

## LEARNING STRATEGIES ACROSS CULTURES OF EFL LEARNERS RESIDING IN EAST NUSA TENGGARA PROVINCE

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### ABSTRACT

*EFL learners employ a set of learning strategies in their learning of English. Learning strategies are claimed to be an “internal mental drive” which EFL learners have in mind. Learning strategies are the internal power which enables EFL learners to acquire the so-called language knowledge and language skills. It has been assumed that learning strategies are influenced by cultures of EFL learners. Consequently, EFL learners may employ different learning strategies, provided that EFL learners come from different cultures. This current research aims to disclose that each of EFL learners from the East Nusa Tenggara Province (NTT) employs learning strategies, as in fact that in NTT lives many cultures. Specifically, this research treated six EFL learners who are from different cultures. Two learners came from the inland area of Ende (Flores); other two students were from the inland area of Timor and two others were from the city of Kupang, the capital of Kupang Municipality. The results of the research show that these EFL learners use the same learning strategies entailing Metacognitive, cognitive and social mediation strategies. The outstanding discovery of this study is that EFL learners, in their learning, are very much influenced by the so-called “instructional learning”. Learning does take place because there is instruction from their teachers. Autonomous learning, as far as data are concerned, still does not take place. Thus culture, in this study, has no influence on EFL learners in terms of the use of learning strategies among EFL learners with different cultural backgrounds.*

**Keywords:** *Learning strategies, metacognitive, cognitive, social mediation strategies*

### INTRODUCTION

Recently a shift from teaching to learning has taken place. Although teaching still plays its roles, learning, nevertheless, plays more dominant roles. Consequently, in Indonesia, the national education policy is directed to learning; e.g. the most recent 2004 and 2013 curriculums did promote “learning-centered” Learning as the key word of the research is rooted in at least three schools of learning psychology, namely: behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism. Behaviorism holds that learning involves learners’ active conscious attempts to acquire knowledge and skills through the so called imitation-repetition cycle. Cognitivism, on the other hand, holds that individual learners, as individual human beings, are endowed minds. According to Dunlosky et al (2013) Cognitivism could develop student learning goals from the learning techniques. In the other opinion, cognitivism believes that the mind is the main processor which enables a man to receive input, process it, internalize it, retain it, and then retrieve it for use. It is what triggers a normal human being to pick up, at least, a language with ease. Meanwhile, constructivism believes that learners based on learners’ experience can establish knowledge principles and skills as well.

Since the 1970's language education experts have attempted to dismantle the mystery of how learners acquire a language being learnt. Hervina et al (2022) revealed that metacognitive strategy can improve the student language ability from reading comprehension. Imposed that language learners attempt to acquire a language through the adopting of simplification, avoidance and repetition strategies. He found out that language of language learners deviates from either the target language norms or the first language of the learners. He terms such a learner language as *interlingua*. Since 1980's language education experts have focused their attention more on how language learners adopt in learning strategies language learners adopt in learning a language (Wenden and Rubin, 1987; Wenden, 1990; Oxford, 1990, O'Malley and Ajustukmo, 1996, Brookfiel, 2017). The ultimate objective is to know the ways or tactics language learners employ in their learning as well as to enable teachers to create better learning.

According to Kurniawan & Pravitasari (2023) reveal that student's had a higher response from teaching methods who practice well in learning strategies are conceptually the representation of learners' mental drives, the innate forces which enable individual learners to creatively learn a language. Learning strategies, according to O'Malley and Chamot (1991), encompass three areas, namely: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social mediation strategies. Meanwhile, Karim et al (2023) argues that learning strategies in use by language learners are also affected by learners' cultures and promote EFL public speaking performance. Bandura (1997) proposed that the learning environment of learners provides rich cultural input which may affect the ways of learning of a group of learners. Further, it is strengthened by Oxford (1992: 441) as she writes "although culture is not only the single determined factor, and although many others intervene, culture often does play a significant role in learning." Although there has been an academic evidence of how culture affects learning strategies and although some studies of learning strategies adopted by EFL learners studying English in Indonesia have been carried out, there is, however, not any research has been focused on identifying learning strategies across cultures of EFL learners in Indonesia in general and in NTT in particular.

