

High Achievers' Strategies for Developing Speaking Skill

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on language learning strategies to develop speaking skill employed by university students categorized as high achiever students. It also focuses on the reasons why they employed those strategies. The study focuses on the above topics because the research concerning language learning strategies to develop speaking skill still receives a little attention in Indonesian EFL context. Some researchers, such as Chamot (1993), affirm that language learning strategy has primarily benefit for developing speaking skill. Two university students were participating in this study. They were studying in the eighth semester at a university in Bandung. They were taking a three-month English for Job Seekers Program supported by the university. In selecting the participants, this study made use of purposeful sampling to gain the important information from the participants (Alwasilah, 2002: 146). The instruments used were questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires were adapted from Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0 as well as Background Questionnaire developed by Oxford (1990). The interview was an open-ended interview. The study then revealed several findings, among others, is that the high achiever students employed meta-cognitive strategies the most. Concerning the reasons why they employed those strategies were presented in this research.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies, EFL, Speaking Skill, Good Language Learner

INTRODUCTION

English ability has become one of significant factors in winning the very tight competition of getting a job in this globalization era and it is believed that people who are fluent in English would tend to earn better jobs in the corporate world because they would have a skill to communicate better with people from other countries (Jenkins, 2010; Seidlhofer, 2004).

University graduates are then expected to master English, especially to become fluent in English speaking skill as, among others, a means of international communication. The importance of being fluent in speaking English is relevant to Nunan's study (2000: 39) which revealed that mastering the art of speaking is the single most important aspect of learning a second and a foreign language, and success is

measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language.

Unfortunately in many areas in Indonesia, based on the information from the Educational Board (as cited in Kompas, 2009), the university students' ability in English especially speaking skill is still considered to be low. Many EFL students find it difficult to develop their speaking ability (Petersen, 2010). Even so, there are a few students who seem to find it easy to develop their speaking skill. Their ability in developing speaking skill is probably the result of employing appropriate language learning strategies.

The above notion, which suggests that employing appropriate language learning strategies would help students develop their speaking skill, is consistent with some studies conducted by a number of researchers (among others O'Malley, Chamot, Russo and Kupper, 1989, as cited in Chamot, 1993). Furthermore, Rubin (1975 as cited in O'Malley and Chamot, 1993: 3) and Oxford (1990: 16) mention that there are direct strategies (such as memory strategies) and indirect strategies (such as social strategies) that affect language learning to develop their English skills.

However, the research concerning language learning strategies to develop speaking skill still receives a little attention in Indonesian EFL context. Therefore, this study proposes to investigate language learning strategies to develop speaking skill used by university students; the students in this research are categorized as high achiever's students.

Next, the study will also focus on figuring out the reasons why they employ those strategies. The focus on these topics is considered important to reveal relationship between language learning strategies and English proficiency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Learning Strategies in Learning a Second Language

Language Learning Strategies (LLS) are believed to boost learner's ability to obtain the communicative competence in the target language as well as to help students to overcome difficulties they encounter in learning the target language (Lessar-Clouston, 1997: 3; Huda, 1999: 53; Oxford, 1996: 18), therefore this study intends to find out the LLS employed by high achiever students in developing their speaking skill. The findings will then be used to see the relationship between the use of language learning strategies and success in mastering a second or foreign language

Fadderholdt (1997 as cited in Hismanoglu, 1997), in relation to this, states that language learners who are capable of using a wide variety of language learning strategies appropriately can improve his language skills in a better way.

As suggested by Rubin (1981) and Oxford (1990: 16-21), learning strategies may be grouped into two categories, direct strategies and indirect strategies. Oxford (1990) clarifies that each category contains three sets of strategies. Direct strategies include memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies; whereas, indirect strategies include meta-cognitive, affective, and social strategies.

According to Oxford (1990: 16-21), memory strategies reflect very simple principles, such as arranging things in order, making associations, and reviewing. This strategy helps learners to link L2 concept with another. Cognitive strategies, on the other hand, are the strategies of identification, grouping, retention, and storage of language material as well as the language use strategies of retrieval, rehearsal, and comprehension or production of words, phrases, and other elements of second language. Whereas, compensation strategies are used to help learners to make up for

missing knowledge, such as through guessing meaning from context, using synonyms, and gestures.

