

**The use of language learning strategies and its role in
language learning**
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ABSTRACT

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The use of learning strategies in language learning is important in facilitating learners' language skills and promoting language proficiency. It is believed that learning strategies are special tools for learners to apply in individual learning in order to obtain knowledge and new concepts in language learning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

This thesis aims to understand how learners identify and perceive the use of learning strategies in their individual learning (especially in English learning). It also examines what influences the learner's choice on the strategy use and how the chosen strategies are employed in a learning environment. Ultimately, this study highlights the perception of learners on the relationship between learning strategy use and learners' language achievement.

Individual interviews were conducted with a total of twelve, both international and domestic, master's students from the University of Jyväskylä. To address the research questions of the study, the interviews were recorded and the discussions were analyzed with qualitative content analysis through grouping interview answers into key themes.

The result revealed that the process of learning English is believed as a continued and holistic process that includes individual goals, learning strategies and its implementation, and the outcomes of strategy use in learning. A variety of learning processes were exposed based on the individual choice of learners.

It was also found that learning strategies were selected and employed (consciously and unconsciously) for the purpose of overcoming learning difficulties and improving language skills. The choice of learners on the use of learning strategies was made based on their personalities, interests, learning types, attitudes, etc. The

relationship between strategy use and language achievement in learning was described as two types - a linear process and a complex process.

Keywords: The use of learning strategies, language learning, language learners, language achievement

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	7
2	THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION	9
2.1	Research on language learning.....	11
2.1.1	The process of language learning.....	11
2.1.2	English language learning.....	12
2.1.3	Challenges and support in learning.....	13
2.2	Research on Language learning environment.....	16
2.2.1	Importance of learning environment.....	16
2.2.2	Formal educational settings.....	17
2.2.3	An ecological perspective.....	18
2.2.4	Social cognition and language learning.....	20
2.3	Research on language learners.....	21
2.3.1	Differences between learners.....	21
2.3.2	Performance of language learners.....	24
2.4	Research on language learning strategies.....	27
2.4.1	Language learning strategy theories.....	27
2.4.2	Definition of language learning strategies.....	28
2.4.3	Consciousness on strategy use in language learning.....	29
2.4.4	The importance of language learning strategies.....	31
2.4.5	Classification of language learning strategies.....	34
2.5	Research on learning strategy use and language achievement.....	36
2.5.1	Academic achievement.....	36
2.5.2	Language proficiency.....	37
2.5.3	The relationship between learning strategy use and language achievement.....	40
3	ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER	41
4	IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	43
5	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY	44
5.1	Context.....	44
5.2	Participants.....	45
5.3	Method of data collection.....	47
5.3.1	Interviews.....	47

5.3.2	Preparation for the interviews	48
5.4	Method of data analysis	49
5.4.1	Qualitative content analysis	49
5.4.2	Transcription	50
5.4.3	Coding and Analysis.....	51
5.5	Reliability and validity	52
5.6	Research ethics.....	54
6	FINDINGS.....	54
6.1	Description of personal learning trajectories.....	55
6.1.1	Learning English.....	55
6.1.2	The focus of learning English.....	55
6.1.3	Learning environment	56
6.1.4	Support from networks.....	59
6.1.5	Learning difficulties in English	60
6.2	Explanation of the choice of language learning strategies in learning.....	61
6.2.1	Language learning strategies	61
6.2.2	The choice of language learning strategies	62
6.2.3	Benefits of strategy use in learning	66
6.2.4	Consciousness on strategy use in learning	68
6.3	Perception of the relationship between language achievement and language learning strategy use	70
6.3.1	Language achievement	70
6.3.2	Relationship between language achievement and strategy use in language learning.....	71
6.4	Summary of the findings.....	73
7	DISCUSSION	76
7.1	Limitations	82
7.2	Future Research	83
	REFERENCES	84
	APPENDICES.....	96
	Appendix 1 Introduction.....	96
	Appendix 2 Interview questions	97
	Tell me your language learning stories.....	97

Difficulties in your learning process	97
Relationship between language learning strategies and language outcomes...	98
Appendix 3 Research Permit.....	98

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the world is recognized as a globalized community, language learning has been considered as one of the main factors to construct common beliefs and values among people from the aspect of human communication. Language learning is believed as an intricate process, the process includes a learner's involvement with the process of planning, monitoring and assessing her or his own individual learning abilities and attributes them to the improvement of language skills in both aspects, the use of language and the understanding of culture and cultural perspectives (Sengül, 2007). In simple terms, language learning is a process of updating individual skills and self-regulation, and through this process learners are able to engage with more opportunities which learners both immerse themselves into a global community and understand the local values and perspectives.

The process of language learning differs from one another because of the individuality of learners. A wide range of options is provided for learners to practice their individual learning and doubtlessly, learners might have chosen different options based on their interests and preferences in learning. Khazaie and Mesbah (2014) present that even though diverse options are available to be applied as learning mediums while engaging with learning, language learning in general still has not been as successfully reached as it expected. The factor of individual differences seems as one of the main components in shaping learning as individual and unique. With respect to this, Reiss (1983) points out that there is no universal learning method or methodology for all learners to use within language learning. In a similar vein, Grenfell and Harris (1999) state, "methodology itself can never be a solution to language learning. Rather it is more an aid and suggestion".

However, the use of learning strategies (as one of the options of language learning) is believed as 'purposeful mental actions' that are used with the purpose of adjusting learners' second or foreign language learning processes (Oxford, 2018).

According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), learning strategies are special methods for learners to apply in individual learning in order to obtain knowledge and new concepts in language learning. Therefore, it is believed that learning strategies are supportive and insightful approaches which engage learners with a second or foreign language positively and assist them to learn their oriented subjects successfully (Kavaliauskiene, Anusiene, & Kauniene, 2011).

There have been some studies on the reflection of learners in language learning and the growth of language learning strategy use among learners. However, most of them have placed the research focus into specific instruments to measure what specific strategies have been applied by successful language learners (Chuin & Kaur, 2015, Gerami & Baighlou, 2011) or have been limited to studying the differences in strategy use of learners based on their individual choices and backgrounds (Nurmela, 2017). More attention should be paid on the choice of learning strategies among diverse backgrounds of master's degree learners and the use of learning strategies in their individual learning.

The present study aims to understand how learners identify their individual learning strategies (especially in English learning) and how they perceive the importance of their strategies in individual learning. It also would like to investigate what influences a learner's choice on strategy use and how the chosen strategies were employed in a learning environment. Ultimately, this study would like to highlight the perception of learners on the relationship between learning strategy use and learners' language achievement.

The target language of this study is chosen as English because of the status of the English language. The English language is embraced as a global language with a special role that is accepted in every country for achieving a global language level (Crystal, 2012). In this regard, English seems as an important tool to obtain among learners which helps learners prepare themselves for challenges and new possibilities in developing their studies and future careers. Particularly in tertiary education,

English with great proficiency is the key to understand lectures, international programs and activities since they are mostly carried out in English (Hamzah, Abdullah, & Ahmad, 2015). Therefore, this study believes that English is the most common language used in higher education among international students, and that all international students would have experienced the language with individual ways of learning.

There will be several chapters presented in this thesis in order to construct a better understanding on the research aims of the study. Chapter 2, Theoretical Considerations, will present a brief summary of the chapter content and main five theoretical concepts related to the field of language learning and research questions. In chapter 3, Role of the researcher, a brief description of the researcher's personal motivation and her researcher position will be stated. In chapter 4, Importance of the study and research questions, the guiding questions of the study will be clearly stated. Chapter 5, Implementation of the study, will present a variety of aspects of how the study was conducted, the aspects include context, participants, methodology of data collection, method of data analysis, reliability and validity, and research ethics. In chapter 6, Findings, research questions will be answered with the elaboration of condensed themes from data and related examples from the participants. Chapter 7, Discussion, will discuss the results of the study based on the research aims and related previous concepts and literature, and it will also present the limitation and further steps for the future research.

2 THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION

There will be five main sections discussed in this study, which are *Language learning*, *Learning environments*, *Language learners*, *Language learning strategies* and *The relationship between learning strategy use and language achievement*. The reason for making the division as the five can be explained in terms of the aims of the study and research questions. As the study is to focus on how learners identify their individual learning strategies in English learning and how they perceive the importance of the used

strategies in learning, therefore, splitting the main aims into small pieces is believed as a well structure to highlight the main concepts and addressing research aims of the study.

Of the five sections, the concept of language learning is fundamental to start out and display other main theories related to research aims. This concept includes not only the theories of language learning investigated in previous studies but also the challenges and support may appear in the process of learning language. Along with this concept, the theory of learning environments will be introduced with its importance and the variety of implementation. That is, language learners are surrounded by different types of learning environments and their learning environments differ from one another because of different reasons. This section will present other perspectives on learning environments in order to highlight the process of language learning and its individuality in learning.

Then, the concept of language learners will be displayed as one of the main theories of the study. This concept is believed as an important determinant of the diversity of learning environments and the process of language learning. Because of the differences among language learners, all learning processes become various and distinctive. Learners' performances will also be presented in this section in order to demonstrate the characteristics of individual learners.

After that, the theories of language learning strategy included its definitions, importance and classification will be introduced. The consciousness on strategy use is also believed as an important factor in discussing the field of learning strategy use. Finally, the relationship between strategy use and language achievement in learning will be presented based on the concept of language achievement, which includes the concept of academic achievement and language proficiency.

2.1 Research on language learning

2.1.1 The process of language learning

According to Illeris (2016), even though the term of learning is wide and understood differently, there are four different meanings still can be given when this term is applied in a general manner in everyday language: 1) Learning is applied among individuals to understand what has been gained and changed, therefore, the term of learning refers to individual outcomes in the process of learning, 2) Learning can be the 'mental process' that occurs in individuals and directs them to identify such learning outcomes and changes, which can be related to meaning one, 3) Learning can be the 'interaction process' which encompasses both interactions between individual learners and their material and social environments. These interactions are imperative for the individual learning processes covered by meaning two. Fourth, the use of learning is hardly restricted within everyday language, rather it can be used in official and professional circumstances (Illeris, 2016, p. 3).

Lev Vygotsky, who is a psychologist, educator, and philosopher, theorized learning as "a process of apprenticeship and internalization in which skills and knowledge are transformed from the social into the cognitive plane" (Walqui, 2006, p. 160). It is explained that the theory of Vygotsky towards learning is constructed on the concept of collaboration and social activities, that is, learning is co-established (by individual work and collaborative work) and all knowledge and learners' learning abilities are gained in social activity (Walqui, 2006). Gholami, Moghaddam, & Attaran (2014) also point out that learning is not a solitary process, that is, it cannot be solely activated in itself, rather it is an active process that combines learners' input and output with learning environments. Therefore, learning is to aim at the integration of mutual understandings, reciprocal interactions, supportive activities and beneficial outcomes that take place between individual learners and their surroundings.

Language learning has been studied in research based on the understanding about the importance of its own meaning (Sengül, 2007; Santana, García-Santillán, Ferrer-Nieto, & López-Martínez, 2017; Adriano & Nkamta, 2018). Language learning is described as an intricate process that includes the learner's involvement with the process of planning, monitoring and assessing her or his individual learning abilities and attributes them to the improvement of language skills in both aspects, the use of language and the understanding of culture and cultural perspectives (Sengül, 2007).

In addition, according to the study of Wong, Sing-Chai, & Poh-Aw (2017), there are three salient characteristics may demonstrate the concept of language learning: (1) language is 'a context-bound phenomenon', therefore, a learning community which learners are able to associate with various activities through making use of learning contexts should be provided in order to arise language learning, (2) since the main purpose of language learning is to make connections between people and their surroundings, therefore, language learning should be aiming at facilitating learners' communicative and interactive skills, to achieve this, taking part in a language learning community and drawing on dialogical communications are encouraged, (3) the use of language is necessary for learners' communicative needs in different situations, so that learners' linguistic outputs (e.g. written works and conversations) should be frequently assessed and given comments.

2.1.2 English language learning

International communication has been considered as one of the main keys of globalization, therefore the definition of a global language is firmly tied to the definition of globalization (Barnes, 2005). A global language is explained as a language with a special role that is accepted in every country in order to achieve a global language level (Crystal, 2012). Considering the relationship between language dominance and historical, economic, technological power, English is embraced as a global tool that can be tied with globalization process and economies (Lysandrou & Lysandrou, 2003). As the English language has become the most predominant global language

(Albiladi, Abdeen, & Lincoln, 2018), it is not a surprise that the process of learning English takes place in many educational institutions. In their study, Santana et al. (2017) show that the presence of the English language can be found in nearly all fields (e.g. cultural, political, economic or labor) and that the role of English refers to an important tool that is applied not only in professional and academic fields but also in social and personal areas. They also note that knowing the language may become a must for learners to be employed in a global field, that is, not knowing the language, contrarily, may be a drawback for learners to make progress (Santana et al., 2017). Therefore, the spread of the English language in all over the world and its internationalization have changed the language into as a dynamic tool for fulfilling language learners' various desires (Sadeghpour & Sharifian, 2017).

Jakubiak (2012) presents that learning English is important to create meaningful opportunities for reaching the international world with individual language skills and competencies. Because English is a means for those who might not have any common language to communicate and to exchange individual values and perspectives. Tikly (2016) points out that English proficiency seems to be important in the process of learning English not only for its own sake but also for accomplishing other learning achievements. Especially in tertiary education, English language proficiency is the key to understand lectures, international programs and activities as they are mostly carried out in English (Hamzah et al., 2015). Therefore, giving significant attention to the process of learning English seems as an important fact which helps learners prepare for learning challenges and provides them greater possibilities to advance their studies and future careers.

2.1.3 Challenges and support in learning

English has become a language which is no longer entirely symbolic of the culture and identity of native English-speaking communities, instead, it is a language extensively applied among not native speakers and between native and non-native speakers of English (Cheung Matthew Sung, 2013). Language learners may have gone

through different language problems and difficulties in the process of learning. Bisson, van Heuven, Conklin, & Tunney (2013) present that even though the process of language learning has many advantages for language learners, it is challenging and frustrating. This is because learning a language, including English, expects learners to become skillful on the use of phonological, syntactic, and semantic codes (Shi, 2018). Many language learners, unfortunately, may not possess as many opportunities as other native learners to practice the target language, so that becoming proficient on the use of those codes may be not as easy as they expected.

In the study of Sharma (2018), a variety of learning problems are presented that learners may experience while engaging with learning English: 1) The difference between native languages and English - the alphabet of English and of other native languages (e.g. Mandarin) seem to make a considerable difference among learners in the way of memorizing the alphabet sequence, 2) The lack of practice at home. Learners are provided with different levels of support and assistance, parents' educational backgrounds can be one of the reasons, 3) Unqualified teachers, 4) Limited learning environments. The chance of language practice in English for some learners may be only restricted with the classroom environment so that the learning process seems an inactive and complicated period for those learners, 5) English grammar. Since the use of correct grammar, either writing or speaking, is extremely important for understanding the language, language learners may be overwhelmed by their grammatical mistakes and natives' fast speaking-pace, 6) Vocabulary and pronunciation. Using extensive vocabulary and pronouncing phonetic sounds may confuse learners while they communicate with native speakers. The use of slang words in a conversation, for instance, can be difficult for learners to continue the conversation with others.

In the process of language learning, the learner's self-effort with linguistic competences is hardly enough to overcome these difficulties, more additional and external support should be provided. Levy (2005) believes that the majority of adult learners may be aware of self-directedness and independence in learning, for this

reason, they might not require additional help from others in directing them to achieve learning success. However, it would not be appropriate to neglect those who still expect considerable guidance and support to develop their learning strategies and communicative skills (Levy, 2005). According to Walqui (2006), learners should be encouraged to experience an academic learning process which is accompanied by support, positiveness, and steadiness. Teachers and parents of learners, for example, can be good resources for learners that provide them sufficient support and guidance to identify and minimize their learning difficulties.