## **METHODS**

This is a qualitative research applying the constant comparative analytic designs (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). Data were taken from six (6) EFL freshmen studying English at Widya Mandira Catholic University in Kupang, NTT, Indonesia, as subjects: 2 with indigenous Timorese Culture, 2 with modern Timorese culture and 2 others with Ende-Lio culture. The instruments for data elicitation were interview, observation, and think-aloud

protocol. Data analysis: from each interview, a tentative proposition was made to find a set of regular metacognitive learning strategies; some thematic. Sentences were drawn and LS properties were made; from each observation and think aloud protocol, a tentative proposition was made to find a set of regular cognitive and social mediation learning strategies, and another interview was done to find the impact of learning strategies to the EFL learning outcome.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### *Results*

The study has come up with the findings of learning strategies commonly adopted by the subjects in their EFL learning which entail metacognitive, cognitive and social mediation strategies. Basically, learning strategies in use reflect the common behaviors of EFL learners as the subjects. Learning strategies in use portray the subjects' available mental drives which control and direct their EFL learning both inside the classroom and outside the classroom; prior and during the effective class hours. Indeed, learning strategies in use also describe individual attempts in EFL learning in the form of the application of various learning strategies. Concretely, they employ learning strategies which are specifically used in their personal learning, but simultaneously they employ learning strategies which enable them to interact with peers and teachers to make their EFL learning more successful, that is to obtain the needed information of the language being learnt.

The findings of the current research apparently reflect some similarities and differences in relation to the use of learning strategies by the subjects in their EFL learning. Based on the findings, however, both similarities and differences cannot totally be explained through local cultures of the subjects. It is because there is no significant reason to claim that similarities of LS in use are due to similarities in culture. Nor is there a strong reason to claim that differences of LS in use reflect the subjects' differences in cultures. Instead, similarities can best be explained by the same learning experience of EFL learners as members of the so called "learner community" in the past, the time when they were in Junior and Senior High Schools. Such a community has helped establish EFL learners' mental drives represented in the form of learning behaviors, which are, ultimately, actualized in the form of LS employed in their EFL learning. Learning strategies in use are, in conclusion, endowed through learning. The way EFL learners attended to their EFL learning in the past has become the underlying foundation of their learning strategies in use at present. The similarities and differences are displayed in some Tables, as follows.

**Table 1.** Similarities Learning Strategies in use

a. EFL learners with indigenous Timorese and Ende- Lio cultures	
Metacognitive Strategies	
Similarities	
Planning	Directed attention Functional planning Selective attention Self- management Advanced organizer
Monitoring:	Motoric
Evaluation (not operated)	

**Table 2.** EFL learners with indigenous Timorese and Ende- Lio cultures

EFL learners with indigenous Timorese and Ende- Lio cultures	
Cognitive Strategies	
Similarities	Differences
Resourcing	Filling up (not operated by T1b)
Note- taking	Paraphrasing (operated only by T1a, T1b)
Translation	Guessing (not operated by T1a, EL2)
Making meaning known	Underlining (operated only by EL1)
Retrieving	
Imitation/ repetition	
EFL learners with indigenous Timorese and Ende- Lio cultures	
Social Mediation Strategies	
Similarities	Differences
Asking peers	Asking teacher (not operated by T1b)
Confirmation	
Discussion	

**Table 3.** Similarities and Differences of LS in use

b. EFL learners with indigenous & modern	
Metacognitive Strategies	
Similarities	Differences
Planning Directed attention Functional planning elective attention Advanced organize Evaluation (not operated by all)	Planning Self – management: Modern Indigenous Conscious Subconscious  Monitoring: Performance Checking content (T2a) Production Checking language (T2a) Motoric Checking writing (all)

EFL learners with indigenous & modern	
Social Mediation Strategies	
Similarities	Differences
Asking peers Confirmation Discussion	Asking teacher (not operated by T1b)

Also the differences can be seen from the point of view of whether EFL learners employ LS to refer to the use of L1 or TL (language being learnt). Thus some LS in use their native language they are learning, as in the tables that follows :

**Table 4.** Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive Strategies	
Similarities	Differences
Resourcing Note- taking Translation Making meaning known Retrieving Imitation/ repetition	Filling up (not operated by T1b) Paraphrasing (operated only by T1a, T1b) Guessing (not operated by T1a, EL2) Underlining (operated only by EL1)

c. L1 – dependence & target language use	
L1 - dependence	Target language use
Resourcing Translation Filling up Making meaning known Note – taking (operated by all subjects)	Guessing (not operated T <sub>1a</sub> , EL <sub>2</sub> ) Paraphrasing (operated only by T <sub>1a</sub> , T <sub>1b</sub> ) Retrieving (operated by all) Imitation/ repetition (operated by all) Note – taking (operated by all)

The differences can also be seen in terms of the frequency of LS in use. It is to know the high to low order of the frequency of cognitive and social mediation strategies.