Another strategy is meta-cognitive strategies which deal with pre-assessment and pre-planning, whilst planning and evaluation, and post-evaluation of language learning activities and of language use event. Affective strategies, on the other hand, deal with regulating emotions, motivation, and attitude. And the other strategy is social strategies which could help learners to work with others and understand the target culture as well as the language, such as asking for correction and cooperating with proficient users of the target language.

From the above explanation, it is clear that Oxford's theories include everything that second/foreign language learners need to be the intelligent learners. Because of that, this study employed Oxford's theories as the basic assumption in doing the study.

Good Language Learners

According to Wenden (1990) and Oxford (1990), good language learners are aware of language learning strategies. Furthermore, Oxford and Nyikos (1989) reveal that better language learners usually use techniques appropriate to their personal levels of gaining knowledge; besides that they also make use of LLS which match their personalities, age, and motive for getting to know the language, as well as form of language.

Good language learners use a variety learning strategies in their learning. Rubin and Thomson (1982), as cited by Brown (1994), cover that good language learners exhibit some characteristics, such as finding their own ways and taking charge for their learning as well as learning certain strategies that help to keep conversation going. These characteristics would likely be developed in this study as the characteristics of good

language learners in developing their speaking skill.

The Present Study

In line with the point of interest, the current research tries to cope with these questions:

1. What learning strategies are used by high achiever students in becoming skilled at speaking skills?
2. Why do they practice those strategies?

METHOD

Participants

The participants of the research were the 8th semester students who were taking the English for Job Seekers program as one of the three-month extracurricular program supported by the university. There were two participants in this study. They were categorized as high achiever students.

The categorization of the students' achiever levels was based on the students' average speaking scores. The average scores were taken from their mid-term test and final test scores. Students who got 5 (excellent) - 6 (outstanding) points were categorized as high achiever students, 3 (good) - 4 (very good) points were categorized as middle achiever students, and 1 (below average) - 2 (average) points were categorized as low achiever students.

The study involved the 8th semester students due to some reasons. First, they have studied English at least for two semesters in the university. Second, they were taking the three-month English for Job Seekers program. Third, they are going to finish their study at the university and are going to search for jobs as soon as they finish their study. In selecting the participants, this study made use purposeful sampling to gain the important information from the participants (Alwasilah, 2002: 146).

Instruments

A. Questionnaires

The questionnaire used was adapted from Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0 developed by Oxford (1990) especially for speakers of other languages learning English. The questionnaire covers six strategies, namely: memory, cognitive, compensation, meta-cognitive, affective, and social strategies.

There were 45 questions administered to the participants. Those questions were used to investigate the students' learning strategies in developing speaking skill. On the next page is the key to understand the average of language learning strategies.

Table 1: Key to Understand the Average of LLS

High	Always or almost always used	4.5 to 5.0
	Usually used	3.5 to 4.4
Medium	Sometimes used	2.5 to 3.4
Low	Generally not used	1.5 to 2.4
	Never or almost never used	1.0 to 1.4

Besides SILL, the Background Questionnaire was included to provide additional information on students' characteristics (Oxford, 1990: 281). The Background Questionnaire and SILL were tried out to the participant non sample respondents in order to know their readability, their validity and reliability since they were originally written in English and were translated into Bahasa Indonesia for the purpose of the study; so that the respondents would not find any difficulties in answering the items existed in the questionnaires. Before working on the questionnaires, the respondents were given some explanation

orally on how to answer the items and some words that might not be understood such as the phrases *flashcard*, *rhymes*. The respondents were also given chances to notice any other words that might hindrance them in understanding the items and they were asked to deliver the questions.

In terms of the reliability and validity, the SILL has been used worldwide for students of second and foreign languages in settings such as university, school and government. The internal consistency reliability of the SILL is .94 based on a 505-person sample (Yang, 1992) and .92 based on a 315-person sample (Watanabe, 1990). Content validity is .99 based on independent raters (Oxford, 1986; Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995 as cited in Yang, 2007). These mean that the Oxford's SILL questionnaires can be considered valid and reliable.

