

EFL Learning Strategies Employed by Indonesian Successful High School Students

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 12/10/2019

Approved 4/2/2020

Keywords:

Language Learning Strategies
Successful EFL learners
High School

ABSTRACT

Abstract: Language learning strategies (LLSs) play an essential role in the process of English language learning. This study is aimed at investigating language-learning strategies employed by successful Indonesian EFL high school students. This study is of significance to provide a model of strategies practiced by successful EFL students who manage to develop good command of English regardless certain limitations and challenges they face. The results of this study show the students actively employ a combination of affective and cognitive-social learning strategies to develop their English skills.

INTRODUCTION

Language learning strategies play an essential role in the process of English language learning. A number of studies have demonstrated the significance of language learning strategies in second/foreign language acquisition (Cáceres-Lorenzo, 2015; Mesgarshahr & Abdollahzadeh, 2014; Pipattarasakul & Singhasiri, 2018; Samalaty & Tedjaatmadja, 2017). Language learning strategies are defined as specific actions purposefully employed by learners to help them learn the target language easier, faster and more enjoyable (Oxford, 2011). It suggests that language learning strategies appear in the form of conscious and goal-oriented efforts.

(Chamot, 2005) finds that learners become familiar with certain learning strategies as they use them repeatedly to deal with difficulties and challenges in their learning. therefore, a study on language learning strategies employed by students is of importance to have a better understanding on cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective processes the students undergo during their language learning. Gaining well-informed insights from such practices can benefit teachers in a way that they have a strong stance to teach less successful students learning strategies that will help them become better learners.

Related to studies on language learning strategies in the context of second or foreign language learning, most research prior to the mid-1970s greatly focused on evaluating teaching methods and learning materials (Khalil, 2005). Following that period, many researchers began paying attention to the importance of social, psychological, and affective variables and how they improve or hinder the success of L2 learning. It suggests that the investigation should concern the learners themselves and hence the notion of learning strategies and successful language learners earn an important place in second/foreign language studies. A comprehensive review on research projects conducted on the notion of good language learners is well outlined by (Griffiths, 2015) article entitled “What have we learnt from ‘good language learners?’” He mentions three important figures that greatly contribute to the development of this area of research, among which are (Norton & Toohey, 2001; Oxford, 2011).

The fundamental value that underlies the above projects deals with the researchers’ optimism that studying what good learners do will help teachers accumulate strategies that can be taught to less successful learners. (Griffiths, 2015), furthermore, outlines that research on language learning gains its increasing popularity through (Oxford, 2011) publication of a typology of learning strategies converted into a readily-used questionnaire named Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). (Oxford, 2011) SILL includes 50 strategies categorized into two general types of learning strategies, namely, direct and indirect strategies.

Direct strategies are classified into memory, cognitive and compensation strategies (Oxford, 2011). Memory strategies involve learners’ mental processes for storing new information and for recalling them back when they need the information. These strategies include specific actions such as using new learned words in a sentence, creating an image of the words, and using flashcards. In addition, cognitive strategies involve conscious ways of handling the target language that include practicing speaking and writing, trying to communicate like native speakers, watching movies in English, and paying attention to patterns. Compensation strategies help learners

use the language either in speaking or writing despite a temporary breakdown they face in communication. These strategies include making guesses, using gestures, using synonyms, and reading without looking up every new word.

Indirect strategies consist of metacognitive, affective and social strategies (Oxford, 2011). Metacognitive strategies help learners control their own cognition. The strategies include specific actions such as noticing ones' own mistakes and use the information to learn better, finding ways to be a better language learner, and having clear goals to improve ones' own learning. Affective strategies are employed by students to manage their emotions, motivation, and attitudes associated with learning. The strategies include encouraging oneself when making mistakes in learning the target language, keeping a diary to express feelings, and trying to relax and cope with nervousness and boredom. Finally, language is a form of social behaviour and learning it involves other people, and it is of great importance that learners use appropriate social strategies in this process (Oxford, 2011). The strategies include practicing English with other students, learning the cultures of English, asking friends or teachers for feedback.

Studying what strategies second or foreign language learners use can provide an insight into what the learners think about their own learning and what they should do to keep improving their learning and therefore enhance our understanding of this process more specifically (Silva, 1993). Moreover, such a study is important to help map out a "predictive model" of the construct of learning which can be beneficial for instructional, research, and educational practices, and for curricular planning and assessment (Grabe & Zhang, 2016). Considering this, some studies have been carried out by employing (Oxford, 2011) SILLs or developing further instruments based on it (Cáceres-Lorenzo, 2015; Mesgarshahr & Abdollahzadeh, 2014; Mistar et al., 2014; Pipattarasakul & Singhasiri, 2018; Samalaty & Tedjaatmadja, 2017).