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d. High to low use frequency of cognitive & social mediation strategies

Cognitive	Social Mediation
Resourcing	Asking peers
Note – taking	Confirmation
Translation	Discussion
Filling up	Asking teacher
Making meaning	
Paraphrasing	
Guessing	
Underlining	

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## DISCUSSION

The subjects with an indigenous Timorese culture have been found to adopt a set of LS. In the area of metacognitive strategies, they have been found to employ planning, entailing its four or the five specific LS: directed attention with two LS properties, functional planning with one LS property, selective attention with eight LS properties, and self- management with one LS property. In our preliminary research, Talok, et al (2023) argues that the subjects with metacognitive strategies can improve their daily learning subconsciously and performance. Still related to planning, the subjects do not employ advanced organizers, in that they do not put down main ideas/ concepts of what they learn on papers. Also, the subjects do not practice cognitive monitoring, but motoric monitoring; they also do not practice evaluation (*PPM not practiced and EVA. Not practiced*). The reasons can be that they do not have a mental operation in relation to the cognitive monitoring and evaluation; they are, perhaps, equipped with monitoring and valuation concepts which are closely related to physical activities (motoric activities). In the area of cognitive strategies, these subjects share eight of the ten specific LS. T<sub>1a</sub> does not employ guessing, but T<sub>1b</sub> does. In addition, they do not employ underlining unfamiliar English words. Meanwhile, they share three of the four specific LS of social mediation strategies. T<sub>1b</sub> does not employ asking teachers in ongoing classroom learning activities, but T<sub>1a</sub> does.

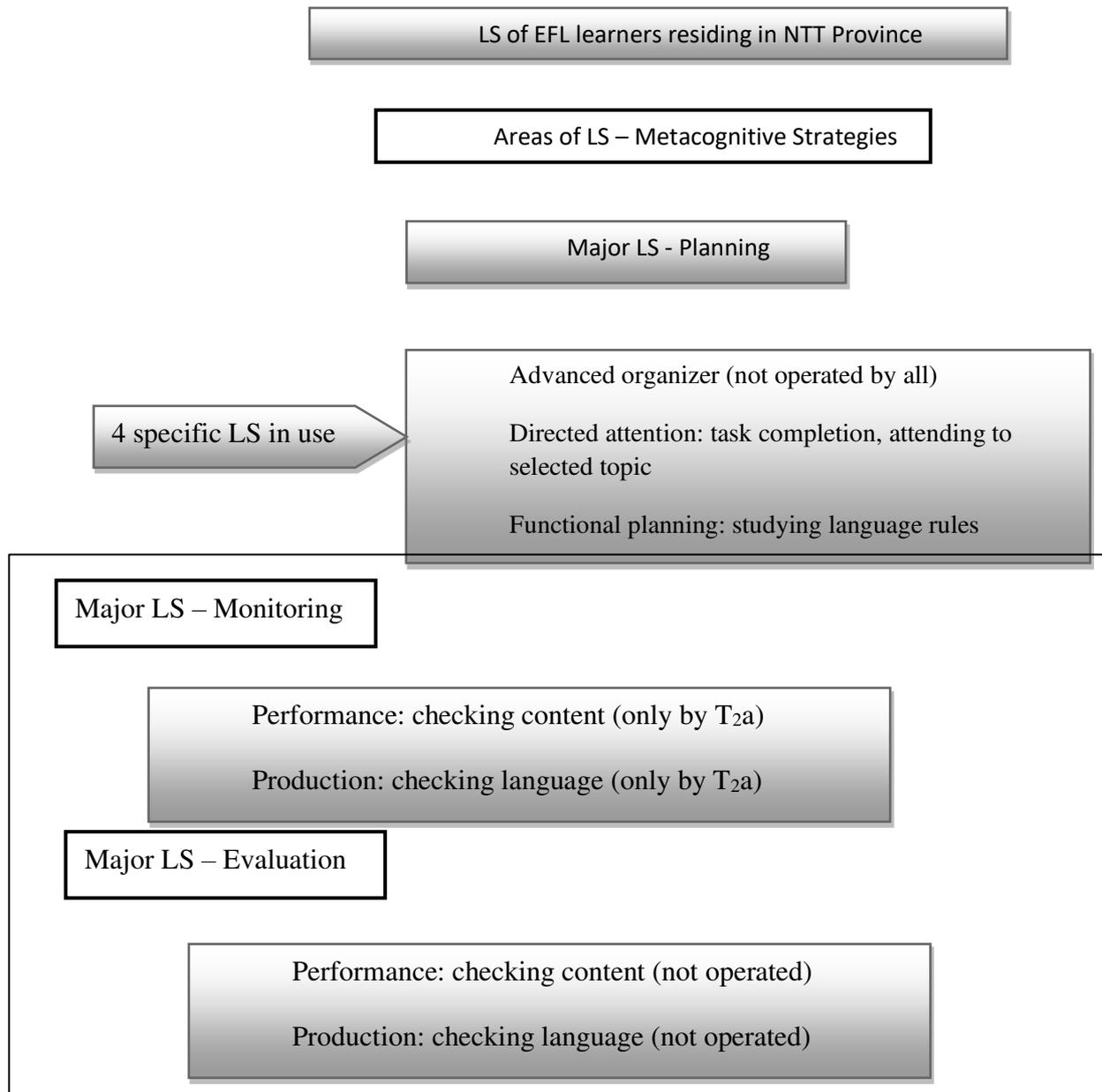
The subjects with modern Timorese culture have been found to employ planning, entailing its four of the five specific LS: directed attention with two LS properties, functional planning with one LS property, selective attention with eight LS properties, and self- management with one LS property. To note, for self management, these subjects have been able to control and direct their daily learning outside the classroom consciously. Derakshan et al (2016) argues that on the EFL Learners speaking ability and approaches with many treatments that teacher could be Improved in class. Still related to planning, the

