

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY LEARNERS IN LEARNING SPEAKING

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ABSTRACT

Language learning strategies guide language learners to become active learners that can provide for their own needs and choose their preferences in learning the language. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the language learning strategies used by high and low-achieving students in learning speaking as well as how they applied their strategies. There were 20 participants taking part in this study. They were classified into high and low achievers based on the speaking scores. SILL questionnaire proposed by Oxford (1990) was adapted in this study to better fit the purpose of this study. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were also done to measure what it was intended to measure. Besides the questionnaire, a semi-structured interview was also used as the instrument to complement the quantitative data. Based on the data gathered through the questionnaire, the study revealed that metacognitive strategy was the most frequently used strategy by high and low-achieving students. Additionally, the data gathered through interviews also showed that each group of achievers applied all language learning strategies as proposed by Oxford (1990): memory strategy, cognitive strategy, compensation strategy, metacognitive strategy, affective strategy, and social strategy. However, high achievers were reported using a higher number (13 strategies) of language learning strategies than low achievers (11 strategies). The study confirms that learners who have a higher level of English competence will almost certainly apply more strategies in their language learning.

Keywords: *language learning strategies; high achievers; low achievers*

INTRODUCTION

The main objective of the English Department's speaking course is for students to be able to make presentations, deliver a speech, and public speak confidently and comfortably. Many people think that the success of public speaking is only being able to appear in public. In fact, public speaking can be said to be successful when a speaker is able to convey his information or messages both verbally and non-verbally.

Among the four main language skills, speaking is considered to be the most important ability that must be well learned in learning a foreign language. For most people, acquiring speaking skills is the single most important aspect of studying a foreign language, and progress is measured by the ability to engage in conversation in that language (Nunan, 1991 as cited in Gani et al., 2015). Therefore, it is obvious that language is a means of communication. It is no doubt that English speaking skills are necessary to be mastered by learners, particularly university students. According to Florez (1999), among the other skills, speaking has a critical function as a key for communication. The acquisition of English-speaking skills is therefore necessary if all learners are to be able to communicate effectively in the language.

Learners perform their speaking ability by using various strategies that they need to adapt. These various strategies are applicable for the English Education Study Program students who need speaking strategies to help

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them in learning their speaking proficiency. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) state that language learning strategies are applied as a means to acquire and use information acquired, stored or recalled by the learners, and these strategies can also promote autonomy learning. This means that language learning strategies guide language learners to become active learners that can provide for their own needs and choose their preferences in learning the language.

In the English Department of Widya Mandala Surabaya Catholic University, not many studies investigating the language learning strategies used by high-achiever and low-achiever students in learning speaking have been conducted. This present study, therefore, focuses on finding out the language learning strategies and differences in the strategies applied by high-achieving and low-achieving students in learning speaking. This present study further explores the language learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1990), namely direct strategies and indirect strategies. Direct strategies cover memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies, while indirect strategies cover metacognitive, affective, and social strategies used by learners in learning speaking.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Learning Strategies

Many researchers have described language learning strategies in a variety of ways, with the majority of them focusing on how language learners manage the knowledge and the language learning strategies that they use. Research in learning strategies, Rubin (1975, as cited in Hardan, 2013), doing his research on the strategies of successful learners, stated that once identified such strategies could be made available to less successful learners. Rubin also classified the strategies in terms of processes contributing directly or indirectly to language learning. Moreover, Oxford (1990, p.8) defines learning strategies as specific actions taken by learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations. In other words, learners have the ability to respond to particular learning situations and manage their learning in an appropriate way. Thus, learning strategies help the learners learn something more successfully.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p.43) define learning strategies as techniques and devices used by second language learners for remembering and organizing samples of the second language. One of the ways learners become actively involved in controlling their own learning is by using strategies. Strategies are thoughts and behaviors that learners use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain information. They also add that learning strategies may include focusing on selected aspects of new information, analyzing and monitoring information during acquisition, organizing or elaborating on new information during the encoding process, and evaluating the learning when it is completed or assuring oneself that the learning will be successful as a way to allay anxiety.

