

## STUDENTS' STRATEGIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH: INDONESIAN CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT

*The objective of this research was to describe learning strategies used by students of English department. English Department students show different performance in their academic achievement, although they were selected through the same entrance test, their academic achievements result not only from what the students do in class, but also their activities. This study used qualitative approach. The data of this study are concerned with the students' activities employed by students in learning English. They are selected based on their Grade Point Average of their language skills and content courses they took at the English Department. The result of this research reveals that English department who are chosen as the participants used all language learning strategies including memory strategy, cognitive strategy, compensation strategy, metacognitive strategy, affective strategy and social strategy.*

**Key Words:** English Department, Learning Strategies, Activities

### INTRODUCTION

Learning strategies are defined as specific action, behaviors, techniques or steps taken by students to enhance their own learning. Learning strategies are especially important for language learning and also the main factors that help determine how the students learn a foreign learning. Brown (2000:210) suggested that learning strategies are specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operating for achieving a particular end, or planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information.

The English Departments are expected to train their students to be good English teachers. They are expected to train their students well, so that the graduates could become qualified English teachers. Unfortunately, many of the graduates, most of whom are teachers, still do not show very good performance in English - not only in oral skills but also in written skills. We can see this from the way English is used in the classroom. Many of them do not use English well and some others use Indonesian more than English in their classrooms because of their limited ability (Marcelino, 2008).

Every learner of a foreign language is an individual. Thus, every English learner has his or her own characteristics in acquiring English as a foreign language. Indonesian students too must have their own characteristics which mark them as successful or unsuccessful learners. The success of learning is the responsibility of the students. Every student should be given opportunities for constructing new knowledge and new language skills by themselves. This is in line with the constructivist approach which views those teachers are in charge as the learning motivators and facilitators. As language has a fundamentally social function which is used for human social interaction, then, the learners' languages will develop through the interaction in their social life (Dorney, 2009).

Learning of any language skill involves the investment of one's time and efforts in learning. Brown (2001) confirms that successful mastery of the second language will be due to a learner's own personal "investment" of time, efforts, and attention to the target language in the form of a battery of strategies for comprehending and producing the language.

Scarcella & Oxford (1992:63) suggested that learning strategies are defined as specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task used by students to enhance their own learning.

According to Chuin and Kaur (2015) in Ang, Embi, & Yunus (2017:48), the development of language learning strategies could facilitate language performance due to the fact that learners are engaged in an active process of learning where by the use of mental processing involved with the aims of achieving specific goals, learning strategies or techniques.

Harmer (1998:25) suggested that classroom students do not usually get the same kind of exposure or encouragement as those who – at whatever age – are ‘picking up’ the language. But that does not mean they cannot learn a language if the right conditions apply. Like language learners outside schools, they will need to be motivated, be exposed to language, and given chances to use it.

Also, Harmer (1998:52) said that “whatever the level of the students and however language ‘study’ is organized within ESA (engage, study, active) teaching sequences, there are four things that students need to do with the new language: be exposed to it, understand its meaning, understand its form, and practice it”.

According to Brown (2000:210), strategies are specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operating for achieving a particular end, or planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information. Strategies are very widely within an individual, while styles are more constant and predictable.

Based on the statements above, language learning strategies can be constructed as learning tools which selected by learners to help get a successful in language learning process. O’Malley and Chamot (1990:45) suggest that language learning strategies can be divided into three groups: Metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social/ affective strategies. This differentiation depends on the level or type of processing involved.

Many factors influence achievement. Not only factors that come from instruction, but also factors that are brought by the students from outside the classroom. Oxford et al. (1993) have studied factors affecting achievement. According to them there are six factors which are relevant to achievement in learning a new language. They are motivation, language learning styles, language learning strategies, gender, course level, and previous experience in learning a foreign language.

Various studies (Fathman, 1976; Madrid, 1995; Freeman, 1999; Gan et al., 2004; Bouageune, 2008; Oxford et al., 2009) have been carried out to understand factors which account for low achievement. The causes of low achievement need to be sought as a response toward the conditions of change, such as plans for educational reform, and in response to the particular situation described above.

Based on the statement in background of this research, the reseacher construct these following research problems:

- 1) What are the language learning strategies used by Indonesian students in learning English?
- 2) What are the factors that mostly influence them in learning English?

