are usually seen as the purveyors of knowledge and students are perceived as passive objects to be spoon-fed by the teacher.

Since vocational school education puts its main concern on preparing students to enter national and international job market and to develop professional attitudes, graduates of vocational school who are proficient in English language can not just be overlooked. However, based on my own experience, most of the students who attend vocational school tend to be those who do not perform well in academic subjects. Many of them usually possess low confidence and motivation in learning, because they feel inferior to those of high school students.

From this point of view, the issues of teaching students to learn on their own and to find the effective way to learn a language are very important. Students should not only learn the language but also be equipped with the skills of self-directed learning, since they will not always have the teachers around to guide them as they use the language outside the classroom or in the society.

In line with how they learn, we are introduced to the term learning strategies. Oxford (1992:63) defines that language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques, such as seeking out conversation partners,

or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task, used by students to enhance their own language learning.

In addition, Brown (2001:210) affirms that successful second language learners are people who know how to manipulate style as well as strategy levels in their day to day encounters with the language. The most general findings among the investigation of language learning strategies showed that the use of appropriate language learning strategies leads to improved proficiency or achievement overall or in specific skill areas. For example, Kyung Ok (2003) found strong relationship between EFL strategies frequencies and English proficiency level among 325 Korean secondary school students of English as a foreign language. In short, this study supports the idea that the use of appropriate learning strategies enables students to take responsibility for their own learning. In accordance with this, Oxford (1990:1) affirms that the application of appropriate language learning strategies will result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence.

Furthermore, strategies are necessary for both teachers and students in language learning activity, because they are good indicators of how students approach tasks or problems encountered during the process of language learning. In other words, language learning strategies give language teachers valuable information about how their students learn or remember new information presented in the language classroom, plan their own learning, practice their language skills, and so forth. According to Fedderholdt (1997:1 cited in Hismanoglu, 2000), the language learners capable of using a wide variety of

language learning strategies appropriately, can improve their language skills in a better way.

Moreover, there are still only few research focused on students of vocational school. Further, in rapid time of changes, the 'uniqueness' of vocational school program could get the appropriate treatment which suit its' characters as schools with career oriented.

In respect to some of the above reasons, this study investigated the language learning strategies employed by the vocational school students of Business and Tourism Program and how they relate to students' proficiency as shown by TOEIC scores. This study is mainly conducted based on the assumption that if there is a strong relationship between these two variables, students' English proficiency may be improved by enhancing strategy use. Some research in Indonesian context have also shown that English proficiency/achievement relates to language learning strategies. However, there are differences in term of frequency and choice of use among different students. In short, this study will provide the information to promote the importance of understanding and awareness of language learning strategies on the part of teachers as well as the students, especially in vocational school program.

B. Statement of the Problems

Considering that language learning strategies as one of various factors that contributes to students' English proficiency, this study was therefore designed to examine the following questions.

1. What are the language learning strategies that are most frequently employed by the students according to Oxford's classification?
2. What is the students' English proficiency level based on their TOEIC score?
3. Is there any significant correlation between students' language learning strategies and their proficiency as indicated by their TOEIC scores?
If there is any significant correlation, how much is the contribution?
4. Do the students' frequency in employing language learning strategies suit to their English proficiency level as indicated by TOEIC scores?

C. Objectives of the Study

In line with the statements of the problems, the aims of this study are:

1. to investigate language learning strategies that are most frequently employed by the students according to Oxford's classification;
2. to describe the students' English proficiency level based on their TOEIC scores;
3. to find out the relationship between the use of language learning strategies and students' proficiency level as shown by their TOEIC scores; and
4. to know whether students' frequency in employing language learning strategies suit to their English proficiency level as indicated by their TOEIC scores.

D. Hypotheses of the Study

Hypotheses to be tested in this study are as follow.

H₁ : There is a significant correlation between students' language learning strategies and English proficiency as indicated by their TOEIC scores.

H₀ : There is no significant correlation between students' language learning strategies and English proficiency as indicated by their TOEIC scores.

E. Assumption of the Study

This study was conducted based on the assumption that vocational school students employ various language learning strategies in learning English language. Furthermore, if there is a strong relationship between students' language learning strategies use and their English proficiency as indicated by their TOEIC scores, students' language competence may be improved by enhancing the strategy use. Therefore, as Hosenfeld (1979, cited in Wenden and Rubin 1987:16) states that "once the strategies of good language learners are identified, students can be made available and, where useful, used by less successful learners to enable them to learn a foreign language more effectively."

F. Scope of the Study

The scope of this study covers the language learning strategies used by students of Business and Tourism Vocational School (SMK Negeri 3 Bandung) and its relation to their English proficiency as indicated by their TOEIC scores. Language learning strategies employed by the students do not refer to a particular

language skill. In contrast, it refers to all language skills in general. Furthermore, other factors that contribute to the preference of language learning strategies use, such as motivation, personality, age, or gender are not taken into account.

G. Clarification of Terms

Following are some terms clarified in order to avoid misinterpretation and to make the terms stated clear in this research paper.

1. Vocational school is school which prepares students for working in vocational work fields. It is equal to Senior High School which provides graduates equipped with skills suit to their work field. There are many kinds of vocational schools. In this study, it refers to Business and Tourism Vocational School.
2. Language learning strategies are steps used by the students to improve their own learning that cover four language skills. It was measured by using Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) developed by Oxford (1989). The SILL was modified and translated into Indonesian language.
3. English proficiency refers to students' competence in English which was measured by TOEIC. The TOEIC covers two sections, i.e. listening and reading. The listening section reflects students' listening and speaking skills, and reading section reflects students' reading and writing skills.

H. Organization of the Paper

This research paper is organized into five chapters. Chapter one contains a general description about this paper which covers background, statement of the problems, the aims of the study, scope of the study, clarification of term, and organization of the paper. Chapter two explains the theoretical foundation, which serves basis for investigating the research problems. In chapter three, methodology of the research is discussed. It contains research method, population and sample, data collection and data analysis. Chapter four reports the data gained from questionnaire, interview, and documentary format. Finally, chapter five contains conclusion of this study and suggestion for further research.

