

Language Learning Strategies Employed by Successful and Less Successful Learners

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Abstract

This study investigated the language learning strategies used by successful and less successful learners in the first grade of a senior high school in Banda Aceh. Both groups of learners were categorized based on their scores on an English test. A number of 20 successful and 20 less successful first grade students were then selected as the respondents. A questionnaire was used to identify language learning strategies used by both groups of these learners. The questionnaire was adapted from Oxford (1990), which consisted 30 items related to six categories of language learning strategies: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social. This data were then analyzed by using the independent sample t-test. The findings revealed that there was a significant difference between language learning strategies used by successful and less successful learners. The successful learners were found to use the language learning strategies more frequently than less successful learners. Thus, both groups of learners obtained the highest scores in the metacognitive strategy; this implies that these learners understood how to manage their own learning. The lowest scores obtained by the successful learners were in the affective strategies, whilst the less successful learners were in the memory strategies. Other strategies (compensation, cognitive and social) were also used by both groups of these learners. Hence, less successful learners did not use all of the language learning strategies very often; this is what affected them to become less effective in language learning. Therefore, it is suggested that teachers should train the less successful learners to apply more language learning strategies in their learning to improve their academic achievement.

Key words: Language learning strategies, successful learners, less successful learners.

Introduction

Being successful in acquiring a language is the main purpose of learning a language. In order to be successful, there are many factors that can influence students’ success in learning a language. Among them is the language learning strategies that can determine students’ success in acquiring a language (Oxford, 2003). Oxford (1990, p. 8) said that “learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations”. Similarly, Schmeck (1988, p. 5) defined learning strategy as the implementation of a set of procedures for accomplishing learning. Richards and Platt (1992, p. 209) further stated that learning strategies are intentional behavior and thought used by the learners during learning so as to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information. These definitions show that learning strategies are the steps taken by the learners to facilitate, help, and make them easier to achieve the goal of learning. The ways or steps students gain in learning will help them to better understand the target language. Based on Ellis (1994, p. 545), “there is a positive relationship between learning strategies and language learning process in learning”. It means that students’ learning strategies influence their learning process; it makes them easy to understand the material given because they use strategies in their learning. Furthermore, age, gender, individual difference, motivation, cultural background, etc., are also among the variables which affect the use of language learning strategies (Lee, 2010; Özmen & Gülleroglu, 2013).

Considering the importance of language learning strategies in helping students in achieving their goals, this paper is to examine these strategies that are used by successful and less successful EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in a senior high school in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. The research question to this study is: Is there any significant difference between language learning strategies used by the
successful and less successful EFL learners? From this research question, the following hypotheses are formulated for this study:

H_s: There is a significant difference between language learning strategies used by successful and less successful learners.

H_l: There is no significant difference between language learning strategies used by successful and less successful learners.

It is expected that by knowing and understanding the language learning strategies used by successful and less successful learners, teachers can bring their learners’ awareness in using language learning strategies and further train them to develop and to use various strategies in their learning to accomplish the goals of learning.

Literature Review

Some studies, such as those conducted by Afdaleni (2013) and Özmen and Gülleroğlu (2013) found that there is a relationship between the language learning strategies used by the learners in learning a language to their achievement. Therefore, to bring students’ awareness in the learning process can help them to be successful in the target language because their awareness in learning assists them to control their own strategies. This is in accordance with Ellis (1994, p. 549) who stated that “successful learners are thoughtful and are aware of themselves in relation to the learning process”. Furthermore, identifying the language learning used by the learners is important because many learners are not aware of the strategies they use. Meanwhile, they need to know the kinds of language learning strategies that they might use in order to be more competent in solving tasks in class. Wenden (1998) further suggested that the different kinds of language learning strategies should be employed jointly to achieve success in learning because there is no good or bad strategy. Therefore, a learner should not focus only on one strategy.

SILL or (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) can be used as the tool to identify the language learning strategies used by learners. This inventory was generated by Oxford (1990), in which she divided the language learning strategies into direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are the strategies used directly by the learners in dealing with a new language and they are memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies are the strategies used by the learners to manage their learning and they are metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Moreover, the strategies in SILL cover all of the four language learning skills, which are listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). Many studies have used this instrument in investigating language learning strategies because the items do not show prejudice and are appropriate to most cultures (Oxford, 1996). Every strategy has its own advantage for different kind of tasks. For the six strategies of language learning strategies, their advantages are equal based on the task given.

Research Method

The respondents were selected randomly from a senior high school in Banda Aceh. The first grade students from three classes (with about 35 students from each class) were given an English test that had to be completed within 30 minutes. The test were 50 items and in the form of multiple choices which included reading and structure competences. The test was taken from the National Examination for the junior high school students from the previous year. The results were scored by using NR (Number Right) scoring. Only the right answers were counted, and the wrong answers were counted as zero. Then all of the correct answers were multiplied by two. After scoring was completed, a number of 20 students with the highest scores were categorized into the successful learners; they obtained scores above the KKM (Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal) or standard value (within 81-100) determined by the school. Another 20 students with the lowest scores were categorized into the less successful learners; they obtained scores below the KKM (0-75). Since this is a comparative study, we selected 20 students from each group to have balanced data between successful and less successful learners.