In terms of the support of teachers, it is believed that teaching is beyond the process of the transmission of knowledge, it also creates opportunities for learners to explore other learning possibilities and to support their learning with positive attitudes (Harmer, 2001). According to Ojo and Adu (2017), teaching encompasses the factors of guidance, motivation, encouragement, and assessment for learners, and implements these factors with an organized and customized professional instruction in educational institutions, by doing so, learners' personal goals and comprehensive developments can be achieved. Even though learners have a right to make decisions in their learning - how to customize and frame their individual learning - without the instruction and guidance of teachers, learners barely achieve their learning goals (Bajrami, 2015). Therefore, providing appropriate support and supervision helps language learners not only establish their own learning patterns but also become confident with the use of language.

In terms of parental support, research has shown that learners' performances and their achievements in language learning are associated with parental involvement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Tae-Young, Kim, & Ji-Young (2017) present that the support of parents may influence the process of the child's language learning directly and indirectly. It has been found that some parents support their kids by providing learning environments, while other kids are supported by their parents' attitudes (Lee & Bowen, 2006). For example, in their study, Martinez and Velazquez (2000) state that even though immigrant parents are not fully capable of giving support to

their kids with environmental resources, emotional resources can be still provided to their kids and kids' learning processes. It seems that language learning would be easier and more enjoyable for learners if different types of support is provided to learners.

2.2 Research on Language learning environment

2.2.1 Importance of learning environment

All learning is built on the basis of social interaction, all knowledge and learning occur in association with interactional activities, so that more and more learning interactions and diverse activities should be shared with learners (Walqui, 2006). La Marca (2010) points out that learners, as a whole, must be provided with rich contexts and surroundings that enable learners to be inspired and interested in learning. In relation to this, Wong et al. (2016) present that the needs of learners in learning are not only fulfilled by content rich curricula (e.g. classroom-based practices) but also supported by multifaceted learning effort in flexible and social contexts (e.g. informal learning settings). Therefore, a positive learning environment is seen to be part of the process of learning that provides unexpected chances for language learners to engage with various learning strategies and other productive activities.

In terms of language learning, Harmer (2001) believes that learning a language is not simply restricted with gaining knowledge in a classroom - the knowledge that learners are supposed to learn at school, rather it encourages learners to explore other learning possibilities where can be found around them outside the classroom. Almost all types of learning environments may have a certain influence on learners' language skills and language development through providing them with the chance of language use in different levels. Without a doubt, learning environments can be various whereby the choice of individual language learners. That is, learners choose their individual learning environments on the basis of their individual preferences and their language interests as there is no universal educational setting can both fit into every single individual learning and match with all

diverse language learners. Therefore, learners should permit themselves to carry out their learning within both types of learning environments, classroom-based environments and informal learning settings.

2.2.2 Formal educational settings

Educational research has shown that formal educational settings (e.g. classroom learning environments) play an important role in the learners' involvement with language learning and have an influence on learners' motivation in terms of learners' autonomy and goal orientations (Sungur & Güngören, 2009; Goksu, 2015). In their study, Webster and Hazari (2009) present that learning environments in formal educational settings refer to "the tone, ambiance, culture or atmosphere of a classroom or school", it develops different relationships (including the relationship between learners, and between learners and teachers), presents various engaging activities and interactions which are constantly encouraged and supported in the classroom, and highlights the influence of these actions on learners' outcomes (p. 133).

A classroom learning environment allows learners to make connections with the target subject in different ways, for example, learners are able to engage with the process of language learning through implementing various activities and interactions. It seems that being in a classroom environment would be a great chance for those who are not offered with any other advanced settings of language practice outside the classroom. According to Masoumeh, Tahriri, & Amir (2017), a classroom setting concerns the personal, educational, social and psychological context of a classroom, and the quality of classroom makes an impact on the learner's confidence, competencies, learning attitude towards the subject. It is believed that individual learners are directly related to the classroom environment and it is hardly possible to consider these two separately in the process of learning (Masoumeh et al., 2017).

Language learners are considered as "practitioner of learning" who practice a foreign language in diverse and variable communicative situations, instead of as

“targets of teaching” who are only tied with formal learning¹ inside the classroom (Allwright & Hanks, 2009, p. 2). In a similar vein, Webster and Hazari (2009) believe that placing language learning into attentive and communicative contexts is crucial not only to make the process of learning more enjoyable but also to facilitate the improvement of the learner’s linguistic skills for informative demands. For instance, Menegale (2013) explains that informal learning - which is regarded as learning comes from a learner’s daily life, such as daily activities in work, family or leisure - is an experimental and unstructured process that learners adapt it freely on the basis of their learning interests and individual personalities, therefore, it may seem more attractive and productive with its diversity and flexibility.

2.2.3 An ecological perspective

Language learning occurs anywhere beyond the classroom. The natural environment provides learners tremendous opportunities to get involved with the target language (for instance, displaying the language in either city settings or virtual contexts), thus, it is expected that as learners they should make good use of every chance they meet (Menegale, 2013). In relation to this, in the study of Anderson (1982), the term of ecology is presented as one of the dimensions of an environment and further delineated as ‘social ecology’, which refers to human environments including human interactions with the physical and social dimension of the environment (e.g. human-to-human and human-to-surroundings). Kramsch and Steffensen (2008)

¹ The definition of formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning is given by Colardyn & Bjornavold (2004):

- **Formal learning** is defined as learning which occurs in an organized and structured setting, the setting specifically designed to learning. Formal awards (e.g. diploma, certificate) may be provided as qualifications which include systems of general education, vocational training and higher education.

- **Non-formal learning** means learning which is carried out through implementing planned activities which consist of an effective learning element rather than a particular learning design. This type of learning is to focus on the view of learners towards learning.

- **Informal learning** means learning is supported by daily life activities related to work, family or leisure. Informal learning is not as structured and organized as formal and informal learning, it is rather unintentional and accidental learning. For instance, learning objectives and learning time can be flexible. Informal learning does not offer any certificate and degree to learners.

point out that ecology refers to holism, and holism indicates that language is practiced in its surroundings rather than in itself, the surroundings related to personal, situational, cultural and societal aspects that contribute to the development and growth of language.

Empirical research has suggested that the ecology of language learning should be taken into account (Van Lier, 2000, 2006; Kramsch & Steffensen, 2008) since the ecological approach is a way of thinking and of acting in education (Van Lier, 2006). In relation to the ecological perspective, Van Lier proposed a shift of second language acquisition terminology from 'input' to 'affordances' (Liu & Chao, 2018); it is explained that 'input' is a metaphoric word for language, which means, language is a fixed code and the code can be processed after the human-brain accepting the code just like a machine, and this indicates that language learning particularly occur in human brain (Liu & Chao, 2018). In terms of affordances, Van Lier (2008) presents that the immersion of learners is needed in an environment to find out other opportunities that engage them with further action for learning since the perception of affordance goes with action. It is also suggested that learning the use of affordances becomes a must for learners because of its role in meaning making (Van Lier, 2008). Learning becomes more effective with active learners and their engagement with tasks and activities than passive input receiver who hardly be involved with affordances (Menegale, 2013). In such a case, in language learning, the language is used to think, to perceive and interpret the linguistic social actions which exist around learners, and to display in individual learning environments (Menegale, 2013).

In their study, Szabo and Dufva (in press) address language learning as "an ecology where subjective processes intertwine with social embodied interaction and different multimodal affordances of the environment" (p. 2). According to Szabo and Dufva (in press), the ecological perspective points out a mutual relationship between learners and their environments through embedding two types of considerations, social considerations and cognitive considerations. It is explained that social

considerations refer to social interactions in social-cultural contexts (i.e. social activities), and cognitive considerations refer to cognitive operations which are distributed across learners and resources of their environments (Szabo & Dufva, in press). The following section will present how social and cognitive theory related to language learning and how to perceive the importance of social cognition in language learning.

2.2.4 Social cognition and language learning

Atkinson, Churchill, Nishino, & Okada (2018) hold the view that human activity is an integration of the social, the material and the cognitive aspects. Learning is one of the human activities which embodies these aspects to achieve language success (Mathew & Raja, 2015). Social cognition, as one of the aspects of human activity, is believed that it is strongly connected to human language and these two perhaps developed “an evolutionary cycle - where in advances in one could feed advances in the other” (Mathew & Raja, 2015, p. 7). Social cognition is described as an approach which is used in one’s interpretation, examination, memorization, and utility of information about the social world (Mathew & Raja, 2015).

Dufva (2011) presents that language learning is a social-cognitive process, that is, any type of learning activity is tied with two aspects, one is with a social embodied environment and the other is with cognitive resources of a learner. In the process of language learning, learners are able to achieve language acquisition and to shape social and cultural concepts with accompanying of these two, without social cognition, gaining knowledge on social understanding and on culture is barely possible (Dufva, 2011). In relation to this, Mathew and Raja (2015) described that it is hard to understand what human cognition would be like if there is no “cultural augmentation that language provides” (p. 7). Therefore, language learning is not only to improve learners’ language skills and personal values towards culture but also to gain cognitive and cultural growth towards the language.

In most instances, language learners may unconsciously be involved with both aspects, social and cognitive parts. It is not necessarily expected that learners should be fully conscious of things that occur in their language learning. According to Illeris (2016), humans can learn something without being conscious of it. Dufva (2011) also points out that language learning would still have a strong connection with both practices (social practice and cognitive practice), even though learners are not entirely aware of the process of learning. For instance, people usually think when they engage with something, so their critical thinking skills which belong to cognitive practice will be emerged with social activities (i.e. social practice). In order to elaborate on the consciousness of both language learning and strategy use, there will be another section presented in the next section.

2.3 Research on language learners

2.3.1 Differences between learners

“Why do individuals differ so much in second language attainment success? After all, every healthy human being in an intact social environment masters a first language to a degree of fluency that, in other skill domains, would be recognized as elite or near elite levels...” (Segalowitz, 1997, p. 85)

Language learners display remarkable differences in the process of language learning because of their individual backgrounds and learning capabilities. Daemi, Tahiri, & Zafarghandi (2017) show that even though learners possess similar aptitudes and competencies, they may achieve different results and outcomes in language learning. Research has investigated the reason for these differences and found that there are several factors should be taken into account, such as individual differences, learners’ beliefs and their perceptions in accomplishing a task (Daemi et al., 2017). The term of individual differences may have significance to language development because learners’ characteristics are required for this development in order to organize and reconstruct input to better output (Skehan, 1998). Many researchers have shown that a broad range of individual differences, such as learners’ motivations

(Mehrpour & Motlagh, 2015; Awad, 2014), efforts on language learning (Lee & Heinz, 2016), and individual interests in language learning (Dörnyei, 2005), have an influence on language processing and language achievement.

In her study, Awad (2014) presents the definition of language learning motivation given by Gardner that refers to learners' eagerness and attempts to reach their desired language outcomes, which include the target language proficiency. Learners who are willing to make their attempts to learn their target languages and who are keen to enjoy the process of language learning with joy are described as motivated learners (Gardner, 2001). The role of being motivated in learning, especially in a second or foreign language learning, is crucial for learners since the process of learning a new language may not be as simple as they learned their mother languages. Lee and Heinz (2016) point out that more efforts and motivation are needed in second language acquisition compared to learning the learner's first language. It seems that motivated learners in the process of learning a new language would have more opportunities to engage with the language and its activities than not motivated ones. In relation to this, Mehrpour and Motlagh (2015) believe that motivation is an essential factor in language learning as it is effective for language learners and their learning processes.

Ushioda (2008) shows that language learning is something beyond acquiring linguistic knowledge and improving language skills, it also includes learners' willingness towards getting to know people within the target language community, their culture as well as their ways of using the language, and therefore, language learning motivation is qualitatively different from other kinds of learning motivation. In language learning, motivation is crucial not only to develop learners' verbal linguistic learning but also to gain an understanding on culture learning. In terms of linguistic learning, Rubin (1975) lists motivation as one of the three essential variables on which good learning depends, that is, learners' learning achievement would not be easily come by without the contribution of learning motivation. In terms of culture learning, Awad (2014) shows that it is built on the learner's motivation and

this motivation has an influence on the flow of learning the language, some learners choose to learn a language because of its culture, for example.

There are also other factors that may influence to the performance of language learners in language learning, such as learners' attitudes towards language learning and their personalities (Zhao, 2015; Mehrpour & Motlagh, 2015; Sykes, 2015). The term attitude is introduced as an important concept in gaining a better understanding of human social behavior and defined as "a complex mental state involving beliefs and feelings" (Latchanna & Dagneu, 2009, p. 1). Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011) present that attitude is different from motivation because "attitude is a set of beliefs and motivation is a reason for doing something" (p. 997).

Learning attitude is one of the essentials in the learning behaviors as it is tied with a learner's backgrounds, opinions, perspectives and educational experiences (Zhao, 2015). According to Latchanna and Dagneu (2009), people attitudes towards what they engage with play an important role in their accomplishments. This can be seen in the field of language learning that learners with good attitudes may have more successful learning processes than those who have opposite ones. In relation to this, Zhao (2015) shows that learners' attitudes bring considerable influences for their learning and learning outcomes, namely, learners direct their learning to success with positive attitudes, whereas it is a failure if it happens in reverse.

Apart from learning attitudes, personality factors have been discussed in theories as one of the general aspects of individual differences. With respect to this, Dörnyei (2005) points out that even though other variables have been examined to account for individual differences in learners' performances, a clear explanation of individual differences is not completed if the effect of personality factors is not taken into account. In his study, Dörnyei (2005) presents that personality traits refer to a person's characteristics which are representative of the person's consistent patterns on how she/he feels, thinks and behaves. Moody (1988) shows that personality is significant in learning in the way of making differences between learners' learning processes, for example in the process of how they learn and what they learn.

It seems that personality traits are individual and therefore, the individuality leads learners to achieve different learning outcomes. In relation to this, Lounsbury, Sundstrom, Loveland, & Gibson (2003) present that learners who have more positive emotions, higher self-discipline, better observation and exploration skills, and greater consciousness on learning would tend to acquire greater learning results compare to those who have less or opposite personality traits. On the whole, personality factors may not have a direct influence on the learner's learning success, but they are "potent modifying variables" that surely affect the response of people on shaping their learning environments in indirect ways (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 30).

2.3.2 Performance of language learners

Learning a new language is a challenging process for learners and it may require something more than a certain period of time in language practice and learners' energy in learning. Learners may be asked to invest individual learning strategies in their learning in order to achieve the targeted language proficiency - the proficiency of literacy and of oral language skills. In relation to this, research has shown that the frequent use of learning strategies is well received by proficient learners. Ehrman and Oxford (as cited in McMullen, 2009) believed that more proficient learners employ a greater number of language learning strategies than less proficient learners. In a similar vein, Khosravi (2012) also presents that language learning strategies are more frequently applied by more successful learners than those who are not successful or less successful learners.

Many researchers suggest that the way of improving learners' language proficiency and language development can be learned from good language learners as they are conscious of their learning actions and steps in their learning (Rubin, 1975, Lee & Heinz, 2016; Sykes, 2015). According to Rubin (1975), conducting a number of observations on individuals is more likely to distinguish good language learners, inasmuch as they are characterized by their presented learning techniques and strategies in learning. She notes, "if we knew more about what the 'successful learners'

did, we might be able to teach these strategies to poorer learners to enhance their success record” (Rubin, 1975, p. 42).