subjects do not employ advanced organizers. They do not put down main ideas/concepts. They regulate their daily learning by a written schedule and a notice. Although it is, perhaps, more of a personal way of learning, T<sub>2a</sub> has been found to do monitoring, encompassing both performance and production monitoring (**T<sub>2a</sub> PPM 1, 2**) T<sub>2b</sub>, on the other hand, does not do monitoring in her learning.

These subjects do not carry out evaluation (**EVA. Not practiced**). The reason of T<sub>2b</sub>'s the not- adopting monitoring, T<sub>2a</sub> and T<sub>2b</sub>'s not adopting evaluation in EFL learning is they are not well-equipped with the cognitive type of monitoring and evaluation. In the area of cognitive strategies, these subjects share eight of the ten specific LS. The two subjects do not employ “*underlining unfamiliar English words.*” In addition, T<sub>2b</sub> does not employ “*making meaning/concept known in Bahasa Indonesia to others.*” Meanwhile, they share the four specific LS of social mediation strategies. The subjects with Ende-Lio culture have been found to employ planning, entailing its four of the five specific LS: directed attention with two LS properties, functional planning with one LS property, selective attention with eight LS properties and self management, these subjects have been found to control and direct their daily learning outside the classroom subconsciously.

Still related to planning, the subjects do not employ advanced organizers, in that they do not put down main ideas/concepts/points of what they learn on papers. The subjects do not operate cognitive monitoring (but they operate motoric monitoring) and evaluation (**PPM not practiced and EVA. Not practiced**). The subjects are assumed not to be equipped with cognitive types of monitoring and evaluation. In the division of cognitive strategies, these subjects share eight of the ten specific LS. One of the two subjects – EL<sub>2</sub> does not employ guessing. In addition, only EL<sub>1</sub> employs underlining unfamiliar English words. Meanwhile, they share the four specific LS of social mediation strategies. The findings numbers 3, 4, and 5 are summarized as follows.

The findings show that learning strategies in use by subjects indicate a significant influence on EFL learning. LS in use contributes a conceptual and concrete link to the success of EFL learning, covering four areas of EFL learning gains; lexicon, syntax, content, and pronunciation.