Abdollahzadeh (2010) finds that metacognitive strategy, such as formulating clear learning goals, planning learning schedules and cognitive strategy, such as trying to find patterns in the target language, reading in the target language for pleasure, are the most frequently used strategies in English writing. The use of both strategies does not highly differ in low- and high-fluent students. (Cáceres-Lorenzo, 2015) find that the most frequently used strategy is social strategy, such as practicing the target language with other students, learning about the culture of the native speakers. It is because the students learn the target language in an immersion program in which the social environment is very supportive in encouraging the development of the students' proficiency. The findings also show that the students' frequent use of language learning strategies positively correlate with their positive results in the students' language program. (Pipattarasakul & Singhasiri, 2018) find that the students frequently use cognitive metastrategies in speaking that include planning, researching sources of information, and rehearsing the task. This strategy is followed by affective metastrategies in which the students attempt to cope with nervousness and anxiety.

(Mistar, 2001) conducts a study to identify English learning strategies employed by 386 students from three universities in Indonesia. The results of the study demonstrate that factors such as the students' language proficiency, personality traits, attitudes and motivation have a significant contribution to language learning strategy use among the students. The students' anxiety and attitudes towards English are deemed to be the best predictors of the use of learning strategies by the students. (Mistar et al., 2014) also conducts a study to investigate the use of language learning strategies used by 150 third year high school students from three state high schools in East Java. The results of the questionnaire show that the students use form-focusing and meaning-focusing strategies at the high level of frequencies. The findings also show that all types of strategies are closely interrelated. Furthermore, (Samalaty & Tedjaatmadja, 2017) find that the high-proficient students employ all types of cognitive strategies such as employing their senses to understand and remember the lesson, conceptualizing what they learn, and reasoning. Though all of the high-proficient students employ cognitive strategies, the strategies also appear to be personalized by each student to suit their learning needs and styles.

It is worth noting that there are various factors at play when it comes to the students' choice of language learning strategies and their success in learning English. These factors range from language proficiency, motivation, gender, socio-cultural background, attitudes, types of learning task, age, and learning styles (Oxford, 2011). Given the importance attributed to language learning strategies in the students' success in learning the target language, it is essential to gain deeper insights related to the students' use of language learning strategies. However, regardless the demonstrated importance of language learning strategies on students' success in learning English, there has been only a few studies conducted to explore this area of research in Indonesian context. This certainly offers a gap to be filled by further studies and the present study thus is carried out to do so.

The present study attempts to provide a more in-depth analysis on the use of language learning strategies through the use of a self-report, which is through interviews with open-ended questions. The use of a questionnaire to elicit data such as in (Mistar, 2001; Mistar et al., 2014) poses limitations on the complexity of language learning strategies use among the students as their responses are directed by items of strategies prepared in the questionnaire. Therefore, such an in-depth analysis needs to be conducted to provide complementary insights on language learning strategy use. In addition, unlike the study conducted by (Samalaty & Tedjaatmadja, 2017) focusing on cognitive strategy alone, the present study will explore all types of strategies in the context of students' overall skills, which

are found to contribute to the students' language learning success by other previous studies (Cáceres-Lorenzo, 2015; Green & Oxford, 1995; Mesgarshahr & Abdollahzadeh, 2014; Mistar et al., 2014; Pipattarasakul & Singhasiri, 2018).

This study aims to reveal what language learning strategies are used by successful Indonesian high school students in learning English at Aji Santoso International Football Academy, Malang. This non-state funded Academy, in which this study was conducted, is equal to high school level in educational system in Indonesia. This Academy is more focused on providing football education for the students as one of the goals is to provide chances for the students to be professional football players.

In relation to the teaching and learning English, the students have minimum exposure to English as it is limited only on the classroom. It is generally a typical situation of English learning in Indonesian high schools as it is a foreign language. (Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019) points out that Indonesian students generally fail to achieve high levels of oral or written proficiency, one reason of which due to the use of English tends not to go beyond classroom. In general, Indonesian students have tendencies to be passive during the teaching and learning process unless they are called on, which is greatly determined by the course content, teaching methods, assessment, and lack of exposure to English outside the classroom (Mattarima & Hamdam, 2011).

