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Learning Strategies Used by Good Achievers in Speaking English

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Abstract

Learning strategies play an important role in gaining good learning result. Those who learn with strategies will get better result than those who learn without strategies. Speaking is a productive skill that becomes an indicator of a language performance. It can be said that students' English is good when their speaking is good. Therefore, it is important to know what strategies used by students whose speaking is excellent. The information will be useful since learning strategies can be trained to other students. This study investigates twenty English students whose speaking score is excellent. They are member of a debate community in an English department. The database consists of questionnaires response consisting of 50 items of strategies. The data are described in a quantitative and qualitative ways. The findings show the learning strategies used by the students and how they use the strategies.

Keywords: good achievers, learning strategies, speaking.

Introduction

Learning is a process. Richards and Schmidt define learning as "the process by which change in behaviour, knowledge, skills, etc., comes about through practice, instruction or experience and the result of such a process." (2010). In the process of learning, an individual learns in his/her own way. The results of learning are varied. Some students are successful and may fail.

Strategies play an important role in the success of learning. The use of appropriate strategies will make the result of learning better than the one without using strategies. Someone who use learning strategies will try to find efficient and effective way to achieve good result in learning.

Strategies are activities that can be trained. One who is successful in using a certain strategy to learn something may share it with others so that they can also be successful in learning the same thing.

Students who learn English will be claimed as successful when their speaking is good. It is because speaking is the skill that can be directly identified, observed, and heard. Speaking English well and fluently is a desire for every student learning English. However, not everyone can have that competence. Therefore, it is interesting to know how students with good speaking ability learn English. What strategies do they apply?

Literature review

According to Oxford (1990) learning strategies are specific action taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations. Each student may have different learning strategy that makes their learning successful. Fortunately, learning strategies are things that can be trained to others so that they can imitate or apply the strategies practiced by successful learners to get success.

In relation to the strategy that can be trained, Brown (2001) suggested approaches that can be used to teach strategies in the classroom. They are teaching strategies through interactive techniques, using compensatory techniques, administering strategy inventory, and making

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use of impromptu teacher-initiated advice.

Oxford divides Learning strategies into six types (1990). They are:

1. Memory strategies: memorizing and retrieving new information.
2. Cognitive strategies: understanding and producing the language.
3. Compensation strategies: using the language despite knowledge gaps.
4. Metacognitive strategies: coordinating the learning process.
5. Affective strategies: regulating emotions.
6. Social strategies: learning with others

Another book by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) studied the learning strategies. They have different types of learning strategies from Oxford's but share one of them, that is metacognitive strategies (Johnson, 2008:150)

Learning strategies are important to gain success. Appropriate language learning strategies result in greater motivation and confidence (Hong Shi, 2017).

According to Oxford (1990) learning strategies have the following features:

1. Contribute to the main goal → communicative competence
2. Allow learners to become more self-directed
3. Expand the role of teacher
4. Are problem-oriented
5. Are specific actions taken by the learner
6. Involve many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive
7. Support learning both directly and indirectly
8. Are not always observable
9. Are often conscious
10. Can be taught
11. Are flexible
12. Are often influenced by a variety of factors

Several studies on learning strategies have been conducted with different purposes. Habok, et.al. (2021) studied differences in foreign language learning strategies among Hungarian, Chinese, and Mongolian University students. The finding shows that all similarly used metacognitive learning strategies as preference. Meanwhile, Qasimnejad and Hemmati (2013) studied the language learning

strategies used by Iranian Monolingual and Bilingual speakers as EFL learners. The finding showed there was a significant difference in the strategy used in learning English by monolingual and bilingual speakers. Another research was conducted to know the language strategies used by successful and unsuccessful Iranian EFL students (Gerami, et.al: 2011). The finding showed that successful students often used metacognitive strategies while the unsuccessful one tended to use surface level cognitive strategies. Yang et.al. (2021) found in their study of language learning strategies used by Brazilian students in learning China as a foreign language that metacognitive and social strategies are the most frequently employed learning strategies.

Method of the study

The study was conducted to investigate the learning strategies applied by students who were successful in learning Speaking. In addition, the study was also to describe how students applied the learning strategies. Data were collected from twenty students whose speaking score are excellent (A). The twenty students were chosen for some reasons. First, they were students who are active in a debate community (DECO). Second, they are fluent in speaking. The instruments used to collect data are in the form of questionnaires.

The questionnaires with 5 options are adopted from Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford. The options are: 1 = Never true or almost never true of me, 2 = Usually not true, 3 = somewhat true, 4 = Usually true of me, and 5= Always or almost always true of me. The questionnaire contains 50 items representing the 6 types of learning strategy. They are 9 statements of memory strategy, 14 statements of cognitive strategy, 6 of compensation strategy, 9 of metacognitive strategy, 6 of affective, and 6 of social strategy.

The questionnaire was distributed to the twenty students. The data then were classified based on the types of learning strategy. Counting the score and the mean score of each type of learning strategy did the data analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the research are presented in the following tables.

Table 1: The frequency of language learning strategies used by the students.