Indeed, the strategies from successful language learners can be provided to less successful learners for the purpose of leading and supporting their learning processes. However, conducting different types of observations for learners is not entirely precise to group them as good learners, in other words, because of the individuality and complexity of the process of learning, it is not visible for the observer to identify what the good learners would be like. With respect to this, Chuin and Kaur (2015) show that there is no direct observation related to language learning strategy because any type of learning strategy requires mental processes in the learning task. Ellis and Ellis (1994) also believe that learning strategies can be found not only in behavioral activities but also in mental processes corresponding with language learning (Ellis & Ellis, 1994).

Nevertheless, having knowledge about certain observed behaviors of successful language learners would be beneficial for other learners to make progress in their learning. That is, the use of other recommendable and alternative strategies can be an option for less successful learners in their language learning making their learning as successful as possible. In his study, Sykes (2015) shows that there is no standard model of a good language learner that can be possible to stand for either a real language learner or all individuals because of the learner’s individuality and other affective variables, and yet the model of good language learners supplies a point of orientation from which to estimate and evaluate a learner’s performance and language achievement in the process of language learning. Therefore, the following paragraph will present several key characteristics of good language learners given by Rubin (1975).

According to Rubin (1975), the characteristics are: 1) Good language learners use different types of clues to guess what is not clear about, 2) Good language learners apply both linguistic (circumlocution, cognate, spelling and paraphrase) and

non-linguistic (such as gestures) methods to connect themselves with the new language, 3) Good language learners are often not restrained, instead they are willing to make mistakes and to stay with a certain amount of uncertainty, 4) Good language learners are prepared to attend to form new schemes and patterns. They try to classify information through in a particular way such as constantly analyzing, distinguishing, and synthesizing, 5) Good language learners practice and repeat their language either in classroom or other settings. They make use of all opportunities they found in the learning process, for instance, watching movies, looking for native speakers and participating in cultural events, 6) Good language learners observe others' performances and reflect their own skills in the way of whether their performances meet the standards they have learned, 7) Good language learners monitor contextual appropriateness, that is, in order to understand the idea in language, they attend to meaning, such as the context of the speech act, the relationship of the participants, the rules of speaking and so on.

Although these above-mentioned characteristics provide an understanding of how good learners perform in cognitive processes, there is no certainty that all good learners hold these features and practice them in the same way as they described. This is because their strategies are diverse based on several aspects: 1) task demands - task demands vary depending on the material, some require solid memorization instead of drilling in classroom, 2) the age of learners, 3) individual types - learners are various with their specific and unique strengths, 4) cultural differences (Rubin, 1975). From the aspect of individual types, for example, Gardner (2003) theorized that individuals might possess multiple intelligences in cognitive learning, which are logical-mathematical, visual/spatial, body/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and verbal linguistic. These seven types of intelligences demonstrate that learners' performances in learning are independent of one another, and that learners have noticeable profiles of identities and assessments which need to be developed individually (Gardner & Hatch, 1989).

2.4 Research on language learning strategies

2.4.1 Language learning strategy theories

In a learning process, strategy use is required for gaining achievement on the main goal of learning (Hardan, 2013). As mentioned earlier, a wide range of options is provided for learners to practice their individual learning. The options of language learning, doubtlessly, are various and diverse based on a learner's interest and preference in learning, but the use of learning strategies seems as one of the essentials to positively influence the process of learning, the essentials such as learning environments and learning process.

Language learning strategy can be understood differently based on the way of a learner's strategy use in individual learning, but generally, it can be assumed that learning strategies are applied in learning as a means to organize the information learners receive and transfer the information into their knowledge. Learning strategies have been recognized differently in the field of language learning. Oxford (2018) presents the complexity and controversies of language learning strategies. From the aspect of complexity, the practice of learning strategies in language can be in many complex settings, such as in school, online, at home, in private educational institutions, at the library and so on (Oxford, 2018). The choice of learners on language learning strategies may be affected by complex reasons such as individual preferences, individual differences in age, learning opportunities, educational level, and educational policies. In addition to the above, there are some other aspects to identify the complexity of learning strategies, such as conflicting definitions of language learning strategies, theories, policies, data sources, and the people who are involved (learners, teachers, and parents) (Oxford, 2018).

From the aspect of controversies, some criticisms have appeared without plausible and supportive evidence. For instance, the definition of language learning strategies given by Dörnyei and Skehan (2008, p. 610) describes learning strategies as "superordinate magic tools". Besides, Dörnyei (as cited in Oxford, 2018) argued

that language learning strategies are neither strategic nor processes, rather they are subsets of general learning strategies that particularly contribute to language development.

In addition, other criticisms which focus on the methodology of research related to learners' strategy use have been presented in the study of Macaro (2006). According to Macaro (2006), some criticisms suspect that research methods only aimed at measuring and classifying strategies, while others argue that the methodology used to pursue intervention studies. Since there is a lack of agreement between different scholars in the field of language learning strategies, the field is still a valid area for research that aims at helping learners to study strategically and further develop their language learning processes. Therefore, more research and further discussions should be encouraged to carry out in different areas of the world (Chuin & Kaur, 2015).

2.4.2 Definition of language learning strategies

Even though the definition of language learning strategies is controversial among researchers in the field of language learning, some of them have agreed that the use of learning strategies is to help learners engage with the process of learning and improve their language skills in a certain level. A variety of definitions have been presented in research in order to elaborate on the importance of strategy use in language learning (Chamot, 2005; Chamorro, Eugenia, & Benavidez Paz, 2017; Chuin, 2015; McMullen, 2009; Lee & Heinz, 2016). In what follows, some significant definitions and their contributions to one another will be presented.

A modest description of learning strategies given by Brown (as cited in Hardan, 2013) indicates that learning strategies may directly influence learning, and Chamot (as cited in Hardan, 2013) provided a further definition that learning strategies are approaches and actions adapted by learners and applied in individual learning in order to recollect of both linguistic and content areas of information and improve their learning skills. One of the early definitions was given by Rigeney in

1978 (as cited in Hardan, 2013, p. 15) who explained learning strategies in a language as “the often-conscious steps/behaviors” that learners are able to apply in their individual learning to “enhance the acquirement, storage, recognition, and the performance of new information”.

According to Franklin, Hodge, and Sasscer (as cited in Nisbet, Tindall, & Arroyo, 2005), learning strategies are considered as actions taken into learners’ learning processes in order to facilitate their individual learning success. For Rubin (as cited in Hismanoglu, 2000, p. 2), language learning strategies refer to “operations, steps, plans, routines” applied by learners to gain knowledge. Oxford (1990) agrees with the previous researchers on the definition of language learning strategies and states that learning strategies are necessary for developing communicative competence in language learning since they are key for active and self-directed involvement, therefore, they are consciously used in the process of learning to increase language acquisition.

Furthermore, Ghani (2003) stated a follow-up definition that learning strategies are ‘behaviors, steps, and actions’ used regularly by learners in their learning for the purpose of making improvements in language developing skills. According to Oxford (2018), language learning strategies are ‘purposeful mental actions’ which are used by learners with the purpose of adjusting their second or foreign language learning processes (Oxford, 2018). These so called ‘behaviors, steps, and actions’ are also pointed out by Park (1997) who describes them as visible or invisible, resourceful, flexible, consciously expanded approaches can be applied in language learning.

2.4.3 Consciousness on strategy use in language learning

Many studies have investigated strategy use in language learning in order to improve learners’ language skills, and along with the investigations, some of them have emphasized the role of consciousness on the use of strategies in language learning. It is believed that the term of strategy use refers to a conscious process that

learners generally are aware of what strategies are being applied in individual learning and of how strategies are being carried out (Brown, 2013; Aydođan & Akbarov 2014; Chamot, 2005). Cohen (as cited in Ardasheva, 2010, p. 4) also presented that “the element of consciousness is what distinguishes strategies from those processes that are not strategic”. According to Ardasheva (2010), language learners (especially adult learners) may be conscious of what language features should be gained. The use of learning strategies is characteristic of language development because learners, especially second language learners, are more mature when begin to learn a new language, thus they are able to implement explicit strategies consciously to improve their learning (Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005).

However, it is hard to tell that learners, even adults, always have a keen awareness of their strategy use in their learning and that all research methods are precise to examine the learner’s consciousness of strategy use in learning as each method has limitations. Without a doubt, there is a large amount of new information to be processed by learners while learning a second or foreign language, for that reason, the learning process requires learners to employ different learning strategies in performing tasks and organizing new concepts they receive. But not all of them are conscious of the use of learning strategies or of the types of strategies applied in learning. Hall (1997) points out that all learners, without an exception, employ strategies and with these strategies to plan how to store their fresh assignments and knowledge, but the difference between learners is, they have different levels of consciousness. That is, Hall explained, some learners are well aware of their learning and the process of using strategies, while others hardly have consciousness of the process of learning and of strategy use (Hall, 1997).

In terms of methodology application, Chamot (2008) argues that neither an observation (which is used for analyzing learners’ strategies in learning) nor verbal report data (which is collected from learners to look for their individual strategies) is entirely precise to identify the strategies of learners applied in the process of learning. Oxford (1990) presents that the strategy use of a learner and an observation for

the learner's strategy use may not occur at the same time or even the learner may not recall some of the details of the used strategies. Encouraging learners to depict their learning trajectories, on the other hand, might be helpful to trigger their related memories on what has been used and how has been applied in a particular learning process.

2.4.4 The importance of language learning strategies

Learning strategy use is very diverse and individual among learners, the use of learning strategies enables learners to make differences from one another in their individual learning. For example, a specific strategy works well with one's learning does not necessarily indicate that the strategy has a great influence on all learners' language learning. Since there is no one-size learning strategy can be applied by all types of learners, the use of learning strategies has become wider and more frequent. Some learners tend to apply more types of learning strategies than others in language learning. McMullen (2009) explains that compared to less successful learners, effective language learners prefer to employ and practice more learning strategies in a more appropriate way.

For language learners, the use of learning strategies not only helps them enhance their language acquisition but also facilitates "the use of information learners receive, store and recall" (Hardan, 2013, p. 15). Oxford (1990, p. 8) also presents that the use of learning strategies is to "aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information" among learners as learning strategies are actions in involving learners with the process of language learning. The use of learning strategies, therefore, is considered as an important tool that resolves learners' learning difficulties they may face in language learning. As noted by Oxford (1990), language learning becomes smoother, quicker, more pleasant, more self-oriented, more productive, and more transferable on the premise that learning strategies are employed in new situations. She explained that the more strategies a learner uses, the easier learning process the learner may experience, a better performance the learner may present in learning (Oxford, 1990).

There is also some evidence suggesting that the use of learning strategies is a means which helps learners transform new knowledge and concepts into effective and enjoyable experiences, as a result, they become active, independent, and confident with their effective language skills in learning (Muniandy & Shuib, 2016). According to Park (1997), the process of transformation includes input and output manner, that is, the use of learning strategies invests better and proper input in language learning, then it processes input into intake and generates output in order to facilitate language acquisition.

Dickinson (as cited in McMullen, 2009) presents that the use of strategies gives a great impetus to the learner autonomy because strategy use allows them to be fully responsible for their individual learning processes, which is, learners are able to keep on their language learning even though they might be out of a classroom setting. With the use of learning strategies in language, learners are capable of practicing and presenting their language skills anywhere they wish, it is also possible for accomplishing the process of learning without any supervision, for example, the guidance of teachers.

The use of learning strategies is different among learners based on the aims of their individual learning, for instance, it can be aiming at solving various learning problems a learner encounters or achieving learning outcomes what learners have expected from the target language. Ghani (2003) points out that learning strategies are used as specific actions and behaviors by individual learners, so that the use of strategies is distinct and diverse based on individual choice. For example, some students memorize words one by one, others break words down into components or use word-guessing while their reading. Because of the diversity of the use of learning strategies, there should not have a standard to normalize what would be the best (or worst) strategies for learners to use. Lee and Heinz (2016) describe that all learning strategies are significant in different types of language practice because of their distinct influences on learners' learning outcomes.

Considering the importance of learning strategies, Oxford (1990, p.9) summarizes her view of language learning strategies by listing twelve key features, which are:

- 1) They contribute to the communicative competence, as the main goal. Development of communicative competence needs authentic interactions among learners using contextualized language, the use of learning strategies provides learners different chances to practice the language in such realistic interactions. Besides, learning strategies are employed in general and specific ways to encourage the growth of communicative competence,
- 2) They allow learners to become more self-directed. Since self-direction is particularly important in learning, the use of learning strategies encourages learners to be more independent and more responsible for their own learning,
- 3) They increase the role of teachers. The use of learning strategies among learners brings a challenge for teachers' status. Their functions may be updated to facilitators, guide, advisers, helpers, and co-communicators,
- 4) They are problem-oriented. Learning strategies are tools, and they are used for something that has to be achieved in learning, for example, a problem to be solved, a task to be accomplished, a goal to be reached,
- 5) They are specific actions taken by the learner. They are specific and diverse because of individual learners and their learning problems,
- 6) They involve not only the cognitive aspect, but also other many aspects of the learner. Apart from cognitive functions, learning strategies include meta-cognitive, emotional, social and other functions,
- 7) They support learning both directly and indirectly,
- 8) They are not always observable. The use of some strategies cannot be seen because they are mental associated acts, or because they are employed outside the classroom,
- 9) They are often conscious. Most of the time, learning strategies are carried on consciously, but after a certain amount of use, learning strategies can be used unconsciously,
- 10) They can be taught. Teachability can be done by strategy training for learners which helps learners become more conscious and strategic,
- 11) They are flexible. Learning strategies may not be in precise patterns, instead they are easy to combine and choose based on individual options,
- 12) They are influenced by a variety of factors. Many factors may influence the choice of learners on strategy

use in learning, such as degree of awareness, task requirements, level of learning, age, ethnicity, personality, interest, and motivation (Oxford, 1990).

2.4.5 Classification of language learning strategies

Language learning strategies have been presented with different classifications by many scholars. Yet, most of the classifications of learning strategies present more or less the same attempts of categorizing language learning strategies, there is no radical change within those categories. A variety of classifications of language learning strategies can be found in the field of strategy use in learning, therefore, this study is to present some of them which emerged as the cornerstones of strategy's classifications and of strategy use. In what follows, the taxonomy of learning strategies given by well-known researchers will be presented.

Rubin (as cited in Hardan, 2013; Hismanoglu, 2000; Griffiths, 2004; Griffiths & Oxford, 2014), who initially made the contribution to the field of learning strategies, divides learning strategies into three kinds regarding whether strategies direct or indirect contributing to language learning. According to Rubin, the three kinds are *Learning Strategies*, which include cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies, *Communication Strategies*, and *Social Strategies* (Hismanoglu, 2000). In the category of learning strategies, cognitive learning strategies are steps which involve "direct analysis, transformation, or synthesis of learning materials", while metacognitive learning strategies are used to monitor, manage or self-directed language learning (Hismanoglu, 2000, p. 3). For O'Malley et al. (as cited in Hismanoglu, 2000; Sepasdar & Soori, 2014; Griffiths, 2004), the division of the category of language learning strategies differs from the Rubin's one, that is, there are three broad categories of language learning strategies, *Metacognitive strategies* (self-awareness on learning), *Cognitive strategies* (distinct clarification on learning activities), and *Socio-affective strategies*.

The variety of classifications on learning strategy have contributed to difficulties with the understanding of learning strategy categories (Hardan, 2013).