The English teachers in the Academy express that the position of English in the school is much harder compared to the one in other schools because they express that English and other school subjects seem to be treated as secondary. The main emphasis on the Academy is football training education for the students. Considering the layout of the school and the English teaching and learning in such a context, the present study is of significance to explore what strategies the successful students employ to develop good command of English regardless of certain limitations and challenges they face. Based on the background of the study, the research question is stated as follows: "What language learning strategies are employed by successful Indonesian EFL high school students?"

METHOD

This qualitative study involved three successful EFL students at the Academy. The notion of success was based on the English teachers' recommendations and tests prepared for this study. Out of six students recommended, three students were considered to be suitable for this study. The teachers stated that these students had good academic grades at English subject they taught, performed well during teaching and learning activities, had overseas living experience through students' exchange programs, and were able to communicate in English well with the foreign coach teaching football at the Academy. These aspects were considered to be important as they were resulted from the teachers' observations, and assessment of their students. Related to the students' English level of fluency, the students passed the writing and speaking tests I prepared with reference to the Common Framework of Reference (CFR), a well-established language framework used to identify students' global levels of fluency across diverse demographics who need English as an additional language (Government of Saskatchewan, 2013).

To collect the data, an interview with open-ended questions was conducted with the three students individually to gain deeper understanding of the students' responses concerning their use of language learning strategies. Therefore, the interview guideline was developed based on the statements listed in each category of learning strategies proposed by (Oxford, 2011). The general themes of the interview include the students' use of specific activities to improve their English with reference to memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, social, and affective strategies. They also include the students' experiences and feelings in learning English.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Employment of Affective Strategies by Successful EFL Students

Affective strategies are specific actions performed by students to manage their emotions, motivation, and attitudes associated with language learning (Oxford, 2011). The analysis of the interview data shows that the successful EFL students employ learning strategies that can be classified as affective strategies. The key strategies include self-motivating to improve their English, encouraging themselves to use English without being afraid of mistakes and judgment, and discussing their feelings about learning English with someone else. Each of these strategies will be presented along with excerpts from the interview.

The first strategy deals with how the students motivate themselves to keep learning English and improve their skills. The following responses derived from the interview with the students reflect this point.

S1: I'm more motivated to learn English after I went to Barcelona. When I was there, I started to realize that it's really important to be fluent in English. Since then, my interest in English began to grow.... It also feels good when I'm able to communicate with other people in English.

S2: I once took part in a selection process to attend a training program in England. It motivated me to master English. I have been interested in English for a long time because I like watching football matches, especially the Premier League.

Moreover, the students are also able to envision themselves as proficient learners and the benefits they can reap from being proficient language users. The following response from the student reflected this point.

S1: I feel the benefits now because I have good English. Now I find it easy to understand films or songs... I also realize that it is important for me when I take part in training programs or when later I become a professional football player.

S3: Of course. I will keep learning English because I really am serious in my ambition to be a football player and I want to play in a foreign league someday.

Following that, the students also encourage themselves to use English without being afraid of mistakes and judgment. The following responses derived from the interview show this point.

S2: You know there are some friends who like English as well so I get along well with them to practice... There are some friends saying that I am a show off but it does not affect me.

S3: I speak English with some of my friends at the dormitory... well, there are some friends who ask me not to speak English... I do not take it seriously as I understand that it is important for me.

The use of such strategy is also reflected on the students' willingness to make the best use of opportunities they have to practice their English.

S1: When I was in Barcelona, I maximized that moment to practice speaking English with other players.

S2: When I was in Bali, there was once a moment in which I pretended to be a Thai person so that I could speak English with the receptionist in the hotel.

In addition, the students perform another affective strategy which is by discussing their feelings about learning English with someone else. The following responses made by the students during the interview convey the use of this strategy.

S1: In our group, we often talk about our English learning and share our experience to each other.

S3: I form a group with those same-minded friends. We watch films together and talk about those who speak ill about us. We take it as a joke.

The findings in relation to the role of motivation are supported by a study conducted by (Dörnyei, 2014a) showing that without having maintained motivation, the students, even the top ones, find it hard to consistently achieve significant improvements in their language learning in a certain long period. Motivation has been regarded as a crucial driver of success in second or foreign language learning (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). It is also in line with the findings of a study conducted by (Tuan & Mai, 2015) showing that motivation becomes one of essential factors that affect the students' English performance. This is supported by the research findings of (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008) and (Aji & Khan, 2019) demonstrating that motivation positively correlates with English learning achievement of the students in their studies. It suggests that the more motivated the students the higher their L2 language achievement. Considering the status of English as a foreign language in Indonesia, in order to be successful in learning the target language, EFL learners in general need a higher degree of motivation because their social-cultural environment provides negligible supports for learning English (Dörnyei, 1990).