Areas of LS – Cognitive Strategies

10 Specific LS in use

Resourcing (operated by all)

Note taking (operated by all)

Translation (operated by all)

Filling up a bilingual list (not operated by T<sub>1b</sub>)

Imitation/repetition (operated by all)

Making meaning known in BINDO (not operated by T<sub>2b</sub>)

Areas of LS – Social Mediation

4 specific LS in use

Asking peers (operated by all)

Confirmation (operated by all)

The findings indicate that all subjects adopt a set of learning strategies, entailing metacognitive, cognitive, and social mediation strategies. Also, the findings show that all subjects share some learning strategies; but they do not share other learning strategies of metacognitive, cognitive, and social mediation strategies. In addition, the findings also indicate that there is a direct link between learning strategies in use and the success of EFL learning. The subjects, by employing learning strategies, obtain input/ knowledge of language being learnt, encompassing lexicon, syntax, contents and pronunciation. Armed with the findings, the following are the implications containing training of LS in use and

introduction of new LS, self-regulated learning, and cooperative learning. Along with the findings of the current research, training of new LS gets their proper start. EFL learners are recommended to be trained in applying LS in their EFL learning. They are trained about how to employ LS with the purpose of enhancing the quality of their EFL learning output.

The training must cover metacognitive, cognitive and social mediation strategies. It must also consider the similarities and differences of LS in use as employed by all subjects with different cultural backgrounds. More specifically, the training has to pay proper attention to LS in use because they are LS which are common to the subjects. The purpose of the training is to help EFL learners employ LS to enhance the quality of their EFL learning. In order to guarantee the quality of the training, Wenden (1991) proposes some steps for the training of LS to EFL learners. She proposes a three- phase paradigm for the LS training. The paradigm comprises three components which are interrelated, namely, focus, process and outcome. In focus, EFL learners are trained to employ other LS aside from LS they have employed thus far.

For instance, EFL learners always pull out their dictionaries each time they encounter unfamiliar English words while reading. The training aims to make EFL learners to figure out meanings of unfamiliar words by employing other LS. How can EFL teachers help EFL learners to employ other LS. In the process, EFL teachers are expected to provide tasks which can foster language learners to adopt other LS. For instance, the task provided by EFL teachers contains words which can make EFL learners retrieve or paraphrase. The outcome expected is that EFL learners work out to get meanings of unfamiliar words by using other LS, aside from using a dictionary.

The findings indicate that the subjects have been able to control and direct their own learning, although there are some LS of metacognitive strategies which are not practiced, such as advanced organizer of planning, monitoring (only 16.6% or one subject practices it), and evaluation. Both inside and outside the class, the subjects have proven to manage their individual learning. Hence, self-regulated learning must be promoted and reinforced. Individual EFL learners must manage their own learning. Such learning has to be implemented after the LS training program. This is to equip EFL learners with adequate knowledge about LS and how to operate them for a better individual learning. In relation to the implementation of more fruitful self-regulated learning, EFL teachers have to take necessary steps. As EFL teachers, they are responsible to design learning materials which require EFL learners to carry out daily learning regularly outside the class.

This prior preparation will help them actively and meaningfully partake in effective class activities. Likewise, EFL teachers are in charge of designing learning activities which can make individual EFL learners actively learn during the effective class hours. To make self-regulated learning occur more meaningfully, the three-phase paradigm of Wenden (1991) may be used: focus, process, and outcome. In *focus*, for example, EFL learners are expected to employ varied cognitive LS in effective class hours: guessing, paraphrasing. EFL teachers are to design relevant activities of the selected materials which enable EFL learners to employ guessing, paraphrasing and other LS. In the process, EFL teachers, for example, prepare some questions related to the task which can make EFL learners employ the said LS. Questions can be as follows:

- (1) What is the synonym of “house”?
- (2) What is a “dictionary”?
- (3) What is “flower” in the text?
- (4) What is “conservative” in “Mr. Brown is a conservative”?
- (5) What is the “question” in “The teacher questions Mary about her absence yesterday” and “Let us answer the question”?