B. Interview

The current research made use of open-ended interview, utilized tape recorder and note taking to gather data. According to Creswell (2008: 226), by having an interview, the researcher will get useful records that cannot be immediately placed from the questionnaire. Furthermore, Fraenkel and Wallen (2007: 10) claim that interview is an important mode for researcher to test the accuracy; on the fact that, interview allows participant to explain some personal information in detail and it has better control over the type of data 'clarified' through the views of the interviewer.

In the attempt to answer the questions of the speaking strategies used by the high achiever-participants and the reasons why they practiced those strategies, this research made use of open-ended interview. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2007) as well as Patton (1987), an open-ended interview let respondents answer in his or her own terms, moreover, an open-ended

interview has the advantage as it permits observe-up through interviewer.

The researcher made use of a tape recorder to document the interview based on the reason that a tape recorder is part of vital gadget of the researcher practicing qualitative approach (Patton, 1987). The researcher additionally made use of note-taking throughout the process of interview. When a tape recorder is being used all through the interview, notes will provide key terms, listing of most important factors made by way of the respondents.

Data Analysis

In the attempt to response to the questions of the speaking strategies used by the high achiever-participants and the reasons why they practiced those strategies, the participants were asked to response to an interview and to response to the items at the questionnaire based totally on 5 feasible options, specifically: always, regularly/usually, from time to time, hardly ever and never. Each answer has its rating beginning from 5 point to 1 point.

As stated earlier, the participants were asked to response to an interview. The data from the interviews then were being analyzed using five main approaches (Kvale, 1996) , specifically: categorization of meaning, condensation, structuring, interpreting of meaning through narrative, interpretation of meaning and ad hoc method for generating meaning.

The participants had also given their respond at the questionnaire. The statistics from questionnaire had been analyzed. The statistics data were being analyzed by using a scale known as Likkert scale from 5 point to 1 point.

Five point refers to the idea that the participant always used the strategy, 4 point refers to the idea that the participant regularly/usually practiced the strategy, 3 point refers to the idea that the participant practiced the strategy from time to time, 2

refers to the idea that the participant hardly ever used the strategy, while 1 refers to the idea that the participant never practiced the strategy pointed out on the questionnaire (See Table 2).

Table 2: The Scale of Questionnaire (Oxford, 1990: 294)

Frequency	Scale Point
Always	5
Regularly/ Usually	4
From time to time	3
Hardly ever	2
Never	1

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Questionnaire Data

The Strategies Employed by High Achiever Students

From the background questionnaires, it can be seen that the high achiever students enjoy studying English language and agree that it is important to become proficient in English. They keen on learning the English language because English is important not only for having conversations with their native English-speaking friends but also for their future careers. These have motivated them to become proficient in English and these have driven them to employ the language learning strategies highly, especially on the use of meta-cognitive strategies. The high achiever students' strategies in developing their speaking skill are presented on Chart 1 as follows:

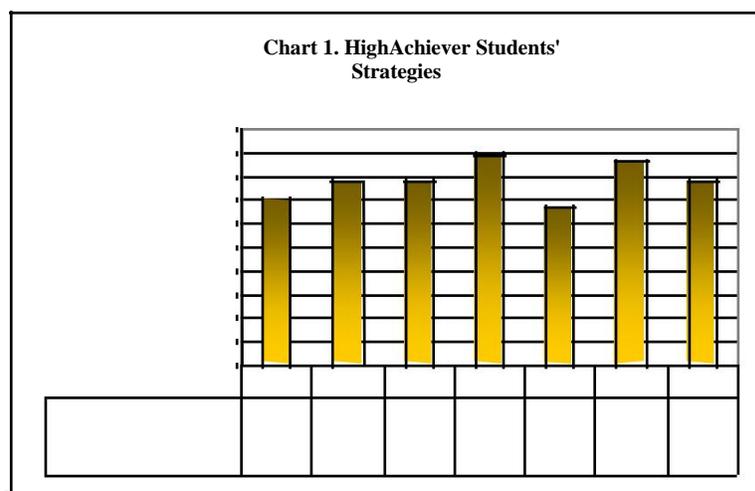


Chart 1 High Achiever Students' Strategies (Taken from SILL Version 7.0 Questionnaire)