Attempting to amend the inconsistency of terminology on classification language learning strategies, the comprehensive classification is presented by Oxford (Oxford, 1990; Sepasdar & Soori, 2014; Nisbet et al., 2005; Hardan, 2013; Hismanoglu, 2000). Oxford (1990), who refers to the main aim of language learning strategies as developing communicative competence, classified language learning strategies into six groups, *Cognitive strategies*, *Meta-cognitive strategies*, *Memory-related strategies*, *Compensation strategies*, *Affective strategies*, and *Social strategies*. In her system, these six categories also are grouped into two types of strategies, Direct and Indirect (Figure 1). Direct strategies, which are Cognitive, Memory-related and Compensation strategies, are directly involved in a language learning process and encourage learners to learn the target language. Whereas indirect strategies, which are Meta-cognitive, Affective and Social strategies, do not directly support the process of language learning but indirectly help learners get involved with the target language (Chuin & Kaur, 2015; Hismanoglu, 2000; Hardan, 2013).

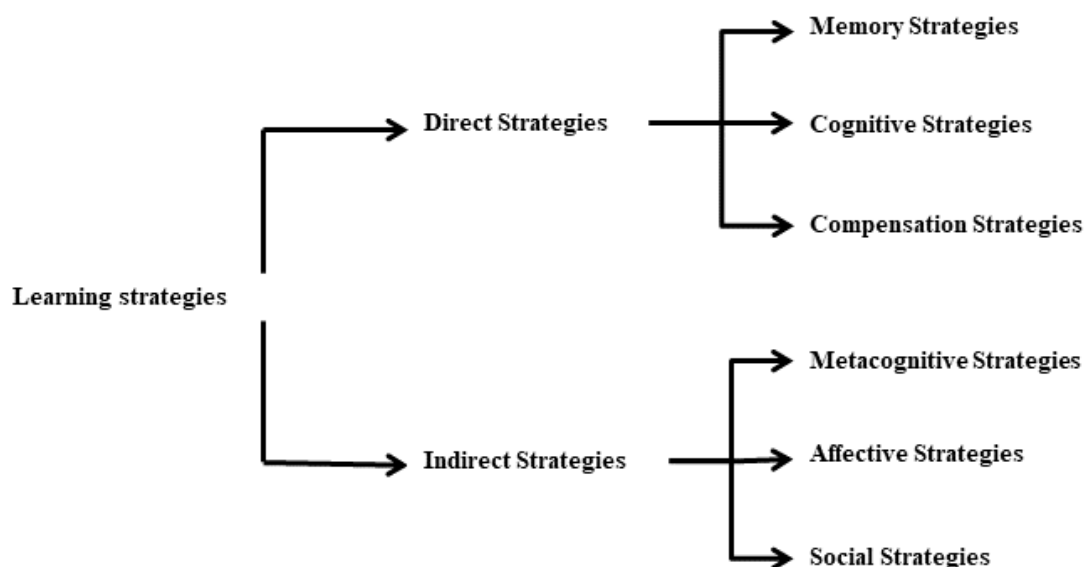


FIGURE 1. Diagram of the learning strategy system, Oxford (1990, p. 16)

According to the explanation of Arulselvi (2016) and Muniandy and Shuib (2016), in the group of direct strategies, cognitive strategies mainly focus on learners'

interactions with the target language in direct ways, such as taking notes, outlining and analyzing what they have learned; memory-related strategies help learners construct new concepts based on their previous knowledge through showing familiar images and sounds to recall their memories; compensation strategies are used to assist learners' knowledge to be comprehensive and holistic through guessing and rephrasing from the context of listening and reading. Meanwhile, in the group of indirect strategies, metacognitive strategies are used to observe, plan and evaluate a learning project in order to help learners realize and analyze the knowledge that they have learned; affective strategies usually are used with other learners in order to gain support from one another and supervise their emotions and attitudes in the process of language learning; social strategies are used to communicate with peers or others to gain a better understanding of the culture of the target language, for instance talking with native English speakers (Oxford, 1990). Affective strategies and social strategies, in other words, can be recognized as communication strategies (Lee & Heinz, 2016).

2.5 Research on learning strategy use and language achievement

2.5.1 Academic achievement

Since the aim of this study is to elaborate the strategy use of international students in the process of their English learning and the role of strategy use in their learning, therefore, the term academic achievement is considered as one of the key concepts which stands for learners' learning outcomes in this section. Academic language is believed as an essential factor in achieving success in terms of literacy tasks (such as reading scientific texts, writing reports, research papers, and literature reviews), it is "to resort to the contexts for its use - the language used in school, in writing, in public, in formal settings" (Snow & Uccelli, 2009, p. 112).

In terms of academic English, Scarcella (2003) writes that academic English is "a variety of English used in professional books and characterized by the specific linguistic features associated with academic disciplines" (p. 9). The use of academic

English is more frequent in the field of academics than in everyday situations. That is, the use of academic English in language differs from what is spoken in conversation with its complexity and rich vocabulary. In relation to this, the study of Snow and Uccelli (2009) presents that even though some university students have advanced skills in speaking part of English, they may struggle with writing and reading tasks in higher education. It is believed that these students' academic-language skills can be improved by proposing instructional strategies (Snow & Uccelli, 2009).

It is challenging for language learners to acquire academic English at once since it is different from daily English. Scarcella (2003) further explains that acquiring academic English is a challenging task because academic English is dynamic, in other words, academic English is a process of continuous growing and evolving in contexts, the contexts themselves are ever-changing. Zamel and Spack (2012) also point out that there is no common standard of academic English practice that fits into each individual learning as academic English encompasses different dynamic and evolving literacies, in simple terms, academic English itself is diverse.

Therefore, it is hard to provide learners an explicit instruction for improving their academic language and academic language skills, and to explain what exactly the ideal progress of academic language achievement may look like (Snow & Uccelli, 2009). According to Scarcella (2003), there are primary features of academic English can be taught if academic English is aimed to achieve in learning, 1) to develop learners' advanced levels of proficiency in each part of English language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), and 2) to develop learners' advanced reading skills which support them in understanding complex vocabulary and making use of these words in oral and written English. It is believed that long-term academic success is particularly associated with proficiency in reading and writing (Scarcella, 2003).

2.5.2 Language proficiency

All learners are required to develop their proficiency in four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) for making a diverse range of communications in

both types of situations, everyday and academic (Scarcella, 2003). Language proficiency, therefore, seems to be part of language achievement that relates to academic achievement in the way of helping learners to understand contexts properly. In this section, the definition of language proficiency, especially English language proficiency, and its importance in learners' language achievement will be displayed.

Oller (as cited in Hamzah et al., 2015, p. 54) describes language proficiency as "an ability of several distinct but related constructs", whereas Bachman (1990, p. 16) describes language proficiency is similar with "language ability" or "ability in a language", that is, in general, proficiency refers to a learner's capability and comprehension in using a language no matter how and where the learner has acquired the capability and comprehension. Rachmawaty, Wello, Akil, & Dollah (2018) have provided a new definition of proficiency, that is, it is the ability that improves individuals' domain-specific language skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking), and that be able to use a culturally appropriate language for the purpose of conducting spontaneous communications in real life situations without rehearsal.

Language strategies are related to effective language learning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Green & Oxford, 1995), and the use of language learning strategies is associated with language proficiency (Wharton, 2000; Green & Oxford, 1995). According to Gardner and MacIntyre (1993), there are three variables that influence language proficiency in a sophisticated way, the types of learning strategies in use - as one of the three - help to minimize learners' learning difficulties in learning and contribute to language proficiency. It is believed that in contrast to less effective learners, more effective learners tend to apply a great number of learning strategies to achieve language proficiency (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). In a similar vein, Wharton (2000) also presents that more and more learning strategies are chosen and applied for individual tasks in the process of learning by more proficient language learners compared to less proficient language learners.

In terms of English language proficiency, it is recognized as an important feature in enriching international students' experiences (Halic, 2009). For example, social interactions among students highly require language proficiency from learners in order to share their feelings, individual stories, and personal experiences to one another. In their studies, Martirosyan, Hwang, & Wanjohi (2015, p.61) present that English proficiency of learners may affect their "social-cultural and psychological adjustment", in other words, low English proficiency can be seen as one of the causes of isolation from the big international community. According to Trice (2007), international students may be detached from their peers and staff of universities due to low English proficiency.

English language proficiency also helps students prepare themselves for challenges and achieve their full potential in the future as it is essential for students to develop their studies for employment purposes (Hamzah et al., 2015). Empirical research indicates that English proficiency is imperative to accomplish learners' related studies in an English-medium education system in higher education, especially for those who speak English as a second and/or foreign language (Martirosyan et al., 2015; Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2010; Drennan & Rohde, 2002). In their study, Drennan and Rohde (2002, p. 37) found that some university international students who accessed limited use of English and low language proficiency in Australia have encountered more language problems in advanced subjects compared to introductory level subjects, that is because advanced subjects would be more demanding with strict requirements for students' language proficiency and their performances on problem-solving activities which interpretive skill would be required.

There are various methods suggested to evaluate language proficiency, Green and Oxford (1995) present some of them in their studies, such as *self-assessing*, *language achievement tests*, *entrance examinations*, *the grades of language courses*, *years of language study*, and *career status*. And yet, not any of them can be a precise predictor to measure either learners' language proficiency or their academic success (Mar-

tirosyan et al., 2015; Kuo, 2011). Fox (2004) points out that language tests, for example, do not consider the influence of other factors - the factors like the social network of support, the time period of studying abroad, academic acculturation and adjustment - that may significantly affect learners' academic performance.

When it comes to academic performance, even native English students may also perceive academic difficulties in their studies regardless of their high language proficiency. Native students tend to have greater verbal fluency in English than non-native students, but it does not indicate that there is no difficulty in their learning in the field of academic English. Kuo (2011) presents that language proficiency which is evaluated by test scores presents one's general performance in English - how fluent and well she/he is, but it hardly represents in one's academic field.

2.5.3 The relationship between learning strategy use and language achievement

The value of strategy use in language learning has been supported by different researchers (Khodadady, 2009; Hayati, 2015). This may lead us to consider the relationship between the use of learning strategies and language achievement in learning. The association between language learning strategy use and academic success of learners has been discussed in many studies (Ardasheva, 2010; Murray, 2010; Bremner, 1999). In his study, Rahman (2010) holds the view that there is a relationship between the use of learning strategies and language achievement in English. It is explained that the use of learning strategies and its role are crucial in learners' academic achievements, that is, the strategies which are used by a learner for learning a certain task affect the quality of learning outcomes the learner achieved (McInerney, Cheng, Mok, & Lam, 2012).

In the study of Park (1997, p. 216), it is revealed that the relationship between strategy use and language proficiency in learning is a linear process, and certain strategies are used more frequently by more proficient learners than others. Other similar findings also indicate that the relationship between learners' strategy use

and their language achievements in learning work positively, that is, the greater learning strategies are used in language learning, the higher level of language proficiency would be achieved (Abar & Loken, 2010; Green & Oxford, 1995; Wharton, 2000; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). According to Abraham and Vann (as cited in Bremner, 1999), a large repertoire of strategies is employed by successful learners and practiced more frequently in learning. Therefore, it seems that the frequent use of learning strategies leads learners to success and achieve the higher level of language proficiency in learning.

Other results have suggested that their relationship in learning is more than a linear process. Even though the study of Green and Oxford (1995) indicates a positive relationship between strategy use and language proficiency - learners become more proficient if more learning strategies are applied, the study of Chand (2014) presents that there is a subject of debate about the exact nature of the association, particularly the issue of causality between the use of learning strategies and language proficiency. In relation to this, Skehan (as cited in Chand, 2014) and Rees-Miller (as cited in Chand, 2014) hold the view that a correlation between these two hardly means to suggest a cause-and-effect relationship. It is possible to perceive that language proficiency is not directly influenced by the use of language learning strategies and that the use of language learning strategies can be one of the factors to profoundly affect language proficiency, and yet, strategy use in learning is to increase proficiency in language skills despite all these debates (Chand, 2014).

3 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

Before presenting the importance and implementation of the study, I would like to explain my personal experience and interest in the topic of strategy use in language learning. For me, the process of English learning, as a foreign language, started from grade 8. Even though it was taught at formal educational setting, I barely had a strong foundation of English until I was in high school. This can be explained from

different aspects, 1) the status of English in my region, 2) the focus of language teaching at school, 3) lack of opportunities to learn the language outside school. I am not confident enough to state that my English had improved while I was at school because of the school curriculum and language teaching system. I did not have any chance to use the language in my region but attending a private language center, the place which made great progress in my English level.

In terms of strategy use in language, I have applied different kinds of strategies in my language learning in order to overcome my learning difficulties and improve my language skills as fast as possible. At the beginning, the learning environments that I possessed until I was in university did not allow me to choose as many strategies as I expected. Some choices were compulsorily made for the purpose of learning the language, without any motivation and interest in learning the language. The after constructing the basis of the English language, insight is gained into which part of English was of interest to me and how I may involve with the language. Based on my constructed knowledge and my personality, I have eventually further developed and selected my learning strategies consciously. In a nutshell, my initial learning environments made me choose some strategies that I did not like, then I had applied some strategies only after I found myself interested in the language.

Indeed, I have addressed my learning difficulties and have achieved language outcomes in my learning process. However, there are still some other parts of English I should prepare myself to learn, for this, I have been employing some strategies in order to keep my interest in the language. I perceive that my English has become better with the contribution of the strategies applied in my language learning, but I also attributed my learning outcomes to the efforts of the other factors, such as my personal interest in learning and a constant exploration of better learning environments. I have believed that every single individual has certain ways to learn a language, and it is important for individuals to figure out which ways would entirely work for them.

Therefore, the field of language learning and strategy use has become of interest to me throughout the discussions on language learning and learning environments that I have had so far with people who are from different parts of the world. Along with the discussions, the idea for this research was born out of curiosity about how people learn a language in their own ways with their own strategies and what makes them choose those strategies in language learning.

4 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH

QUESTIONS

Language learning strategies have been discussed as beneficial tools for learners to engage with a new language easily and effectively. Empirical research has been done in previous studies regarding the reflection of learners in language learning and the growth of language learning strategy use among learners (Chamot, 2005; Chamorro et al., 2017; Chand, 2014; McMullen, 2009). However, due to the controversies on the definition of strategies and research methodology, the use of learning strategies is not always acknowledged as it is expected in many contexts, there is still a lack of agreement between different scholars in the field of language learning strategies (see section 2.4). There are still research gaps should be addressed through conducting further research and discussions in different parts of the world to help learners get involved with the process of learning language strategically and develop successful language learning (Chuin & Kaur, 2015).

Therefore, this study aims to understand how learners identify their individual learning strategies in English learning and how they perceive the importance of their individual strategies in learning. The choice of learning strategies in language learning is also considered as one of the main aims of the study. Moreover, the study takes the relationship between strategy use in learning and learners' language achievement into account in order to elaborate on the role of strategy use in language

learning. Through asking participants to talk about their English learning experiences with the description of learning environments, insight is gained into how they perceive their learning processes in English learning and how they explain their own choices on learning strategies. In order to achieve the aims of the study, individual interviews were designed on the basis of the following research questions.

Research questions:

- 1) How do participants describe their individual learning trajectories in English learning?
- 2) How do they explain their strategy choices in language learning?
- 3) How do they perceive the relationship between language achievement and language learning strategy use?

5 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

5.1 Context

This study proceeded at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. Six faculties of the university host a total of 15,000 students from all over Finland and almost 100 countries around the world (University of Jyväskylä, 2017). Even though there is no stated exact number of international degree students, the number of the students was estimated by the Student Union around 425 in 2017 (Kruid, 2017). There are fourteen high-quality, research-based two-year master's degree English programmes provided for students all over the world (Master's Programmes, 2018). Besides, diverse language activities and other programs are offered to both local and international students in order to bridge the gap between other cultures and the local culture, Finnish culture. In order to apply to a master's programme in English, proficiency in the English language is required for all students in one of the ways described in the programme-specific admission criteria (How to apply, 2019). The eligibility of applicants for master's programs in the University is determined with

their documented English language proficiency (e.g. IELTS or Cambridge English Test). In such a case, students have a certain level in the English language before the start of any international degree programmes.