Questions constructed must have direct influence to make EFL learners employ guessing, paraphrasing and other LS. By this, EFL learners obtain two things: to employ other LS in getting meanings of unfamiliar English words using other LS other than resourcing and to use the target language actively. The findings of the current research provide a data-based evidence of the existence of cooperative learning. The finding prove that individual subjects when faced with difficulties in EFL learning due to learning materials have taken necessary steps to interact with peers and or with teachers. By this, they expect to obtain needed information. EFL learners treat their peers as good language provider, resourceful reference. They commonly do the following social mediation strategies to help themselves learn more meaningfully, namely asking peers, confirmation discussion and asking teachers.

In EFL learning, EFL teachers are expected to manage a more fruitful cooperative learning. Again, the three phases of Wenden (1991) can be used to design a good cooperative learning: focus, process, and outcome. In *focus*, EFL learners are expected to employ the four social mediation strategies. What are materials to provide so that cooperative learning can work fruitfully? In *process* EFL teachers are responsible to design activities to reinforce the cooperative learning to recur meaningfully. Some guides can be

prepared based on which EFL learners work on the task assigned. More concretely, EFL teachers can provide some questions to foster the use of the four social mediation strategies, which can, later on, enhance the quality of their EFL learning. The questions can be as follows:

- (1) What is your idea/opinion about opium?
- (2) What is your idea/opinion about smoking?
- (3) Reading English texts is one of the best ways to attain the goal of EFL learning. What is your idea?
- (4) How to eradicate corruption?

The questions have to be constructed in such a way that they can help EFL learners employ social mediation strategies in their way to obtain needed information/input. Such as, EFL learners can employ LS more meaningfully in their EFL learning. In addition, they can, in a later stage, attain the objective of EFL learning, which is being proficient in the language being learnt.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the findings, individual subjects have been found to have controlled and directed their EFL learning outside and inside the classroom, prior or during learning activities. They have operated a set of mental drives in learning in the form of various different learning strategies in EFL learning. The use of learning strategies in learning indicates that subjects have been able to carry out a so-called self-regulated learning. On the other hand, some learning strategies adopted indicate how individual EFL learners involve other EFL learners in their EFL learning. With the purpose of gaining needed input/ information, the subjects have treated other EFL learners (peers) and EFL teachers as resourceful references to rely on. Peers and teachers are people who not only provide input/information, but also help solve any language problem encountered by the subjects in learning. This has marked the social aspects of the subjects' EFL learning. The subjects have, by their own way, established a so-called cooperative learning. Moreover, the findings indicate the success of EFL learning, encompassing lexical gains, syntactic gains, content gains and pronunciation. Armed with these, the following are some proposed suggestions to those who are deemed to have link of EFL learning in general and to the use of learning strategies in EFL learning in particular:

- (1) EFL teachers are expected to appreciate the self-regulated learning done by individual EFL learners. To foster self -regulated learning is, thus, one of EFL

teachers' responsibilities. They have to facilitate this type of learning to take place more meaningfully. Such responsibility can be actualized in the form of training of learning strategies already in use by EFL learners or else introducing (and also training) other learning strategies which can help EFL learners achieve the ultimate goal they have in mind. EFL learners are trained to take notes, to paraphrase, to ask teacher, etc. the training here demands EFL teachers to play some roles, such as material designer, motivator, guide, facilitator, idea person

- (2) EFL learners are expected to be aware of what learning strategies they are using and also of the advantages of learning strategies they are using. Such consciousness will make them adopt learning strategies more effectively and hence enhance the quality of their learning output. Rather than stick to the same learning strategies, they can shift using other learning strategies which help them achieve the ultimate goal of EFL learning they have in mind. To note, it is recommended that EFL learners are trained to employ learning strategies which foster high exposure to the target language use, and simultaneously minimize the use their own language L1
- (3) Since the use of learning strategies help EFL learners gain important language input, the provincial government of NTT, more specifically the office of national education in the region, can cooperate to promote the use of learning strategies in EFL learning in order to enhance the quality of EFL learning in the region.

Future researchers can make use of this research as a starting point to conduct more holistic research of EFL learning strategies in the region covering all ethnic groups of the province. This is to obtain more representative findings concerning varied different learning strategies adopted by EFL learners residing in NTT. As well, the research can become a reference when conducting other research encompassing larger ethnic tribes in Indonesia: EFL learners with NTT cultural background and those with Javanese or Balinese background, for instance. The future researches may, further, emphasize on whether or not culture has an impact on LS; or culture becomes the foundation of the existing LS in use by EFL learners across cultures.

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