A=Memory Strategies; B=Cognitive Strategies; C=Compensation Strategies; D=Meta-cognitive Strategies; E=Affective Strategies; F=Social Strategies; T=Total

As presented on Chart 1 above, it can be seen that the group of learning strategies which these high achiever students employed the most for learning English was meta-cognitive strategies. The second group of strategies they used the most was social strategies; the third was cognitive strategies, followed by compensation strategies and memory strategies. And finally, the group of learning strategies these students used the least for developing speaking English was affective strategies with the average 4.44, 4.34, 3.91, 3.90, 3.50 and 3.34 respectively.

The total average of the groups of learning strategies being used was 3.90. According to Oxford's SILL Profile of Results (1990: 300), the overall average of 3.90 indicates that these high achiever students have a "high" use of language learning strategies. A high use of language learning strategies (with total average of 3.90), according to Oxford (1990), means that these strategies were "usually" employed by these high achiever students (*see* Table 1 (p. 6) Key to Understand the Average of LLS).

The highly used of the strategies for learning a language can be one of some indications that these students have shown their full involvement in language learning. According to Ghani (2003), when students show full involvement in language learning it means that they can be categorized as good language learners. Therefore, it can be concluded that these high achiever students are good language learners.

B. Interview Data

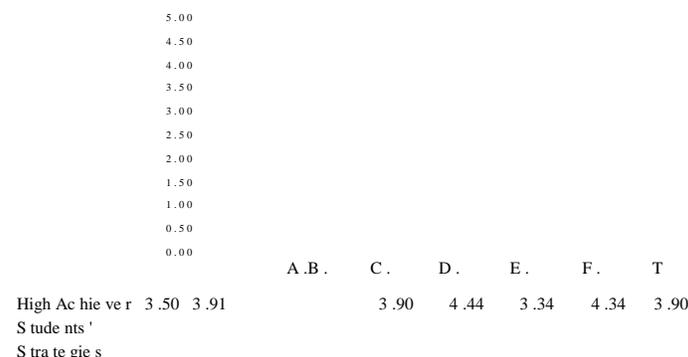
The interview in this research showed that the participants made some efforts regarding their speaking skill development by making use of several strategies consciously, specifically: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies.

According to Oxford (1996) and Wenden (1990), good language learners are those who use language learning strategies intentionally. It can be concluded that the participants in this research were categorized as good language learners.

Concerning the reasons why these participants employed the strategies, following are their responses: they actively use memory strategies to efficaciously flourish their ability in memorizing new words. This strategy is important on the fact that English is foreign language to the participants which means that their vocabulary should be enriched by, amongst others, employing memory strategy.

On the subject of using cognitive strategies, they stated that these strategies help them to increase their self-belief that they are able to speak well when they were speaking in English. Gaining more confidence may bring more benefit to them as stated by Arango (2015), who agrees that foreign language learning is influenced by self-confidence.

About the purpose for using compensation strategies, the participants indicated that they benefit from these



techniques because they can preserve the conversation going.

Concerning the use of meta-cognitive strategies, they pointed out that they employed those techniques, amongst others, to keep away from producing the same mistakes.

Regarding the employment of affective strategies, the students put forward that they applied them, amongst others, to advantage self-belief and to keep away from losing their focus of attention while speaking.

Finally, concerning the use of social techniques, these high achievers made use of those strategies in order to speak well with their English speaker friends. This is in line with Buresova (2007) who pointed out the importance of social strategies; she emphasizes that social strategies can enable the students to speak.

CONCLUSION

From this research, it can be realized that the high achiever students enjoy studying English language and they have come to an agreement that it is important for them to become proficient in English. They keen on learning the English language because English is important not only for having conversations with their native English-speaking friends but also for their future careers. These have motivated them to become proficient in English and these have driven them to employ the language learning strategies highly. They employ several strategies consciously for the betterment of their speaking skills, specifically: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies.

Based on the results from the current research, which may not be generalized to other situations; it is recommended that the language learning strategies be progressively but intensively presented and applied in

developing English skills, principally speaking skill.

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