International master's degree programmes provide diverse English medium compulsory courses and other optional courses to students either in their applied fields or other interested areas at the University. The university language center, for example, offers over 700 courses in which students are able to possess multilingual academic communication skills - the skills they need to acquire for their studies and future careers (Welcome to the Language Center, 2018). Apart from the compulsory communication and language studies included in a master's degree, students are free to take other language courses based on their learning interests and needs (Welcome to the Language Center, 2018). Student life is also associated with local and international interactions that students easily engage with one another via using English.

5.2 Participants

A total of twelve international master's students from different programmes participated in the study. The recruitment of participants was accomplished in two ways: via personal contact and a local university related group on Facebook. The reason of choosing personal contact was that all international programmes open up many opportunities for students to meet new faces from different continents in different faculties, so I, as a researcher, made use of my international networks. It is also believed that personal contact avoids nervousness and discomfort within the period of data collection. And the reason of recruiting some of the participants via Facebook was the consideration of the limited personal contact and of the diversity of participants. It is considered that recruiting the similar background of participants in my personal contact may not be able to entirely illustrate the aims of the study. It is believed that the research questions of the study would be well addressed with rich data comes from different backgrounds of participants.

The diversity of participants is considered in the study in order to illustrate the differences in learners on strategy use in learning. They are diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, personal motivation, and the experience of language learning and of education system. The ages of participants varied from 23 to 40 and the majority of the participants are from Europe, Asia, and Central America. Most of them are on their second year of master's studies at the university.

The participants' backgrounds and basic language information are considered as important to highlight the study. Because the study is about to examine the process of language learning (especially the process of learning English) and the use of learning strategies in language, it is important to have knowledge about the status of English in their home countries and the school focus of learning English. The number of participants' spoken languages in total and a degree in English medium also are believed as key factors that would be likely to influence their learning processes in the current international program. Moreover, the school focus of participants on learning English is considered as an important factor that may affect the process of participants' English learning. Therefore, two basic questions were asked from participants as supportive sources for the study, which are regarding the degree of participants was held in English medium, and the previous school focus of participants in learning English. These two points may make differences among learners in terms of language learning strategy use and their learning environments. The following table (Table 1) provides a good overview about participants, their language backgrounds in general and other related information about their English learning experiences in particular.

TABLE 1. An overview about participants

NAME	HOME COUNTRY	NUMBERS OF SPOKEN LANGUAGES	DEGREE IN ENGLISH MEDIUM	SCHOOL FOCUS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
PARTICIPANT 1	Vietnamese	2	The current master's degree	Mostly grammar, reading and writing

PARTICIPANT 2	India	4	All her degrees	Reading and writing
PARTICIPANT 3	Singapore	2	All her degrees	Reading and writing
PARTICIPANT 4	South Korea	4	The current master's degree	Reading, grammar, vocabulary
PARTICIPANT 5	South Korea	4	Bachelor's degree & master's degree	after a change, mainly reading and grammar
PARTICIPANT 6	South Korea	2	First master's degree	Grammar, vocabulary, and reading
PARTICIPANT 7	Indonesia	2	The current master's degree	All parts
PARTICIPANT 8	America	4	All her degrees	All parts
PARTICIPANT 9	India	3	All her degrees	All parts
PARTICIPANT 10	Finland	5	The current master's degree	Grammar, vocabulary, and reading
PARTICIPANT 11	Japan	3	The current master's degree	Reading, writing and imitating sounds.
PARTICIPANT 12	Czech Republic	3	The current master's degree	Reading, grammar and writing.

5.3 Method of data collection

5.3.1 Interviews

The aim of this study is to understand learners' perspectives on English language learning, to highlight the choice of learning strategies in the process of learning, and

to investigate learners' perceptions on the relationship between learning achievement and their learning strategy use. It also seeks an understanding on how international students at the University of Jyväskylä make use of their language strategies in academic learning. To shed light on this, qualitative research was conducted for this study as it is believed that qualitative research has the superiority of "the richness of collected data" (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen, & Kyngäs, 2014, p. 5). Qualitative research is also to help readers have an in-depth understanding about the investigated research topics by examining and analysing rich data sets (Lichtman, 2014).

In the study, individual interviews were conducted with participants and each interview lasted between forty-five and fifty-five minutes. The reason for conducting interviews was to understand the current phenomenon being discussed and to engage with participants' experiences and attitudes (Dufva, 2011). Participants also feel less peer pressure in individual interviews and provide socially desirable responses (Cohen, 1998). Therefore, in this study, the focus of the individual interviews was (1) to get a better understanding about the individual experiences in the process of language learning, (2) to equally balance the participation of interviewees, and (3) to elaborate their individual voices on the choice of learning strategies and the benefits of applied strategies in learning.

5.3.2 Preparation for the interviews

Before starting the interviews, a description of the research was given to all participants (see Appendix 1). By doing so, the information of the study was delivered to participants so that they understood what participation they have agreed to and what the topic of the research, but there was not so much background information given about the specific topic in order to avoid too much influencing of the participants' answers.

Participants were instructed with a short instruction to bring some images that would be likely to reflect their language learning experiences or language learning environments (Table 2). It is also perceived that the images help participants emphasize their individual learning strategies in contexts and make the interviews run smoothly. Seven participants provided their personal learning environment images, but considering the related content and privacy, there will be no image presented in this study.

TABLE 2. The given instruction

Please, bring some images/photos which can reflect your individual learning environment. The images/photos can be diverse physical locations, contexts, and cultures in which students learn. In the basis of these images/photos, please tell me your own learning stories (e.g. how many languages do you speak, how did you learn the English language, why you chose this learning environment, etc.). If you are not able to find appropriate images/photos, a rough description of your individual learning environments is also helpful for my study. Besides, you will be asked to describe the way of choosing your learning strategies towards learning English and your strategies' role in your learning process (other related questions will be asked during the interview).

I, the researcher, posed interview questions based on the research questions. That is, interview questions were divided into three parts and each part consists of small segments which were representative for relative research questions (see Appendix 2). Even though the questions were listed in interview, participants were encouraged to talk about their own learning trajectories freely and openly. Each interviewee had similar questions but several sub-questions were slightly different on the basis of participants' learning backgrounds, for example, the choice of learning environments for native English participants.

5.4 Method of data analysis

5.4.1 Qualitative content analysis

To analyse the data, qualitative content analysis was applied because of the data format, it is an open answer format. Qualitative content analysis is defined as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their con-

text” (Krippendorff, 2018, p. 403) and described as an appealing method which provides a model to systemize the process of qualitative analysis with explicit procedures, and this helps to examine the quality of the analysis process (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Qualitative content analysis is to focus on investigations of texts, mainly in large communicative research, and it explains the characteristics of the content of a document through studying people’s ideas and their influences on other aspects, therefore, the research method provides a systematic model to develop the process of data analysis with a better quality and a clear procedure (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). This study combines two qualitative approaches, which are theory-driven approach (deductive) and data-driven approach (inductive), since both elements can be found. It is deductive in that it is informed by existing language learning strategy theories and models from previous research, while it is inductive in that it avoids applying preconceived categories related to the use of language learning strategies and consciousness in language learning strategy use. The current research also allows some preconceived concepts to flow from the data and finds out new information and variables.

5.4.2 Transcription

Different types of data can be addressed by conducting qualitative content analysis, but the first step of conducting content analysis is to transform participants’ voices into written format (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). In this study, audio was recorded during the interviews. The process of transcription occupied comparatively long period of time as there was a large amount of data that need to be addressed. There were two approaches of transcribing applied in the study, *A full transcription goes with line by line* and *A catalogue of topic summaries with time-stamps*. A full transcription was applied for those parts that correspond with the focus of the study as well as the research questions. A catalogue of topics, on the other hand, was used for the contents that illustrate the excessive details. Using a time-stamped summary was to find a specific content in the analysis if some details were needed for the research. As a transcript convention, three dots between square brackets ([...]) was used to

indicate that some unrelated sentences and examples of the original transcript has been omitted or that the transcript starts or ends in the middle of interviews. In order to consider confidentiality for the participants of the study, code names were given to them, e.g. P1, P2, P3, etc.

5.4.3 Coding and Analysis

After accomplishing the process of transcribing, repetitive readings of the transcript were required for the next step, *Coding and Analysis*. According to the guide of conducting content analysis by Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017), the process of coding and analysis was done through addressing the data set as following steps. First, dividing the data set into small parts as meaning units. Then, condensing the meaning unit but retaining the core meaning. Once having condensed meaning units, formulate codes based on the condensations and then group them into themes. The following example (Table 3) is illustrative of the process of coding and analysis.

TABLE 3. Example of coding and analysis of the study

Description of personal learning trajectories	
Meaning unit	<p>We studied the language as a subject in school, usually start to learn the language from 3rd grade.</p> <p>I started English in private classes and also by myself, and schools organized classes as a compulsory subject for some reasons. So three ways of learning English.</p> <p>the school mainly focused on grammar, but listening and speaking, writing skills were not too much.</p> <p>I had encountered lots of language barriers to understand what the teacher taught. I asked my teacher to give me some websites that I can learn the language at home, she helped me a lot.</p>
Meaning units condensations	<p>At school, started from 3rd grade.</p> <p>The focus at school was mostly grammar and little listening, speaking, and writing.</p> <p>The way of learning was with three types of learning environments, such as school, private classes and my own way.</p> <p>Got support from my foreign teachers in private classes.</p> <p>In order to cope with some language barriers, I used different strategies alternatively rather constantly.</p>
Codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Takes a long time to learn the language. -Various learning environments applied. -School focus was limited -Support from others, teachers. -Language difficulties exist, applied language learning strategies
Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The learning process is long -Learning environments of the learning process -Support from surroundings -Difficulties (mainly in speaking and writing)

5.5 Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity demonstrate research findings with trustworthiness and display the process of research with precision, by doing so, the reader can easily construct a clear understanding on related research topics and other encountered terms (Roberts, Priest, & Traynor, 2006). Reliability refers to trustworthiness and accountability in qualitative research studies and it aims to establish the argument that the findings displayed in a study are worth to be respected (Elo et al., 2014). This can be

done by presenting a number of research features, such as what the research questions are, how and when data are collected, who the target group is, how the process of analysis work, and what results are obtained (Roberts et al., 2006). Elo and Kyngäs (2008) suggest that the process of data analysis and findings needs to be dissected throughout the description of the process in order to allow the reader to have a better understanding on the procedure of data collection and analysis.

To increase the reliability of this study, as it is evident from section 5.4.3, I, as a researcher, have displayed and described the process of coding and analysis in as much detail as possible when reporting the results. Data was condensed based on the meaning units and was constantly quoted in the subsections of analysis in order to make defensible inferences for the reader. Elo & Kyngäs (2008) present that providing a clear account of the overall context, selection and backgrounds of interviewees, data collection and analysis is important to increase the reliability. Therefore, in this research, I have given a clear explanation of the participants and their related backgrounds, the process of collecting and analyzing data. In addition to this, some related information was also given with the format of tables.

Validity refers to the accuracy of participants' reliabilities for the phenomena under investigation and also the credibility of the phenomena for the participants (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Validity is to evaluate how well the research methods are carried out to address the research questions of a study (Roberts et al., 2006). In their study, Roberts et al. (2006) describe that the term of validity is more precise than the concept of reliability because of the precision of the findings, that is, validity addresses what the researcher believes he or she is measuring from what he or she intended to measure.

To increase the validity of this study, researcher reflexivity and thick-rich description procedures were employed. As it is shown in section 3, I have reported on my entering beliefs and personal experiences related to the research topic and have suspended my biases along with the process of data analysis to let the reader know

my positions. I also have presented verbatim accounts and statements of the participants to assist the reader to understand that the account is credible. It is believed that credibility was well established in this study through the lens of the reader.

5.6 Research ethics

Research ethics have been considered as important as other chapters of the study during the whole research process. Participation was voluntary and consent forms which were adapted from the template provided by the university were distributed to participants. Participants were informed about the goals of the study before starting the individual interviews. They were also told about the data in use for other research in the future and consent can be withdrawn later at any point of the research process. Anonymity and confidentiality of participants were crucially considered in research since they freely expressed their own values and ideas, positive and negative, about their learning experiences at different learning environments. There is no name published in this thesis, and codes are used to refer to participants. Participants gave informed consent and signed the forms during the interview section (see Appendix 3).

6 FINDINGS

In this chapter, categorized themes from the process of coding and analysis will be presented. As mentioned above, themes have been grouped after formulating large amounts of data about valuable learning English experiences, personal opinions regarding the choice of language learning strategies and language achievement. The categorization of themes aimed to feed the research questions of the study. In what follows, research questions will be answered with the elaboration of condensed themes from data and related examples from the participants.

6.1 Description of personal learning trajectories

6.1.1 Learning English

When asking about their personal learning experiences in learning English, all participants reported that the process of learning starts considerably early and takes a long period of time to be good at it. Of twelve participants who described their early learning processes, three narrated that an informal connection between the participants and their language learning started before their involvement with systematic learning at school. The reason for having a connection with the language can be explained by various reasons, such as the influence of their living environments, of immigration, and entertainment. The role of the connection was not the same in their learning, either all positive or all negative. This will be presented in the section of Learning environments. The rest of them, nine participants, started learning English from school environments - earliest first grade and latest third grade. English was a subject at school and considered as a native, official or second and foreign language based on the status of English in their home countries.

1. Our family moved to England when I was 4.5, I was immersed in the English community from the first year in kindergarten[...] (P5)
2. English was the first language I learned as a second language from 3rd grade... when I started learning, there was no one around me to speak the language, so even I could not practice with anybody[...] It was just relying on school only[...] (P12)

Even though the systematic learning of English has ended at school, for some participants the process of learning English has been continuing as they recognized their English skills not as excellent as they had expected. In other words, there are still some difficulties that need to be fixed, especially in the academic term. This will be illustrated in subsection 6.1.5.

6.1.2 The focus of learning English

All participants perceived English learning as a holistic process which includes four language skills, reading, writing, speaking, and listening. However, the school

focus of English learning was not as diverse as participants awaited. As shown in Table 2, when participants were asked the focus of their learning in school environments, the majority commented that the focus was mainly on reading with vocabulary and writing with grammar. In addition to that, the majority of participants agreed with the statement that a little speaking and listening were achieved at school. One interviewee put it:

3. It is ironic, in class we focus on reading, writing, and grammar. But people only say you are good at English when you are good at the speaking part, cause that's the most noticeable part. (P4)

Because of this limitation, many of them have chosen additional learning environments which can help them update their English skills.

4. There was an English class in school, but to be honest, I don't think that made my English ability these days. Because I have been to a kind of private tutoring as well...You can never speak fluently as such if just rely on school classes. (P4)
5. By participating in other private programmes, I was able to produce the language, speak the language, but then the grammar that I got at school gave a foundation of correctness for my language. (P5)

6.1.3 Learning environment

Apart from learning environments at school, participants have chosen their individual learning environments in different ways. Some participants were aware of the level of their English skills and pursued better ways to improve their English skills. They had better knowledge about their needs towards language learning so that they searched for various learning settings where the needs can be fulfilled and their learning skills can be improved. Then, their optimal learning environments were selected and used for long-term learning after experiencing a number of try-outs. In all interviews, participants suggested that an ideal learning environment should be comfortable for learners, supportive for the learning aims, and enjoyable for the learning process.