Speaking Skill

Nunan (2003) believes that speaking, a productive aural/oral skill consists of producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning. In other words, speaking refers to the ability in using language to convey meaning. Speaking, therefore, is the ability of someone to express his ideas, feelings or thoughts in his mind to others. In addition, speaking ability is the ability to speak appropriately and effectively in a real communicative situation in order to convey his ideas to others. English language learners need to develop their speaking ability for various purposes, such as to express an opinion, describe something, complain about something, persuade someone, or make polite requests.

Brown and Yule (1983, as cited in Abbas, 2014) mention that the goal of a speaking course is to enable students to express themselves in the target language, to cope with the basic interactive skills, to express their needs, and to request information, service and etc. Speaking, therefore, is the ability to use language orally, a skill to share ideas, information, suggestion, opinion and so on to other people.

RESEARCH METHOD

Respondents

The respondents of this study were 31 undergraduate students taking Speaking A (English Conversation and Role Playing) in the English Education Study Program. They were Indonesian students who did not speak English as their first language; they were EFL students who were in the stage of developing their English skills.

In this study, the respondents were divided into two groups (high and low achievers) based on the speaking scores of their speaking performances. The levels of their achievements were categorized into:

- The high achievers were those getting scores > 80
- The middle achievers were those getting scores between 75 - 80
- The low achievers were those getting scores < 75

Out of these 31 respondents, there were 10 respondents categorized as high achievers and 10 respondents categorized as low achievers. While, the rest 11 respondents were categorized as the middle achievers.

Instruments

In order to find out the language learning strategies used by both the high and low achievers in learning speaking, this study adapted SILL questionnaire by Oxford (1990) and conducted an interview to the chosen respondents.

Questionnaire

This study adapted Oxford's (1990) *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (SILL). The questionnaire contained six subscales of strategies (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social) with a total of 30 items and offered a choice of five Likert-scale responses for each strategy described: 1=never or almost never true of me, 2=generally not true of me, 3=sometimes true of me, 4=generally true of me, and 5=always or almost always true of me.

The high and low achievers were asked to fill in the online questionnaire. The total number of high and low respondents was 20. Before administering the questionnaire to these respondents, the adapted questionnaire was tried out to measure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Table 1 shows the result of the reliability of the questionnaire.

Table 1. The Reliability of the Questionnaire

Cronbach Alpha Value	Number of Questionnaire Items	Result
0.809	30	Very high

The result shows that the reliability of the try-out questionnaire, the Cronbach alpha value, is 0.809, which was considered as "very high".

Additionally, the validity of the try out questionnaire was also measured. To determine the validity of each item of the questionnaire, this study used correlation analysis, which compares the scores of each item to the total score, which is the sum of the scores for each item. Decision making in the validity test can be done by comparing the value of r value with r table. If the calculated r value is greater than r table (r value $>$ r table), the instrument item for the questionnaire is declared valid. While, if the calculated r value is smaller than r table (r value $<$ r table), the instrument item for the questionnaire is declared invalid.

Table 2. The Value of r table

Significance Level	df = (N-2)	r table
0.05	(15-2) = 13	0.514

Table 2 shows that the value of *r* table is 0.514 with the significance level of 5% (0.05). The value of *r* table was then compared with the *r* value of each item of questionnaire. Based on the result of the validity test in Microsoft Excel, it is concluded that there are 18 items (Item number 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 16, 17, 18, 21, 23, 25, 26, 27, and 28) which are declared as valid and 12 items (Item number 2, 5, 9, 12, 13, 15, 19, 20, 22, 24, 29, and 30) declared as invalid items. Therefore, in order to make invalid items valid, the researcher revised the invalid items to make them more understandable and more appropriate.

Interview

The interview to the chosen respondents was used to find out the different strategies used by the low and high achievers. The questions aimed to dig out how the high achievers and low achiever of Speaking-A course applied the language learning strategies in their learning process during the course.

With the suggestion from the Speaking-A lecturer, six out of the 20 respondents were chosen to be interviewed. Table 3 shows the speaking scores of the six respondents (Respondents A – F) chosen for the interview.