The findings have demonstrated that the students show positive attitudes towards English, the culture, and the speakers of the target language. This point is in line with (Dörnyei, 2014b) concept of *integrative orientation*, a goal-oriented motivation that drives language learners to continuously learn because they develop a high interest in the target language and members of the community. The students in this study also motivate themselves by projecting a positive self-current/positive image due to the result of being proficient in English. This is supported by (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) concept of vision in L2-self suggesting that in learning a foreign language, what strongly drives one's motivation to attain their learning goals is closely related to their vision on possible, the ideal and the ought-to-be selves.

In addition, the students also motivate themselves by realizing potential benefits of English proficiency. This point is in line with (Dörnyei, 2014b) concept of *instrumental orientation*, in which language learning is associated with pragmatic gains that learners can reap as they become proficient in the target language. In this case, the students are aware of the benefits of having good command of English for their careers as football players or future jobs. These specific ways of motivation allow the students to encourage themselves to use English without being afraid of mistakes and judgment and discuss their feelings about learning English with other students. The students thus need more efforts to sustain their use of such affective strategies to support their English learning because learning a new language takes considerable time and tedious process (Chang & S. Goswami, 2011).

Table 1. Summary of Affective Strategies Used by Successful EFL Students

Learning strategies	Illustrations
Self-motivating to improve their English	Showing a high interest in English and having the desire to interact with speakers of English.
	Projecting a positive self-current/future image as the result of being proficient in English.
	Having a vision of potential pragmatic benefits of English proficiency for their careers as international football players or future jobs.
Encouraging themselves to use English without being afraid of mistakes and judgment.	The rather negative attitudes towards English use among some of their peers do not dismiss their effort to practice speaking English.
	During their stay in international environments, they made the best use of the opportunity to practice despite linguistic limitations.
Discussing their feelings about learning English with someone else.	Forming a circle of friendship consisting of the students who share passion and interest in learning English and discussing about their feelings on learning English.

The Employment of Cognitive-Social Strategies by Successful EFL Students

The analysis of the interview data shows that the successful EFL students employ learning strategies that can be classified as cognitive-social strategies. The key strategies include practicing talking like native speakers to develop accuracy and fluency, reading extensively in English, listening extensively in English, using smartphones as a tool to support English learning, and practicing English in daily life with friends and looking for other people they can talk to in English. Each of these strategies will be presented along with excerpts from the interview.

The first strategy deals with efforts done by the students to practice talking like native speakers to develop accuracy and fluency. The following responses derived from the interview with the three students reflect this point.

S1: I am interested in practicing accents. I often follow American accent from films and YouTube videos I watch.

S2: I like to imitate British accent from watching Premier League. I think the accent is unique and cool. I also watch YouTube videos.

S3: I like to imitate British accent from watching Harry Potter so that I'm interested in British accent. I think it fits me well... From YouTube as well.

Following that, the students read extensively in English to improve their language skills. By extensive reading, it means they read for pleasures in English enjoyably and abundantly. The following responses paraphrased from the interview with the three students reflect this point.

- S1: I like to read online sport comics and other genres in English. The English version is released earlier. Up to now, I still frequently read online comics and articles from the Internet.
- S2: I think reading has profound impact on my English learning. I have long liked reading football magazines and articles in English. They appear first and are more comprehensive. This expands my vocabulary.

In addition, the students listen extensively in English to improve their listening skills or comprehension of spoken language input. The following responses taken from the interview with the three students convey this point.

- S1: I learn a lot from listening to English songs and films. I sometimes try to watch films or videos without subtitles. I also often access YouTube contents in English.
- S3: I often watch English contents from YouTube. I also like to watch football channels and cooking-related contents.

Moreover, smartphones have been an inevitable part of students' use of technology. In this case, the students consciously use their smartphones as a tool to support English learning. In the interview, the students reflected on this learning strategy.

- S2: I follow English learning accounts on Instagram. I often leave comments or make captions in English.
- S3: I have a dictionary and learning notes on my phone. I once installed English learning app as well... I use Instagram to follow my favorite players and like to read the caption, comments, and leave comments myself.

Cognitive strategies are inseparable from actions done by the students to put what they have learned in use. In this matter, the students practice English in daily life with their friends and other people they can talk to in English. The following responses taken from the interview demonstrate the use of this strategy.