6. [...] Even though I had English as a subject at the university, I still needed to go to a learning center to study English. Because the English subject in my program was really basic and simple, the content is not so much, especially for the academic field[...] (P1)

7. For me sometimes it is boring if I study only the language, currently, I am studying my degree in English, so I practice my English in my studies as well. Combining my courses with the English language is the ideal one for me to learn the language because, in this way, I can learn something more than the language itself at the same time. (P11)

While others did not consciously select their learning environments as the environments were already fixed by other elements, such as their home countries and living environments where English is mainly used as an official language. For this case, English was easily found anywhere around them - in school settings or out of school. These participants barely intended to place themselves in particular learning settings to learn the language, especially to practice their speaking skills. One participant reported:

8. I didn't really intend to attend courses or memorize vocabulary. Because my environment is English friendly compared to other average Korean people. (P4)

These participants made better use of their advantage by being exposed and being immersed in those environments.

9. I was placed in the English learning environment, I don't remember how I learned it, I was only in the speaking English environment, from that point, I want to speak English everywhere[...] (P8)
10. My country is a multinational country, there are a lot of prints with different languages around us, but mainly in English. English is the main language which has been used in everywhere[...] (P3)
11. My environment gave me enough space to improve, I wouldn't say I put a lot of effort into speaking to myself or going to a class or anything like that, but my environment[...] pushed me to learn the language[...] (P2)

For those who have been overseas for different reasons (such as studying Erasmus and other master's programs, and conducting an internship), their learning environments played significant roles in their learning by providing numerous interacting chances with native and non-native English speakers while being abroad. Some have mentioned that they found their interests in learning the language because of their short-term abroad experiences, e.g. traveling.

12. [...] After going abroad for a short time, I found my interest in the language. (P4)

However, the most striking result to emerge from the data is that even though having learning environments is essential to language learning, without self-interest for the language, the most influential learning settings hardly work. For a big number of participants, not having a good learning environment particularly towards the speaking part was the reason to pursue other learning settings in where the participants believe their English may become better.

13. [...] My parents could not speak the language[...] there was no one around me to speak the language even though I wanted to practice, no one could not help me out[...] I was looking for people who can speak the language and trying to be in that environment[...] (P12)

Whilst a minority mentioned that having learning environments may have a significant influence on language learning, but it does not have predominance in producing better English, instead, learning environment only works entirely for those who may be of interest to learning the language.

14. [...] I think although it was already in my environment in the first place, it takes a lot of self-motivation and self-interest to explore (the language) further[...] (P2)
15. Learning environments are important, but interest does matter for language learning, I think it is more important than that[...] (P7)

In relation to this, a few participants described the process of learning Finnish at university. The majority of participants demonstrated that a number of Finnish environments are available to learn the language at university (e.g. Finnish students around the university and Finnish language courses at the university language center), but they are not interested in learning Finnish by using the environments they are surrounded with. Even though they have studied in Finland for quite some time and have taken compulsory language courses for degree studies, still they did not learn well Finnish because of the lack of learning interest.

16. [...] Cause if I am not interested in a language, then I am forced to learn it, I cannot remember well, here I learnt Finnish cause I have to, it was a compulsory course for us, but I didn't learn well[...] (P7)

6.1.4 Support from networks

The benefits of gaining support from other people while learning the language were mentioned by the majority of participants. Getting support from others helped the participants generally overcome their common difficulties, such as being afraid of making mistakes and being shy to use the language. Support from teachers was important for the participants while they engaged with a different language. According to these participants, the encouragement from their teachers drove the participants forward in the learning process despite the unfamiliarity of the language. The support of teachers also directly influenced the participants' language interests in learning. From the description of participants, the teachers' support not only guided participants to become active and motivated in learning but also inspired them to engage with various language learning opportunities outside the classroom.

17. [...]What affected the most was the teacher herself, she was really supportive, she offered a lot of chances to practice the language, like we got English magazines from the UK with lots of cool stuff[...] (P12)
18. I had a very inferior complex telling me that I am not going to speak English as good as them[...] The help from my professor showed me that it is okay to make mistakes, because the surroundings all I had, it allows me to make mistakes. (P2)

Commenting on teachers' support, a few participants reported their language experiences without the encouragement of teachers. They depicted that they had lost their interest in learning English and had become less motivated in addressing their learning difficulties.

19. I had many difficulties in learning because of my language teacher[...] she neither gave us support to learn the language nor helped us get involved with the language, I was demotivated, I felt I am not good at English, I had no motivation to learn[...] (P10)

Apart from the support of teachers, parents also played an important role in some participants' learning processes. Parents of some participants have participated in their kids' learning processes by supporting them to find out what is good for the participants to master the language. Their involvements positively affected the participants and their language learning. For example, one interviewee said:

20. [...] My learning process was like the bottom line with basic classes and school, next there was a private education comes, and then my mom was trying to seek as many opportunities as possible for me to be in English environments. (P4)

In addition to this, other types of support were also depicted by a small number of participants, e.g. support from classmates, relatives, and friends.

21. [...] I think the learning process of English is complex that couldn't be done by solo. You need certain learning environments and support to hold you back, then you can see outcomes[...] (P2)

6.1.5 Learning difficulties in English

When participants were asked whether they have encountered any learning challenge in the process of learning, all but one commented on the existence of learning difficulties. Some difficulties of participants were in common whilst other of them were different depending on the way of the participants' learning. Even though the focus of the study was not about learning difficulty itself, giving some examples of reported difficulties is considered as important 1) to explain the process of participants' language learning and 2) to provide a better understanding for the individual choice of learning strategies.

According to participants, the common learning difficulties in the learning process were, to find English speaking environments, to memorize vocabulary and its spelling, to work with good language teachers, and to improve their academic skills. In order to address these challenges, participants explored particular language learning strategies and implemented them in the way of understanding their own learning processes. This will be presented in the following section 6.2.

Over half of those interviewed stated that a few minor learning difficulties still exist in their learning and the existence hardly bothers them in their master's degree studies. They reported that they feel comfortable with their difficulties since their language skills were not disturbed by those difficulties. This is because they believed that learning English is a long process and their current learning will assist them to sort out their challenges.

22. [...] I still have them (the learning difficulties), but now I study in psychology and books are only in English, also my surroundings are helping me, I am constantly learning from others[...] (P10)
23. It would be nice if entirely overcome all of them, but I would not put so much effort to do so. Talking with my native friends, I might catch up a few expressions[...] (P5)
24. I haven't overcome these problems, for academic writing, I am still working on it, I think I am trying to imitate the authors of academic papers, how to use phrases and explanations[...] (P11)

6.2 Explanation of the choice of language learning strategies in learning

6.2.1 Language learning strategies

During the second phase of the interview questions, participants mainly were asked about their learning strategies applied in the process of English learning and the reason for choosing particular strategies. The main theme of this study, Language learning strategy, linked up with the previous subtopic, The discussion of how the participants addressed their learning difficulties. As mentioned above, when they were asked to talk about their learning difficulties, participants also reported how those learning problems were tackled. A common view amongst interviewees was that all of them have applied various learning strategies, consciously and unconsciously, to minimize their learning difficulties. As one interviewee put it: "language learning strategies supplied to everyone, even though for natives" (P6).

Issues related to language learning strategy itself were not particularly prominent in the study, however, it is assumed that providing some sources related to learning strategies is fundamental to gain insight into how learners make their choices on the use of learning strategies. For instance, when participants were asked about the issue of learning difficulty and learning environment, a number of individual learning strategies were exemplified and identified. Participants described their strategies by giving specific examples and descriptive words rather than naming the terminology of the strategies. According to the description of participants, a variety of learning strategies have been applied in English learning, and the most

common learning strategy applied among participants was memorization, which described as compulsory to everyone who learned the language and as fundamental to develop other language skills.

25. I used to read flashcards, mornings, afternoons and evenings, going through back and back. Trying to see how I can use in my daily conversation[...] (P9)
26. My strategy to remember vocabulary was memorizing, which I disagree with how I learned or the teacher chose how to taught, typical vocabulary you might see in a test[...] but now I don't really remember the meaning of the word[...] (P8)

Even though some participants have had similar learning difficulties in language learning (e.g. difficult to find English speaking environments and memorizing vocabulary), the ways of tackling the difficulties were unique and individual. Namely, all participants applied a number of learning strategies in learning on the basis of their own choices to address the similar learning difficulties. For example, in terms of vocabulary memorization, the participants chose different strategies to aim at the difficulty of memorizing vocabulary, some used word blends and spelling, and others selected flashcards, note-taking and so on.

6.2.2 The choice of language learning strategies

When the choice of learning strategies was discussed, the majority of participants demonstrated the differences among language learners. According to the participants, the differences in personality, interest, learning types, attitudes, learning comfortability, motivation, influences from others made the choice of learning strategies individual. The most common view among interviewees was that learning strategies were chosen based on their personalities and interests in a specific part of learning English.

In terms of personality, seven out of twelve participants described themselves as extroverted and active learners who would like to have more interactions with others through placing themselves into a socializing environment. So that, they opted for the strategies which allow the participants to meet their expectations, for

example seeking help from others, taking part in vivid learning activities and communicating with others (native or non-native) directly and indirectly.

27. [...] I enjoyed using English[...] and I am an active learner[...] I didn't speak quite good English, but we all managed to communicate[...] we went to see ice hockey, we shared our personal stories[...] (P12)

Those who selected less interactive learning strategies, like material-based learning and memorization, expressed that their learning processes were also comfortable and enjoyable with the strategies they have applied. When these participants were asked whether would be possible to accept other more engaging strategies if a chance was given, they all indicated that their strategies were congenial to what they expected from their learning. As one interviewee put it:

28. I am not sure I can change my strategies... because of personality, maybe watching more TV show is possible, but for meeting with new faces and practice my language skills, maybe I would not. (P6)

Concerns regarding interests in language were more widespread. The majority of participants indicated that the process of English learning can be developed only if learners are interested in learning the language. One interviewee reported: "I chose them (my strategies) based on my interest, as long as it is interesting for me, I would keep using it" (P11). This view was echoed by another participant who said: "I think learning a language is really important to be something you are of interest with, if you don't enjoy, you would start rejecting it" (P3). It is explained that the initial interest of participants in a certain part of English (speaking, reading, writing and listening) enabled them to find out more interesting factors in the whole process of learning.

29. In school, I was being forced to use English[...] I wasn't really interested in English[...] but first thing that inspired my interest in English would be reading, I started reading Harry Potter and then I really got engrossed in it[...] It kind of spots my interest in English and makes me more interest in my environment, be in the news or on TV where they started having subtitles, that's why I got more interest in it (P3)

In addition to personality and interest of learners, some participants have taken learning types into account when choosing their learning strategies. According to those participants, the process of learning would be easier and more enjoyable if someone has general knowledge on what type of learner she/he might be. It was explained that selecting proper learning strategies based on their learning types helped participants improve language skills better and more efficient, learning would be time-consuming and suffering otherwise. One participant reported:

30. It's important to know what kind of learner you are, whether you are a static learner or a visual learner, based on that, you need to find something that interests you and engages you. (P3)

Moreover, over half of the participants found that learning comfortability and flexibility can also be the reason for the choice of learning strategies. It was indicated that as the learning process was a long go, learning strategies were chosen in the way of making both the learning process and participants comfortable. For flexibility, it was explained that flexible learning strategy shaped the learning process smooth and pleasant since participants were not restricted to draw on some fixed strategies in their learning, they were free to make a change if the applied strategies would not feed their expectations.

31. [...] I find different ways to learn the language, I will give a try. Like you know, when one way that I tried didn't work, I stopped it, and I would find another way[...] (P1)

Motivation and attitude for language learning were demonstrated as factors to influence the choice of learning strategies. It was reported that without motivation, learning was hardly achieved. For example, one interviewee said:

32. [...] Motivation sparks my imagination, so got to find your motivation in language learning first, without motivation, learning would be more difficult than you ever thought' (P9).

Another interviewee believed that her English learning process would be easier and enjoyable if she "was not demotivate". She also demonstrated how the attitude in-

fluenced her choice of learning strategies and said: “attitude does matter, if you remind yourself that you are not motivated, passive attitudes easily appear and you would never be master of it (learning English)” (P10).

An influence from surroundings was expressed as one of the reasons for affecting the choice of learning strategies among learners. A small number of those interviewed suggested that the influence either from their classmates, peer friends and language teachers or from their learning environments, directly and indirectly, impacted their choices. For example, a friend’s recommendation on applying an experienced learning strategy was taken as a strategy by a few participants into their learning. One individual stated:

33. A friend of mine encouraged me to join the class (of a private language institution) and to use some learning English websites that were given in her class. (P1)

Moreover, the influence of learning environments was also significant for those who have only been in English speaking areas. The comments below illustrate that some participants were initially inspired by their learning environments, then other learning strategies were used based on their learning environments.

34. I think for that (choosing my learning strategies) the help of environment is already available. I picked up a lot probably from the teacher[...] it is quite easy for us to seek help from teachers and converse with them, and our media, we have English channels always available for us[...] and we have different friends from different races as well, so speaking is not an issue. (P3)
35. I wouldn’t say I put a lot of effort in speaking to myself, or going to a class or anything like that, but my environment helped, like every day listening to people, and speaking with people, through reading books, through seeing how my professors engage with a conversation and present. For me, most of my learning happened by looking at people, how they are doing in their learning and learning from that. (P2)

A very small number of participants stated some other reasons for the choice of learning strategies, such as joyfulness and learning possibilities. Interestingly, there was no evidence found that the participants aimed at a specific strategy based on their prior knowledge regarding the strategy’s role and its benefits throughout

their learning. They have chosen various learning strategies based on their own preferences instead of a preliminary investigation regarding the use of particular learning strategies.

6.2.3 Benefits of strategy use in learning

There was no negative effect on the use of learning strategies found in participants' reported learning experiences. All of them have chosen several language learning strategies and have benefited from using them as tools in their learning. When participants were asked about the importance of their strategies in individual language learning, all twelve reported that their strategies were highly beneficial to their learning processes.

In terms of language learning, all participants agreed that using learning strategies helped them polish their English and facilitate their language skills in different ways as the strategies were chosen diversely. A common view among interviewees was that strategy use has played a positive role in learning in the way of making the learning process efficient and enjoyable. Through using a wide range of learning strategies, participants have reached a better level of using and understanding English, both on a daily basis and in the academic field.

36. In my studying my strategies help me a lot, because the more I know, the more I can put in my writing, the more I read, the more how to better out my ideas across. (P3)
37. My strategies helped me in different ways, for example as for speaking part, I can talk with my friends confidently because I know the language[...] using strategies in reading supported my academic English. By reading, many fuzzy words were sorted out. So, I would say I don't have any problem in my academic writing. (P6)

Over half of those interviewed reported that the use of learning strategies was beneficial beyond improving the language itself, namely, strategy use in learning did not centralize the role only on learning the language, rather it has triggered other unexpected improvements. According to the participants, their strategies were not only effective for their language learning, but also essential to develop their other

skills, such as providing comprehensive knowledge, improving communicative interactions, expanding personal and social network.

38. They (learning strategies) are really good, because they not only helped my English learning and my English skills, but also provided me knowledge, the knowledge that I cannot have gained without them[...] (P1)

When they were asked whether the process of learning English would be better if they did not implement these strategies, the majority of participants responded by saying no. According to participants, their English has significantly improved after applying those strategies in their learning. It was expressed that strategy use – especially the constant use of strategies – has become part of their learning, because the use of strategies has been continuing as a means of displaying their social and academic skills in their studies. One interviewee reported that the influence of her learning strategies was not as immediate as it was expected, but it has benefited her English “step by step through practicing them for years” (P1). The comments below illustrate how other participants responded to the hypothesis that if there was no implementation of their own strategies in learning English.