Table 3. Student Scores

Level of performance	Student	Score
High achievers	A	86
	B	90
	C	91.5
Low achievers	D	71
	E	72
	F	74

The researcher used semi-structured interview where the interviewer asked a few prepared questions and the rest of the questions was not planned in advance.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire was transferred to Microsoft Excel and they were calculated by using Microsoft Excel. The calculation revealed the most-frequently used language learning strategies applied by high and low achievers. The formula used in analyzing the data was as follows:

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\Sigma X}{N}$$

\bar{X} = mean

ΣX = sum of all data values

N = number of students

In addition, the researcher analyzed how frequently the students applied the language learning strategies by using the scale. According to Oxford (1990) there are 3 scales that represent how frequently the students used the language learning strategies, which are:

- a) High-frequency use (Mean score (M) between 3.5 to 5.0 indicates that all six of learning strategies are the most frequently used by the participants)
- b) Medium-frequency use (M between 2.5 to 3.4 indicates that all six of learning strategies are normally used by the participants)

- c) Low-frequency use (M smaller than 2.4 indicates all six of learning strategies are rarely used by the participants)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Language Learning Strategies Used by High and Low Achievers in Learning Speaking

Table 4 presents the results and averages of language learning strategies used by the respondents from different levels (high and low achievers) in learning speaking.

Table 4. The Result from Questionnaire

Parts of Language Learning Strategies	High Achievers Average	Interpretation	Low Achievers Average	Interpretation
A (Memory Strategy)	3.8	Highly used	3.26	Medium used
B (Cognitive Strategy)	3.68	Highly used	3.46	Medium used
C (Compensation Strategy)	3.52	Medium used	3.32	Medium used
D (Metacognitive Strategy)	3.9	Highly used	3.98	Highly used
E (Affective Strategy)	3.56	Highly used	3.38	Medium used
F (Social Strategy)	3.78	Highly used	3.32	Medium used

Table 4 shows that metacognitive strategy is the most language learning strategy frequently used by high and low achievers in learning speaking. The finding of this study is in line with other previous studies (Gani et al., 2015; Lee & Heinz, 2016; Sartika et al., 2019; Fitasari et al., 2020; Alfian, 2021). It is beneficial that both high and low achievers frequently apply metacognitive strategy. According to Oxford (1990:137), metacognitive strategy is actions which go beyond purely cognitive devices, and which provides a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process. It means that metacognitive strategy is the language learning strategy which enables language learners or students to supervise their own learning by correcting their pronunciation to improve their speaking skill, paying attention when someone is speaking English, planning their schedule so they will have enough time to practice their speaking skill, and evaluating how they speak.

This study shows that both the low and high achievers frequently used metacognitive strategy to improve their pronunciation ability. As stated in the previous chapter, pronunciation is one of the speaking components to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding (Harris, 1974 as cited in Kurniati et al., 2015). Moreover, according to Hornby (2008), pronunciation is a method on which a language or a specific word or sound is spoken, and it is important to master, particularly in oral communication skills like speaking. As a result, it may be inferred that pronunciation is a crucial component of learning any language, and particularly in learning English, because a person's pronunciation can have a significant impact on whether or not others comprehend or understand what he is trying to convey.

The Different Language Learning Strategies Applied by High and Low Achievers

Table 5 presents the different kinds of language learning strategies applied by high and low achievers in learning speaking obtained from the interview.

Table 5. The Result from Interview

Language Learning Strategies	High Achievers	Low Achievers
Memory Strategy	Using familiar words and phrases while speaking	Remembering new words or phrases by remembering their sound
	Using new words and phrases while speaking	Reviewing speaking lesson
Cognitive Strategy	Trying to talk like native English speakers	Watching English movies
	Applying grammar rules while speaking	Applying grammar rules while speaking
Compensation Strategy	Using dictionary to prepare a role play or communicative activity in class	Guessing the speaker's meaning based on what she/he said so far
	Switching to Indonesian	
	Predicting what others are going to say by using context	
Metacognitive Strategy	Correcting the pronunciation component to improve the speaking skill	Correcting the pronunciation component to improve the speaking skill
		Paying attention when someone is speaking English
Affective Strategy	Practicing to relax while speaking (Reducing students' anxiety)	Practicing to relax while speaking (Reducing students' anxiety)
	Encouraging themselves to speak	Encouraging themselves to speak
	Making positive statements	
Social Strategy	Having a talk with classmates and teachers	Asking others to slow down or say it again
	Asking questions to clarify a confusing point	Having a talk with classmates and teachers
Total	13	11