- S1: I often practice my English with Bathi, with my brother as well as my friends I hangout with.
- S2: You know there are some friends who like English as well so I get along well with them to practice... I also often speak English with my girlfriend.

These findings are in line with some studies coming up with findings showing that cognitive strategies have a high correlation with students' high proficiency levels (Baker & Boonkit, 2004; Khalil, 2005; Mesgarshahr & Abdollahzadeh, 2014). (Mesgarshahr & Abdollahzadeh, 2014), for example, conducts a study on Iranian university students' learning strategies in English. His findings show that cognitive strategies are more frequently used by students with a high proficiency level. (Khalil, 2005) finds that cognitive strategies, followed by social strategies, highly correlate with university students' high proficiency levels in his study.

One of the strategies used by the students is practicing talking like native speakers. The students give themselves lots of exposure to language materials from the target community. One student, for example, has developed British accent as he likes watching Premier League. The students also practicing the sounds of English they listen from resources they access to learn English (e.g., YouTube videos). This is supported by (Dörnyei, 2014a) as well as (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) conveying that the students' positive attitudes towards learning can be reflected through their increased interest and autonomy in exposing themselves in language and socio-cultural aspects of the target language and community. They further state that such attitudes maintain their motivation in learning and help them develop their language proficiency.

Other key aspects that need to be discussed deal with the students' good habits of reading and listening extensively in English. These findings are in line with (Renandya & Jacobs, 2016) points asserting that out input is a key factor in language learning. He points out that many studies have demonstrated that when EFL students are frequently exposed to a vast amount of language input, the students expand their vocabulary, improve their recognition of language structure, and increase their overall proficiency. (Renandya & Jacobs, 2016) further points out that one way to give students a large amount of input is by developing a high interest in extensive reading and listening. When the students do reading and listening extensively in English, it means that they process language input abundantly and enjoyably. In extensive listening, for instance, (Renandya & Jacobs, 2016) points out that a number of research have shown that when students are exposed to a large amount of input to develop listening fluency. They will increase their ability to understand and process spoken data with greater ease, accuracy and comprehension. Finally, the students' use of language strategies also reflect their autonomy as language learners. Learning autonomy also has been considered as a crucial aspect that helps students improve their language skills and become successful language learners (Dörnyei, 2014a; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Guilletoaux & Dornyei, 2008).

Table 2. Summary of Cognitive-Social Strategies Used by Successful EFL Students

Learning strategies	Illustrations
Practicing talking like native speakers to develop accuracy and fluency.	Giving oneself lots of exposure to language materials from the target community. One student, for example, has developed British accent as he likes watching Premier League. Practicing the sounds of English they listen from resources they access to learn English (e.g., YouTube videos)
Reading extensively in English.	Developing good reading habits by reading extensively materials of their interest such English football magazines, articles, or sport comics.
Listening extensively in English.	Developing good listening skills by listening extensively to visual-audio materials of their interest in English such as YouTube contents, TV series, football match, and songs.
Using smartphones as a tool to support English learning.	Using the phone to keep notes of vocabulary. Setting the phone in English mode. Saving English videos and laying games in English. Accessing social media to write posts/comments in English and interact with other speakers of English there.
Practicing English in daily life with friends and other people.	Having groups of friend to practice English with. Using English with other people when possible opportunities for using English are available.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show the students actively employ a combination of affective and cognitive-social learning strategies to develop their English skills. The affective strategies include self-motivating to improve their English, encouraging themselves to use English without being afraid of mistakes and judgment, and discussing their feelings about learning English with someone else. In the case of motivation, the findings show three types of motivation that the students possess, namely, integrative orientation, instrumental orientation, and vision in L2 self which have been regarded as crucial to students' success in language learning (Dörnyei, 2014a, 2014b).

In addition, the cognitive-social strategies include practicing talking like native speakers to develop accuracy and fluency, reading and listening extensively in English, using smartphones as a tool to support English learning, and practicing English in daily life with friends and other people they can talk to in English. These findings pinpoint a high degree of learning autonomy that the students have. The autonomy drives the students to interact with language input abundantly through reading and listening for pleasure, which has been found to be crucial LLSs done by successful language learners to achieve fluency (Renandya & Jacobs, 2016). The findings are supported by previous studies in the use of LLSs in EFL context showing that students with high level of proficiency are significantly associated with a frequent use of LLSs (Chang & S. Goswami, 2011; Green & Oxford, 1995; Wong & Nunan, 2011).

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