

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 The Background to the Study**

During the last couple of decades the world has been concerned with cultural, social, political and technological changes. In order to keep up with those changes, people have had to meet the needs created by all these changes. Language learning is one of the most important needs and it has become an essential component in people's lives. Because of numerous reasons such as studying at an English medium university or living in a foreign country, people all over the world are trying to learn it as a second language.

By having those facts, government has tried to increase the ability of Indonesian in English especially the students. One effort done by the government is putting English as compulsory subject taught at levels of formal education. Moreover, English becomes one of the subjects included as the graduation standard in National Examination.

There are four language skills to be mastered in balance, namely: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Alwasilah (1999), reading is the most important language skill for academic achievement, followed by writing, speaking, and listening comprehension. This is consistent with Collielr's (1989: 521) suggestion that successful reading performance is strong predictor of students' academic performance in the second language at the secondary and post-secondary level. In the 2006 English Curriculum for junior high school, reading

regarding as the backbone of other language skills. It is stated that through reading students can develop the other language skills such as writing and speaking.

In Indonesia, English as a foreign language is a compulsory subject to be taught in all school from lower to upper secondary schools and also universities. Even in some elementary school, English has been offered as an elective subject. However, the proficiency in English of the Indonesian students still shows unsatisfactory quality of the outputs. According to International Association of the Education (IAEA) in 1992, Indonesian elementary students' reading comprehension is very low. Thus Indonesian elementary reading comprehension is ranked in 29 from 30 nations that used as the research sample (Bali Post, September 22, 2002) the finding indicated the students have low ability in reading comprehension.

The unsatisfying quality of education in general and English in particular relates to some variables. It may come from the methods the teachers use in teaching English on one hand, while it may come from the students themselves. From the side of the students, there are some variables that affecting successful in learning English. Some of them are learning styles and language learning strategies (Oxford, 2005). Appropriate learning styles and language learning strategies help the students in learning English. Furthermore, Oxford (2006) claimed that learning styles and strategies are the main factors helping determine how language learners learn a second or foreign language. Hence, it seems that learning styles are quite crucial during language learning process. Leksman (in Oxford, 1989 : 21) says that learning style is one part of our link to accelerated

learning. Research has identified that people learn in different ways. If one wants to learn something more rapidly, the material needs to be presented to him or her in his or her most developed pathway to the brain-his or learning style. According to Joyce and Weil (1996 : 385), learning styles are important in teaching since they are the education –relevant expressions of the uniqueness of the individual. Individual differences are prized because they are expressions of the uniqueness of personalities. Individually, one's configurations give his or her personal identities. As a teacher, s/he needs to use the teaching repertoires in such a way that s/he capitalizes on the characteristics of the students to help them achieve increasing control over their own growth.

In the learning process, learning style is used in a variety of ways. Each student has his or her own unique learning strength and weakness. It is vital for teachers to deliberately use a variety of learning strategies to reach the students' optimal achievement. The teacher should be aware that the ability and the way of students in studying are different. At the present, the teacher tends to apply one way in teaching that is visual style. For example, the teacher teaches by using board and book, and this is only effective for those whose learning style is visual style. For those who learn better using body movement or work in group this teaching will not be effective. It is obvious, teaching using only one learning style can raise a problem.

Due to this phenomenon, the teachers have to improve the quality of the learning process. The teachers have to be able to arouse the students' motivation and attention towards reading comprehension. The teachers also have to create

or select appropriate method and create the atmosphere of learning where the students optimize their own learning according to their own learning styles and learning strategies.

Therefore, this study aims at investigating the individual learning style preferences of learners, the language learning strategies they prefer to use, and to investigate whether a correlation between language learning strategies, learning styles and reading comprehension exists.

### **1.2 The Problems of the Study**

Based on the previous explanation, the problems of this study are formulated as follows:

1. Is there any correlation between the students' learning style and their language learning strategy preferences
2. Is there any correlation between the students' learning style, language learning strategy preferences and their reading comprehension?

### **1.3 The Objectives of the Study**

In line with the problems, the objectives of the study are to investigate

1. the correlation between students' learning style and their language learning strategy preferences, and
2. the correlation of students' learning style, language learning strategy preferences and their reading comprehension.

#### **1.4 The Scope of the Study**

There are some language learning strategies classification systems and learning styles dimensions such as proposed by O'Malley's, Anna's, and Oxford's, etc. This study is limited to the language learning strategies as classified by Oxford and to the learning styles as categorized by Reid. The study is also limited to the language learning strategies and learning styles preferred by the learners of junior high school grade VIII and their reading comprehension.

#### **1.5 The Significance of the Study**

Theoretically, the findings of the study are expected to be relevant and useful in some respects. The findings hopefully will give contribution for further enhancement and enrichment to the theory of how students learn English especially reading skills. The findings, hopefully will also give contribution for further research especially those in the field of reading comprehension and learning styles and language learning strategies.

Practically, the findings of this study will give contribution to language learning activities especially teachers of English as a foreign language in the classroom. This study can raise teachers' awareness of their students' language learning strategies and learning style that finally will give effect to their teaching style. It is also expected that the study will give information about learners' strategies and style in learning English. The findings are also expected that this study will raise students' awareness of their learning style and strategies in learning English. Raising students' awareness of their language learning and

strategies will make them not only more prepared for learning but also more analytic about their learning strategies they use. Reid (in Tabanlıoğlu, 2003:5) states that developing an understanding of learning environments and strategies will enable students to take control of their learning and to maximize their potential for learning.

The findings are also expected to be useful to curriculum developers and material producers. Because teachers need to have enough time in the curriculum dedicated in the identification of learners' learning strategies and learner training activities, curriculum developers will be able to allocate sufficient time for the training session. Similarly, knowing students' general preference tendencies may enable material developers to produce materials and help students manipulate beneficial strategies.