Table 5 clearly shows that high achieving respondents applied more strategies than the low achieving respondents did. There were 13 kinds of speaking strategies applied or implemented by the high achievers, and only 11 strategies used by the low achievers. The findings appear to support the belief that, in general, high achieving learners were reported to use a higher number of language learning strategies than low achieving learners (Gani et al., 2015; Samperio, 2019; Fitasari et al., 2020). It is confirmed by Green and Oxford (1995), who assert that learners who have a higher level of English competence will almost certainly apply broader strategies.

In terms of the variety of strategies used, the findings of this study confirm that successful language learners are typically those who are good at modifying learning strategies in their day-to-day interactions with the language they are learning (Brown, 2001). For instance, high achieving students use more various strategies (memory, cognitive, and social strategies) to improve their fluency ability. They applied those strategies by using new expressions while speaking, practicing to talk like native English speakers, and communicating with their classmates and their lecturers. Meanwhile, low achieving students improved their fluency ability by using affective strategy. They applied this strategy by encouraging themselves to speak English so that they could improve their fluency. This finding demonstrates that students with high academic achievement put up greater effort than those with low academic achievement.

Furthermore, this research confirms that a learning strategy should be primarily focused on achieving a specific goal (Samperio, 2019). Occasionally, however, learners are unaware of the purpose for which they are applying a strategy; for example, low-achieving students who used a cognitive strategy to watch an English movie with the goal of learning vocabulary were unaware that they were applying the strategy. It is unlikely that these

learners will improve their vocabulary if they do not focus on improving their listening comprehension, their pronunciation, and their enjoyment of the movie. Perhaps being aware of the reason for applying a strategy could help to increase the efficiency of that strategy because the effort would be directed directly toward the achievement of the learning goal. It would then be necessary not only to encourage low achievers to incorporate strategies that high achievers apply, but also to ensure that low achievers apply these strategies correctly and appropriately.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The finding of the first research question shows that students taking Speaking A course (English Conversations and Role Playing) applied all language learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1990). Additionally, quantitative analysis of the data obtained from SILL questionnaire indicates that English Foreign Language students used a variety of strategies in learning speaking. Meanwhile, the most frequently used language learning strategy by both high and low achieving respondents in learning speaking was metacognitive strategy. This finding also reveals that different achievers (high and low) frequently used this strategy by organizing, planning, and evaluating their learning. For instance, by correcting their pronunciation to improve their speaking skill, paying attention when someone is speaking, planning their schedule so they will have enough time to practice, evaluating how they speak, and making an outline before performing.

Based on the findings about the language learning strategies applied by high and low achieving respondents, it is apparent that respondents with high speaking performance used more learning strategies than those with low speaking performance. Moreover, the data from the interviews also reported that both high and low achievers applied various strategies to improve the speaking components, namely pronunciation, fluency, comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary. However, the aim of applying a strategy in order to achieve a goal is a differentiating factor between the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of these strategies. Applying a strategy can help to increase the efficiency of that strategy if the effort is directed directly toward the achievement of the learning goal.

The research results suggest that English teachers should understand the benefits of language learning practices that can be included into their English instruction. Students will later have an understanding of the language learning strategies that can be used in their own learning process. Moreover, students should also be aware of how they should learn, when they should learn it, and why they should use a certain strategy in their learning. They can become more aware of their own learning experience and realize that learning is more than just a matter of learning new things. Better strategies are established in order to achieve the learning goal that is relevant to their skill and ability rather than simply recognizing the content.

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