Respondent	Strategies					
	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
1	3.77.	2.92	3.5	3.44	2.66	2.66
2	4	3.64	4	4,1	3.66	3.8
3	3.77	3.92	4.5	3.66	4	3.5
4	4.22	4.71	4.66	5	5	5
5	4	4.07	4	4	2.5	3.6
6	3.88	3.85	3.5	4.22	4.16	4
7	2.8	2.57	2.83	2.7	2.83	3
8	3.77	3.85	3.83	4.6	3.66.	4.33
9	2.44	3.21	2.8	4.55	2.5	4.33
10	3.33	3.14	3.33	4	3.83	2.83
11	3.77	3.85	4	4	2.5	3.66
12	3	3.28	4.33	4.11	3.66	6
13	2.33	2.85	3	3.66	2.66	0.66
14	3.55	3.64	4.16	5	4.5	4.66
15	3.33	3.42	3.16	4	3.66	3.66

16	3.22	3.57	2.66	3.77	2.83	2.5
17	3.55	4.28	3.5	4.55	3	4
18	2.55	2.21	2.33	3.22	2.66	2.66
19	3.2	3.42	4	3.88	3.16	3.5
20	3.88	3.5	3.16	4.11	3.66	3.83
Total	61.04	69.9	71.25	76.47	63.43	72.18
Mean	3.05	3.49	3.56	3.82	3.17	3.6

Notes

1 = Never true or almost never true of me,

2 = Usually not true,

3 = somewhat true,

4 = Usually true of me,

5= Always or almost always true of me

Table 2: Categorization

Score	Category
4.25 - 5	Very high
3.75 – 4.2	High
3.0 – 3.7	Medium
2.0-2.95	Low
0 – 1.95	Very low

Table 3: Mean score and category of strategies used.

Strategies	Mean score	Category
metacognitive	3.82	High
Social	3.60	Medium
Compensation	3.56	Medium
Cognitive	3.49	Medium
Affective	3.17	Medium
Memory	3.05	Medium

Table 4: The mean score of the strategy used

No	Strategy	Mean Score	Category
1.	Meta cognitive	3.82	High
2.	Social	3.60	Medium
3.	Compensation	3.56	Medium
4.	Cognitive	3.49	Medium
5.	Affective	3.17	Medium
6.	Memory	3.05	Medium
Average mean score		3.44	Medium

From the mean score in table 4, students with good speaking ability applied metacognitive learning strategy as the most frequently used. Figure 3.82 as the mean score

indicates that the use of this strategy is high. This strategy is represented by these statements:

No of questionnaire	Metacognitive strategy
30.	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.
31.	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.
32.	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.
33.	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.
34.	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.
35.	I look for people I can talk to in English.
36.	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.
37.	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.
38.	I think about my progress in learning English.

They used this strategy by paying attention well, finding native speaker to speak with, setting clear goal in learning, evaluating the progress by comparing a year before and after. In addition, they use mistakes to do correction. The use of social strategy is the second frequently used.

The mean score for this strategy is 3.60. They used this strategy by practicing speaking with friends, asking the speaking partner to slow down his/her speaking, and by learning the English culture. The statements representing the social strategy are the followings.

No of questionnaires	Social Strategy
45.	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.
46.	I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.
47.	I practice English with other students.
48.	I ask for help from English speakers.
49.	I ask questions in English.
50.	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.

The next frequently used strategy was compensation strategy. The mean score is 3.56. The students use this strategy by using gesture, guessing, changing with other

words or by describing. This strategy is shown in the statements below.

No of questionnaire	Compensation strategy
24.	To understand unfamiliar words, I make guesses.
25.	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.
26.	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.
27.	I read English without looking up every new word.
28.	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.
29.	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.

The fourth frequently used strategy is cognitive strategy. The mean score for this strategy is 3.49. These statements

show the cognitive strategy used by the students in learning.

No of questionnaire	Cognitive strategy
10	I say or write new English words several times.
11.	I try to talk like native English speakers.
12.	I practice the sounds of English.
13.	I use the English words I know in different ways.
14.	I start conversations in English.
15.	I watch English language TV show spoken in English or go to the movies spoken in English.
16.	I read for pleasure in English.
17.	I write notes, messages, letters or reports in English.
18.	I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly), then go back and read carefully.
19.	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.
20.	I try to find patterns in English.
21.	I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.
22.	I try not to translate word-for-word
23.	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English

The use of affective strategy was the second last preference. Figure 3.17 shows the medium use. The mean

score for the use of this strategy is 3.17. The statements that show the use of this strategy are as follows.

No of questionnaire	Affective strategy
39.	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.
40.	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.
41.	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.
42.	I notice I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.
43.	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.
44.	I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.

The least frequently used strategy in learning speaking is memory strategy. The mean 3.05 indicates it. Items 1-9 in

the Strategy Inventory represent the use of memory strategy for Language Learning.

No of questionnaire	Memory strategy
1.	I think of relationship between what I already know and new things I learn in English.
2.	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.
3.	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.
4.	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.
5.	I use rhymes to remember new English words.
6.	I use flashcards to remember new English words.
7.	I physically act out new English words.
8.	I review English lesson often.
9.	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.

This research finding shows that the most frequently used strategy in learning Speaking is metacognitive strategy that is coordinating the learning process. It means that students prefer more on the way to learn English than learning the language itself. This finding is in line with research conducted by Habok, et.al. (2021), Gerami et.al (2011), Ang, Embi, and Yunus (2017), and Yang et.al. (2021), They also found that metacognitive learning strategies are preference of students learning English as a foreign language.

Conclusion

Students with good speaking ability use the metacognitive strategy as the first preference in learning English. It means they learn by coordinating the learning process. To most students learning English as a foreign language, the most frequently use strategy is metacognitive strategy.

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