## **METHOD**

This study used qualitative design. According to Creswell (2014:12), “Research designs are types of inquiry within qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches that provide a specific direction for procedures in a research design”. The case study selected to investigate the learning strategies that the students used in learning English.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Learning strategies are defined as specific action, behaviors, techniques or steps taken by students to enhance their own learning. Learning strategies are especially important for language learning and also the main factors that help determine how the students learn a foreign learning. The activities can be categorized into: (1) academic activities: activities which participants employ because of the assignments they get from the courses they take at the English Department;(2) social activities: activities which participants employ for other people without getting payment;(3)leisure activities: activities which participants do for having fun, relaxing in their spare time or doing their hobbies.

These activities refer to all participants' English learning activities employed outside the classroom to improve their English. They can be listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary learning, and grammar, etc. To answer this question, the activities are analyzed using Benson's categories (2001: 62) of Self-Instruction, Naturalistic Language Learning, and Self-Directed Language Learning.

Self-Instruction means that participants locate resources to help them improve their English as their target language. This is done intentionally with the purpose to improve their English. In Naturalistic Language Learning, participants learn English unintentionally through doing their daily activities. Naturalistic Language Learning is implemented when the participants use English as their daily means for communication including communicating with other people, orally or in written activities.

Meanwhile, in Self-Directed Naturalistic Language Learning, participants create and search out a language learning situation by choosing their own activities with the purpose of mastering English. In this category, the participants are seen from (1) their own intention in choosing their activity, their situation and the English skills they want to improve, (2) the natural learning activity, in which the skills are meant to be improved in the natural ways as the native speakers usually do.

For her success, it is also indicated that Cs always works hard to understand the courses she attended. This is identified from the following interview:

Cs: It is more favorably to read the book. So actually the ... in the course outline, the lecturers always keep the primary source and the secondary source. When I didn't find what I am looking for in this primary source, then I ask him or her. I may text him or her then sometimes we meet and we talk about that. And when I didn't understand then I go to internet because .. ehm.. what I am worrying about is that when I use internet it is not really ... I don't know .. what the qualification of ... of that information.

Sa also indicates that she spends most of her time for studying: reviewing her notes and doing her assignments to get the best scores for all her classes. She reviews well by studying her notes she wrote during her classes. Sometimes she looks for references from the internet to support her understanding for her lessons. the learners as fluent speakers used memory strategy. In memory strategy, the learners categorized as fluent speakers that used memory strategy such as creating mental link.

The next participant, As, shows that she does her homework well and she studies well too. She states that it is because of her curiosity. She likes to ask questions to her lecturers if she wants to understand more. It can be seen from her outstanding GPA.

Self-Instruction is also employed from Sa from her social activities for pronunciation and translation and leisure activities for vocabulary. Although at first Sa admits that she does not have time to learn English, she realizes that she learnt vocabulary from reading English dictionary either printed or electronic ones, listening to English songs, and from English puzzles she finds in English magazines. If she has time, she likes to study vocabulary and idioms.

Sa : ... I like to listen to the music, sometimes. English music. First, I like the sound, then I try to find the lyrics. Then I study the lyrics if I find a new word and I try to find the meanings, yeah.

The learners as fluent speakers of English department used social strategy. The learners categorized as fluent speakers that used social strategy such as cooperating with other. Self-instruction is also implemented when Sa helps her housemates with their English. When she helps, indirectly she studies and practices her English and at the same time she also improves her English.

Cognitive strategies used to help the learners to manipulate the target language or task correctly by using all their process. They included practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning and creating structure for input and output. For example, use of drills to practice the language and use of dictionary to find the difficult words.

Researcher found that practicing is an effective activity that they have to do to improve their fluency in speak English. It is accordance with Ghufon (2017:198) who states that in learning English as a foreign language, good language learning strategies are important as well. He also said that learning strategies are deliberate action taken by language learners to make learning more effective.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Students of English department who are categorized as student fluent speakers used all language learning strategies including memory strategy, cognitive strategy, compensation strategy, metacognitive strategy, affective strategy and social strategy. It can be seen from the findings that the students can be successful although they have other activities, such as social activities but they spend and manage their activities well.

For future researchers, it is proposed that a future researcher replicates the same research design by involving more subjects with different levels of achievement and different proficiency, so that more specific activities employed by the students can be discovered. Another future research is also proposed through an experimental design, so that the theories formulated by this study can be verified quantitatively.

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