39. [...] Even though my strategies are quite formal to learn a language, they made my learning easier and more comfortable. (P6)
40. [...] with these strategies I improved my English skills. If I change my strategies, it may not work for me at all, because I think I know what is best to learn a language for myself. (P10)

A very small number of those who responded to the idea of alternatives for their learning strategies felt that replacing their strategies with new ones is considerable only if the new ones may have a better influence on their learning. However, they also indicated that they would keep their own strategies if the strategies are good enough to be used for learning a new language. For example, one interviewee explained her Finnish learning experiences and said:

41. [...] The way of my language learning is more systematic, organized, sophisticated, start learning from the easiest parts to the difficult parts. But the Finnish one, I think they are more practical [...] it's totally different from my language learning strategies. Because without knowing grammar to learn a language is impossible for me. (P6)

During the interviews, some described that their strategies are universal in terms of learning other languages, they would like to keep them to learn other languages in the future, while others said that their strategies are universal in terms of learning English, the strategies can be recommendable to other learners who would like to learn English. On the whole, concerns were expressed that no common strategy fits every single individual learning since strategy use was tailored based on learners' individualities and their needs for English.

42. [...] Learners are definitely different. The one works for me doesn't mean it works for you too, it is good to have a try, but also finding out the one exactly fits you is important[...] (P9)

6.2.4 Consciousness on strategy use in learning

Opinions differed as to whether participants were conscious of using strategies while engaging with the language. Of twelve participants, six reported that they have learned the language with clear awareness on the choice of learning strategies and its implementation in their learning. Specific learning strategies have navigated their learning by constructing knowledge on what the participants are in need of and what strategies can be appropriate for their learning. A common view among these interviewees was that clear awareness on the use of language learning strategies was raised based on their personal learning goals and desires. For example, one interviewee said: "I am aware of what works for me, so I chose what I can enjoy my learning" (P6). They were conscious of whether the chosen strategies are effective in their individual learning and of how to update learning strategies if the strategies may not reach their expectations.

43. Learning a language is really important to be something you are of interest with. I was aware of what strategies would be good for me to learn and practice the language, because I always went with my interest. (P3)
44. I am aware of what I used for my learning, because I knew what I really need. Every time I tried to use different ones to take my motivation back, but it was too difficult. I tried this, if doesn't work, tried that, a constant try helped me find out which is best for me. (P10)

Four participants indicated that their learning strategies were formed naturally. In other words, they did not have any clear awareness on the use of learning strategies as they have been surrounded by English speaking environments. According to those participants, learning English in such environments was an unconscious process that engages learners with the language indirectly and naturally. As one interviewee put it: “language is a skill, and it is difficult to learn by sudden. You are using some strategies without knowing you are using” (P7). It is explained that having English environments was one of the reasons of not being conscious of strategy use in learning, if English environments did not exist in the process of learning, the participants would be alert to the transition of environments and look for what they have need of.

45. [...] I was not really aware of them (my learning strategies) [...] since I had the environment (the UK environment). But after I got back to my home country, I knew what to do, because I don't want to lose my existed English skills. (P5)
46. I formed them (the learning strategies) unconsciously, I used to listen to it (the English language), so listening was one strategy. Reading and speaking are always there, I mean they all always do exist in my learning environments. (P6)

Only a small number of interviewees indicated that they had not had any awareness on the use of learning strategies until they made self-reflection on their learning strategies and learning processes. According to these participants, initially they did not have any consciousness on the process of learning the language nor the use of learning strategies, that is, the whole process was deemed as unconscious and natural experiences. But after the implementation of self-reflection in their long-term learning processes, the participants perceived that the process was not unconscious and that self-reflection has helped them gain insight into how they selected and applied their individual learning strategies.

47. At the beginning, I wasn't aware of what I am using. But time goes by, I thought I should do something with my language, coz it's my major. then I put effort and searched for different ways to learn the language. Now I can tell you what they are and how I did. (P4)

6.3 Perception of the relationship between language achievement and language learning strategy use

6.3.1 Language achievement

When participants were asked how they perceive their language achievements and the relationship between their achievements and strategy use in learning, they responded from their perspectives of achieving learning outcomes. A variety of language outcomes have been stated from the aspect of language test achievement, fluency of speaking to the academic level of English. Some participants indicated that they achieved fluent English through applying their learning strategies, as one interviewee said: "You can see how fluently I speak English now, which is very obvious how beneficial they (learning strategies) were" (P2). While others perceived that their language achievements can be evaluated by different language tests, e.g. IELTS, GRE.

A small number of interviewees suggested that they have had significant progress in the field of academic English after some specific learning strategies being used in their learning. It was expressed that different learning strategies have been applied to improve the participants' academic performances since, as some of them put it, academic English is completely different from general English. They found the significant progress in their individual learning processes, especially in the field of academic term, after the implementation of certain strategies. This learning progress, therefore, was counted as language achievement by those participants since it has become part of their learning. In terms of academic English, one interesting finding was that the use of learning strategies is not only beneficial for those who speak English as a second/foreign language, but also valuable for native speakers such as P8.

48. I want to be able to set on like the way I speak, the expression in speaking and the expression in academic writing are completely different, writing is more formal, I think writing takes more time to try to make it perfect. (P8)

49. For the academic term, I hadn't tried before I started my program in the uni, I was happy that we had an academic language course, cause I learned how the structure of the academic assignment is and how to use specific methods on it[...] (P12)
50. [...] It was so hard for me to write in an academic way, I thought it would take me forever to write[...] I found writing so overwhelming[...] in my case right now, research articles would be helpful, that's what I am trying to write for my thesis to somehow replicate that the use of the language and word choice[...] (P8)

One expressed concern regarding language achievement was that, in general, there is no explicit standard to measure language outcomes in language learning because of the diversity of learners and their learning processes. As mentioned above, using strategies in language learning is supportive not only in facilitating language skills, but also in constructing knowledge beyond acquiring the language itself. According to participants, all constructed knowledge and progress in the process of learning can be perceived as language achievement.

51. The outcome of learning a language doesn't mean that you become proficient in the language, but it means that help you open other doors for other outcomes, like knowing other things and making friends. (P2)
52. I would define my achievement as being comfortable enough to use English in different situations[...] My strategies have helped me to reach this point by creating English thinking mind in my head. I don't have to use Japanese at all to translate, to speak, to listen, not at all[...] (P11)

6.3.2 Relationship between language achievement and strategy use in language learning

According to the description of participants, a positive connection was found between strategy use in language learning and learning outcomes. In all cases, interviewees reported that they had unexpected positive learning results after implementing learning strategies in language learning. On the whole, participants agreed that learning strategy in use has increased the proficiency of language and has improved their language skills in different levels. A common view amongst interviewees was that the role of strategy use is significant in helping participants to orient

themselves in the field of language learning. Some of them believed that their English could have been much better if they had applied other recommended strategies instead of the ones they had used in learning.

53. My strategies helped my learning process a lot... I have courage to use the language now[...] Through using my strategies I have found my direction to learn the language. Because of these strategies, I am confident enough to communicate and interact more with my surroundings[...] (P10)
54. [...] My brother is a good writer, he suggested several tips for my writing difficulties... if I did it more than my those strategies, my writing could be better. I could be more confident [...] (P11)

When participants were asked how they discern the relationship between these two variables, the majority of participants described that their learning outcomes and used learning strategies was linear in their learning processes. It is explained that these two variables were positively related to one another in learning, that is, the more learning strategies the participants applied, the better learning outcomes were achieved in language, they are neither separable nor interchangeable.

55. I think when I was actively using the strategies, it was positively related. If I don't really use those, I think my language skills would just maintain itself[...] (P5)
56. It's like 80% success[...] because I can see a lot of differences after I put in the effort to learn, I picked up my own strategies to learning the language[...] before that, I would say my English level that point might be 30% [...] (P3)

Only a small number of participants indicated that their learning strategies were effective because of the contribution of other elements in their learning, and with all these, they have achieved language proficiency and other outcomes.

57. I didn't start to apply these strategies at the beginning, I put effort first, and the learning environment came, and then I apply the strategies. Initially in my school, there was no learning environment[...] so my proficiency of speaking English was low, when I engaged with a learning environment where English used, my proficiency increased[...] then I started to use these strategies[...] my proficiency increased even more. (P2)

Concerning other elements, having learning environments related to the English language was expressed by several participants as an influential factor to improve

language skills. In their experiences, using learning strategies was the main key, but not the only one, to make them succeed in learning. According to these participants, their learning strategies were efficient to their language learning because of the combination of learning strategies and learning environments. A few participants found that their strategies in learning did not work as much as they expected due to the learning environments they had. According to these participants, they would intend to place themselves in English environments where the language can be used widely.

58. I think they are quite supportive for my learning[...] If I didn't use my strategies, I may use another ones[...] I think those previous strategies did not help me so much in terms of speaking, I want to try more strategies to improve my conversational English. Actually, I would try to tourist place and be a tour guide if I still stayed in Vietnam[...] (P1)

6.4 Summary of the findings

The findings from the interviews collected valuable perspectives and experiences from participants and grouped them into three sections, which are 1) Description of individual learning trajectories, 2) The choice of learning strategies and 3) Language achievement. These three distinct categories are formed to answer the research questions of the study. The first section is to address the first research question “**How do participants describe their individual learning trajectories in English learning**”. From the rich data, insight is gained into how participants perceived their English learning processes through highlighting their learning environments, learning difficulties and various types of support from networks. The focus of learning English was also considered as one of the key features to influence the process of learning English as a variety of learning focuses were described. Therefore, as shown in Figure 2, the description of personal learning trajectories was elaborated by five themes.

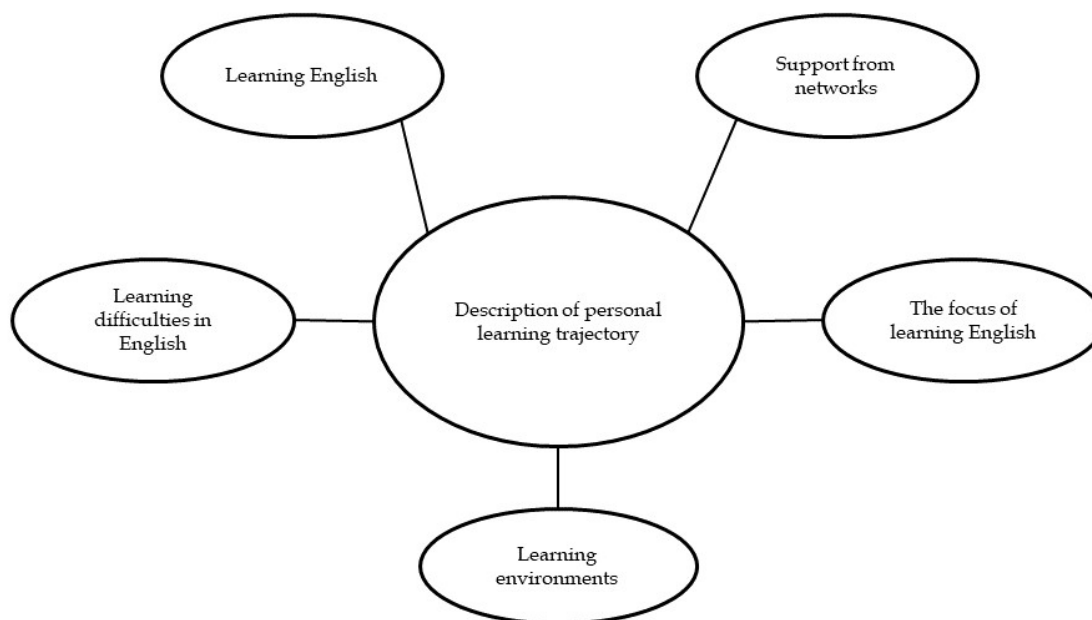


FIGURE 2. Themes of the description of personal learning

The second section aims at answering the question “**How do participants explain their learning strategy choices**”. Since the process of learning was described as a long and not easy process with learning difficulties, participants adapted different learning strategies individually. Even though some participants have had similar learning difficulties in language learning, the way of choosing their learning strategies differed from one another. The choice of strategy use in language learning was diverse based on personal preferences (e.g. personality, interest, learning comfortability) and other fixed factors, such as learning environments. The use of learning strategies has played a positive role in participants’ learning and all agreed that they benefitted from their learning strategies applied in the process of language learning. In general, participants were able to explain the reason for choosing their learning strategies, however, not all of them had consciousness on strategy use in learning. Therefore, the differences between the choice of participants in strategy use can be explained from the aspect of participants’ learning difficulties to the aspect of participants’ consciousness on learning strategy use in learning. The figure below shows several summarized main themes in participants’ responses towards the choice of learning strategy use.

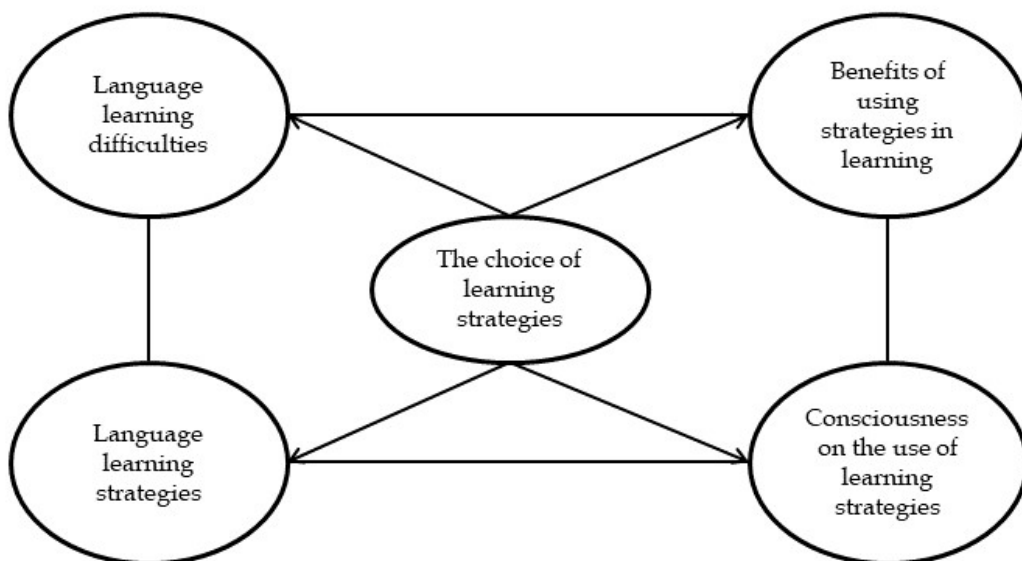


FIGURE 3. Themes of the explanation on the choice of language learning strategies

The third research question “**How do they perceive the relationship between language achievement and language learning strategies in use**” was answered in the last section with two main themes - Participants’ perceptions on language achievement and Relationship between language achievement and strategy use in learning. The first theme reflects the perspectives of participants on how they perceive their achievements in language learning. Even though participants’ language outcomes have been displayed in various ways, on the whole, all agreed that any progress and constructed knowledge in learning can be perceived as language achievement. The second theme highlights the relationship between language achievement and strategy use in language learning. Participants had positive learning results after implementing learning strategies in individual learning. There were two types of descriptions expressed regarding the relationship between the two variables (language achievement and language learning strategies in use). One description is the relationship between them was a linear process, that is, the two variables are positively related to one other. Another description is that, it was a complex process in which other elements were also included to achieve language proficiency and other learning outcomes. The figure below provides an overview of this section.