One week after the test, the selected respondents were to fill in a close-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) version 7.0 for ESL/EFL learners proposed by Oxford (1990). It consists of 30 statements related to the six categories of language learning strategies. For this research, the questionnaire was translated into Indonesian to ease the respondents in comprehending the statements. After the respondents filled in the questionnaire, their statements were evaluated on a five-point likert scale, ranging from (1) never true of me to (5) true of me. The data was finally analyzed by using the independent sample t-test to study the six categories of language learning strategies used by these two groups of learners.
Results and Discussion

After the questionnaire scoring was done, the results in general which inquired about the language learning strategies of memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social of the successful and less successful learners are shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. The average score of each category of language learning strategies used by the successful and less successful learners](image)

Based on Figure 1, it can be concluded that for all of the six categories of language learning strategies, successful learners employ all the language learning strategies more often than less successful learners in every category.

For the highest scores, both successful and less successful learners obtained the highest score for the same strategy, which are the metacognitive strategies. In this category, successful learners got the highest score for statement number 20 (I have clear goals for improving my English skills) which obtained the score of 90. This indicates that successful learners were confident of their goals to learn English while the less successful learners were less aware of it. For less successful learners, statement number 17 (I pay attention when someone is speaking English) obtained the highest score of 80. Therefore, the teacher’s speaking skills greatly influenced their interest in learning.

For the lowest scores, successful learners obtained the lowest score in affective strategies for statement number 25 (I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English) with the score of 51. This refers to discussing their feelings with someone else when learning, and this helps them to be better language learners (Oxford, 1990). For less successful learners, the lowest score was in the memory strategies for statement number 4 (I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign) with the score of 49. This refers to applying images and sounds as a way to remember new information that has been heard or read in the target language and make a mental image of it.

Thus far, the findings are similar to the study conducted by Afdaleni (2013) where the samples from her study also used metacognitive strategies as the most in language learning. Accordingly, metacognitive plays an important role in language learning because when learners understand how to manage their own learning, language learning process can be faster (Anderson, 2002). Oxford (1990, p. 136) also has a similar point of view; she stated that "metacognitive strategies are essential for successful language learners, because many learners lose their focus and it can be regained by raising students conscious of using metacognitive strategies". These strategies then provide awareness to students of their lesson contents and help them plan their monitoring towards comprehension on the lessons learned (Fitrisia, Tan & Yusuf, 2015). Although metacognitive strategies are important for students’ success, it will benefit less if learners only focus on one strategy. Therefore, these strategies should cooperate with others to make learning more efficient (Wenden, 1998).

Additionally, Figure 2 displays the total scores of the successful and less successful learners from the questionnaire. The numbers prove that the successful learners obtained higher scores (2161) than the less successful ones (1914). This implies that the successful learners used more language learning strategies than the less successful ones. This finding is in accordance with the study done by Afdaleni (2013) and Özmen and Gulleroğlu (2013) who also ascertained that learners who are categorized as
successful learners apply more language learning strategies with higher scores as compared to unsuccessful learners who use less language learning strategies or with lower scores.

![Figure 2](image.png)

**Figure 2.** The total scores of questionnaire of language learning strategies used by successful and less successful learners

After we calculated the scores of both groups of learners, we tested the normality of data. The result showed that successful learners obtained $\alpha=0.941$ and less successful learners obtained $\alpha=0.499$. Since both groups of learners obtained values more than $\alpha$ (0.05), this indicates that the two samples is of normal distribution. Afterwards, the test of homogeneity by using the Levene test also showed that the variance between the two samples is the same or homogeneity (0.096>0.05). Consequently, the difference between language learning strategies used by both groups of learners was done by conducting the t-test for independent samples. The means, standard deviation, and standard error deviation were calculated and the results are shown in Table 1.

<table>
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<th>Table 1. Independent samples test</th>
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<td>Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances</td>
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To find the significant difference, the t-score was compared to t-table, and sig. (2-tailed) was compared to $\alpha$ (0.05). From Table 1, the t-score is 3.263, at df (degree of freedom) of 38 (n1+n2-2), and the t-table score is 2.024 or 3.263.>2.024. This means $H_a$ is accepted and $H_0$ is rejected. The same result was also found by comparing sig. (2-tailed) to $\alpha$ (0.05), where the sig. (2-tailed) is 0.002. Thus, 0.002<0.05, and this means that there is a significant difference between the language learning strategies used by both groups of learners of the first grade senior high school students in Banda Aceh. It further infers that those successful learners used language learning strategies more frequently than less successful learners.

**Conclusions**

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that there is a statistical difference between successful and less successful learners in using language learning strategies. The difference is also at the frequency of using these strategies by both groups of learners. They both employed all of the six
language learning strategies, however, successful learners employed all more often than less successful learners. Both groups were found to obtain the highest scores in metacognitive strategies. Subsequently, the lowest scores for the successful learners were in the use of affective strategies, whilst the less successful learners were in the use of memory strategies. Hence, it is expected that teachers can teach less successful learners to apply more language learning strategies in their learning to improve their learning outcomes. Both groups of learners should also be trained to employ all strategies cooperatively to produce more resourceful learning effects.

This research was conducted with limitations, such as the number of respondents and the time constraint. Therefore, future related studies are suggested to enlarge the number of respondents from both groups of learners (i.e. successful and less successful learners). The trends in learning from these groups of learners specifically in each skill of language learning are also suggested to be examined. We believe that this would give a clearer impression to the main points of conclusion that has been drawn from this research.

**References**