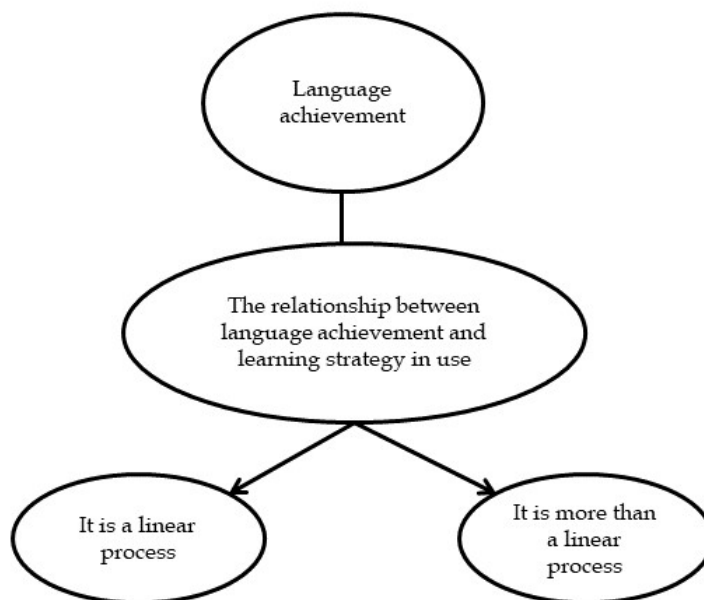


FIGURE 4. An overview of the relationship between language achievement and language learning strategies in use

7 DISCUSSION

The study focused on the process of language learning with strategy use and the role of strategy use in individual learning. Besides, the choice of learning strategies among learners and the relationship between strategy use and language achievement in learning were also elaborated in order to emphasize the differences between individual learners and their learning outcomes. This present chapter will discuss the key findings with respect to the research questions of the study and theoretical concepts mentioned in the literature. Limitations of the study will also be presented along with possibilities for future studies on the use of learning strategies in language learning.

The results of the present study reveal that even though all participants have experienced in learning the same language, which is English, a variety of learning processes were exposed and experimented based on the individual choice of participants. With respect to the first research question, it was found that all participants agreed on learning English as a continued and holistic process, the process includes understanding individual goals in language learning, outlining participants' own

learning strategies and evaluating the outcomes of strategy use in learning. This finding correlates with the study of Sengül (2007) that the process of language learning involves planning, monitoring and assessing learners own learning abilities to achieve all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

All participants highlighted their formal and non-formal educational settings to emphasize their learning processes. As mentioned in the literature review, formal educational settings, in all levels, play a significant role in learning in the way that brings boost to learning efficiency (Goksu, 2015). Indeed, the findings of the study revealed that some participants had such a great engagement with the English language in school settings which includes the overall focus of learning English and the support from teachers. And yet, these findings cannot be extrapolated to all participants, that is, most of the participants did not report on a significant correlation between formal educational settings and the progress of language learning.

It is believed by most of the participants that either the progress in their learning or their achievements in language learning was not the only result of participating in school settings, rather it is perceived that other non-formal learning environments have significantly contributed to their learning outcomes. Because of the restricted focus and limited space of school settings, many participants opted to place themselves in other learning environments, for example, private language institutions and learning by themselves. In other words, even though all participants have experienced learning English at school, not all of them appreciated formal environments around them because it is believed that those settings hardly offered a significant growth to their learning. Non-formal learning settings, contrarily, were described as more effective learning environments in the way of supporting the development of participants' language skills.

In the current study, the choice of learning environments was directly and indirectly made by two types of learners. The direct choice was applied by the type of participants who had great awareness of their personal learning goals and of their

needs in language learning, they have successfully chosen their optimal learning environments after experiencing a range of observations and experiments. The indirect choice, in contrast, was made by those who adapted learning environments unconsciously because of the existence of social-cultural environments in their learning. This finding broadly supports the term of social ecology and holism (Kramsch & Steffensen, 2008) that language is learned in its natural surroundings, the surrounding related to personal, situational, cultural and social aspects. It can be seen that rather looked up other options in language learning, these participants made better use of their surroundings. Even though some participants believed that having learning environments, especially the type of social-cultural environments, was influential to improve participants' language skills, others still agreed that all types of learning environments would only be effective in language learning if learners hold an interest in learning the target language.

The finding related to the two types of learners broadly corresponds to the idea of Rubin (1975) who suggested the characteristics of good and successful learners in language learning. In this study, participants successfully found out what works for their learning and how to improve their language skills in the way of what Rubin (1975) suggested. However, not all types of learners revealed the same characteristics listed by Rubin (1975), instead other more flexible features were formed by learners with their diverse learning strategies. For example, some participants neither observed others' performances in learning nor analyzed their own learning processes as these listed in the characteristics of good language learners, alternatively, the participants applied their own learning strategies and learned the language unconsciously.

Learning difficulties were presented in the study as one of the reasons for choosing learning strategies in the process of learning. There is a great number of similarities between the difficulties expressed by participants in this study and those described by Sharma (2018). To address various learning difficulties, participants have implemented learning strategies and have been supported by others. It is

believed that learning strategies were the most essential tools to address participants' learning difficulties and to facilitate language skills in their learning. Moreover, participants agreed that the support from others during the process of learning had a meaningful influence on their learning in a way that encourages them to seek out their interests in learning and face their difficulties in a positive way.

The results of this study indicate that even though some participants had similar learning difficulties in learning, different learning strategies were applied towards the same difficulties. This could be seen especially in the cases of P6 and P12, both participants had the difficulty of using grammar and memorizing vocabulary, but they implemented different learning strategies based on their individual choices. One interesting finding is, almost all participants were aware of self-used strategies and the benefits of strategy use, but none of them were able to describe their strategies on the basis of the understanding of the terminology which was offered by Oxford (1990), even some participants stated that there is no name for their strategies. A possible explanation for this might be that participants may have applied learning strategies without the intention of inquiring learning strategy itself, rather they have chosen individual strategies in language learning based on their learning experiences and personal choices. Another possible explanation might be that the use of metalanguage is hardly known among language learners and it barely appears in learning on a daily basis. Therefore, Figure 5 shows the difference between the description of participants' learning strategies and the terminological description of the related strategies.

Termonological description	Description of participants
Cognitive strategies	Note-taking (P10, P11)
Meta-cognitive strategies	Reflecting and analysing what I have learned (P2), Observing others' English (P8)
Memory-related strategies	Flashcards(P9), Word blends (P3), Spelling(P7)
Compensation strategies	Movies, TV shows (P1, P4, P5, P6, P11), Broadcast and audio books (P12)
Affective strategies	Learn with friends (P1), Speaking with my classmates (P2)
Social strategies	Discussion (P2, P3, P8, P9), Presentation (P2), Keep contact with foreign friends (P1)

FIGURE 5. Description of participants' learning strategies and the terminological description of related strategies trajectories

With respect to the choice of learning strategies, it was found that learning strategies were selected for the purpose of overcoming the participants' difficulties and improving their language skills. Consistent with the literature, the findings along with the statements from section 6.2.2 clearly state that the choice of participants on the use of learning strategies can be explained in terms of the differences in personality, interest, motivation, learning type, attitude.

In addition, the findings of the study confirm that other factors are also associated with the choice of learning strategies, such as the comfortability of learning and the flexibility of strategy use, joyfulness, learning possibilities (whether the use of strategy is possible in individual learning), and influences from networks (classmates, peer friends, language teachers, and learning environments). It is somewhat surprising that no participant in the study selected a specific strategy based on prior knowledge about the strategy itself or its benefits in learning.

The importance of using learning strategies and the benefits of strategy use in learning became apparent in this study. Participants indicated that their own learning strategies were the most appropriate ones for language learning as they have seen the outcomes of using the strategies in the process of learning English.

At the same time, the benefits of strategy use in learning have been emphasized that using strategies had a significant influence not only in learning the target language but also in developing social and comprehensive skills of participants. The learning process of participants has become more efficient and enjoyable after the implementation of individual strategies. These results corroborate the view of Muniandy and Shuib (2016), who suggested that the use of learning strategies assists learners to transform their knowledge into effective and enjoyable experiences, as a result, they become active, independent and confident with better language skills in learning.

In terms of the consciousness on strategy use, the findings revealed that not all participants were conscious of using learning strategies in learning. Some participants have explored their learning with clear concepts of using learning strategies. Meanwhile, other participants also have navigated the learning process in a good way without being conscious of applying their strategies, that is, they were not as conscious as others since they have been surrounded by English speaking environments. This finding is consistent with the point of Hall (1997) which learning strategy use is needed for planning how new information and tasks to be constructed and organized, but the process is different among learners because of their consciousness, some of them are conscious about the procedure and others may not be.

A final objective of the study was to identify the relationship between learning strategy use and language achievement in learning. The findings show that participants evaluated their achievements in different terms based on their understanding on the concept of achievement. As mentioned in section 6.3.1, language proficiency and academic English were mostly described as language achievement of participants, they have seen positive results in these terms since some specific strategies have been implemented individually in learning. For example, the results like language tests, language fluency and remarkable progress in their academic learning.

There was also a positive relationship found between the two variables, strategy use in language learning and language achievement. That is, learning strategy use had an influence on the growth of domain-specific language skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) and language development. It is believed by some participants that achieving their learning outcomes was the result of using learning strategies in individual learning.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that there were two types of relationships in learning – a linear process and a complex process. In terms of the linear process, it is believed that strategy use in learning was tied to language achievement directly, that is, the more frequent learning strategies are applied, the more learning outcomes would be achieved in learning, neither of them was replaceable. In terms of the complex process, only a small number of participants described that language achievement should be considered as contributions of several other factors in learning rather than those of using learning strategies, for example, the factors like the personal effort in learning and learning environments. As mentioned in the literature review, a similar finding was also reported by Chand (2014) that the correlation between strategy use and language proficiency beyond a cause-and-effect linear relationship. The use of strategies in some participants' learning was essential for language development, but it was not the only cause within the process of learning.

7.1 Limitations

The present study has certain limitations. The first limitation is the sample size. Even though there were already twelve participants in the study, it is always believed that the findings would have been more remarkable with more individual learning processes and a larger range of individual learning stories.

The second limitation would be selecting participants. Because of the personal contact between the researcher and participants, some subtle details did not present the way it should be. For example, a small group of participants stated that there was no learning difficulty in their learning. But then goes to the topic of

strategy use, various learning difficulties were pointed out by those participants in order to illustrate the use of learning strategies in their learning. Since the interview of this study is a situation of performing identities in language learning, some participants might have thought about the consequences of providing their learning difficulties to whom they know during the progression of the interview. In other words, they might have perceived that sharing learning difficulties would be a chance for the researcher to underestimate their language capacities. The findings would have been more diverse if further learning difficulties and related learning strategies had been provided.

The third limitation would be recalling the learning process. Even though all participants in the study have been using the language in their current degree program, it is described that they all have learned the language a long time ago and it was not easy for them to recall the initial process of learning the language (especially their learning environments) and to describe the use of learning strategies. As a result, they may have emerged their personal learning opinions and have shared them along with interview questions as some interview questions were not directly reflective to the research questions.

7.2 Future Research

Future steps of this study would be to conduct both qualitative and quantitative methods to find out how a wider range of students perceive the process of learning English and the use of learning strategies. A longitudinal study would be interesting since language learning is considered as a long process to achieve, checking in with learners after high school graduation, at the beginning of university studies and post-graduation. By doing so, the use of learning strategies in English would be well observed.

In addition to English, the process of learning Finnish for international students in Finnish environments should be researched. As it reported, having learning environments is an important factor to positively influence learners'

learning, then it would be interesting to examine to what extent the surroundings are beneficial for learners to engage with the target language.

Furthermore, understanding the perspective of teachers on the use of learning strategies may help learners improve their strategy use in individual learning, that is, learners would have more chances to be instructed with the use of successful learning strategies by teachers' guidance in formal settings. Learners language achievement would be also suggested from the viewpoint of teachers how they evaluate learners' outcomes in learning.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Introduction

The research is to focus on the use of language learning strategies in a learning process. Language learning strategies are diverse based on the learner's practice in different learning environments. Learners choose their LLSs in light of their interests and individual preferences. Some learners are aware of the strategies which are used in their learning, whereas other of them might not have a specific idea about what strategies have been carried out. Thus, I am interested in how language learners choose their learning strategies and for what purpose their strategies are adapted in different learning environments.

Learning environment is understood differently, it refers to diverse physical atmospheres, contexts, and cultures in which learning occurs. It also can be the ways that teachers design, organize and manage a learning setting for learners to promote their learning. Therefore, as participants in this study, they will be suggested to bring images/photos which reflect their own learning environments, so that their individual learning strategies can be highlighted while describing their individual learning environments. It is also believed that the combination of photo descriptions and individual learning stories can highly illustrate the focus of the study.

The learners may encounter learning difficulties while engaging with the process of learning a second or foreign language, for examples, the use of academic written English or oral formal English. I would like to know how participants have overcome their difficulties and how strategies are applied to those difficulties. In addition, I also would like to know how individual learning strategies benefit participants' learning processes and language outcomes.

Appendix 2 Interview questions

Name:

Nationality:

Basic Information:

- How many languages do you speak?
- Do you have any degree in English medium?

Tell me your language learning stories

- How long did it take?
- How did you learn?
- How did you learn at school? What was the main focus of English at school?
- Have you experienced any abroad life?
- Did your abroad life influence your learning? In what way?

Describe your images

- Please describe your learning environments. (Those who bring the images)
- What kind of learning environments did you have when learning the language? (Those who didn't send the images)
- How did you practice at school?
- Was it your ideal ones (the learning environment), why?

Difficulties in your learning process

- Have you encountered any language difficulties in your learning process? Any examples?
- How did you overcome? In what way?
- Have you applied some learning strategies to overcome your difficulties in your learning process? If yes, which are they?

The choice of learning strategies

- How/why did you pick them up during your learning? Why not others?
- How about the academic field, how did you practice?
- If you have difficulties in the academic field, how did you select strategies for your difficulties?
- Were you aware of using your strategies in your learning/Have you had any knowledge that you have used/been using them?

How beneficial are they to your learning

- What do you think about their roles in your learning? Are they helpful for your learning, in which way?
- How can they be helpful?

- How about your difficulties in the field of academic English (e.g. academic writing and formal speaking)?
- Are they universal? To all the difficulties or to learn other languages?

Relationship between language learning strategies and language outcomes

- How do you perceive your language outcomes?
- How do you relate your used strategies to your language achievements in English?
- Do you think whether your learning would be better in language learning without using learning strategies?

Appendix 3 Research Permit

I am Kadiya Kelimu. I am working on my master's thesis in Education. In my research, I investigate the use of language learning strategies for language learners and its role in language learning achievement. My research helps to understand how learning strategies benefit learners' language learning process and in which ways the language learning strategies are carried out. The supervisor of my thesis is University Teacher Tamás Péter Szabó, Ph.D. (e-mail: #####@###.##, telephone: +### #####).

Data is collected through individual interviews. Interviews encompass telling personal learning stories and demonstrating images/photos which are brought to the interviews. The data is audio recorded and saved to database. The data might be used for other research in the future as well. Participation in the research is voluntary, and consent can be withdrawn later at any point of the research process. Research data is handled and used in a confidential manner. Research data is handled and presented in a way that research participants' personal identity cannot be revealed. Research data is handled according to the data management principles of the University of Jyväskylä.

I gladly provide you further information about the research; please feel free to contact me via e-mail: #####@#####.###.## or phone: +### #####

I request your consent to participate in the above-mentioned research.

Thank you for considering my request.

With best regards,

Kadiya Kelimu

I hereby give my consent to my participation in the above-mentioned research

Yes No

I agree that the copy version of my images/photos can be used in research.

Yes No

Date and place

Signature and clarification of name