

Outstanding Students' Learning Strategies in Learning English at Riau University, Indonesia

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to evaluate and validate language learning strategies used by excellent students based on gender, socio-economy, types of school, and academic background in the English Studies Programme at Riau University, Pekanbaru. This study investigates students' reading strategies in terms of memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social. This study comprehensively investigates excellent students' learning strategies in reading. One hundred and one subjects who are studying and doing well in the English Education programme were recruited for this study. The data were analyzed using a descriptive statistic with min. For this study the data were collected using questionnaire to explore the learning strategies of excellent students. A pilot study was conducted to increase the reliability of the instrument used and was assessed using cronbach alpha and value was between 0.82 and 0.91. The findings show different language learning strategies among the students based on gender, ethnic group, parents' income, and academic results in secondary school. It was found that there was no significant difference in learning strategies among excellent students based on types of school. This study This finding has important implications for various parties in educational sector to cooperate in their effort to develop and improve the students' learning strategies in order to produce quality human capital.

Keywords: learning strategies, excellent students, English language, University

1. Introduction

This article consists of the research background, the purpose of the study, the conceptual framework of the study, literature review, research methodology, findings, conclusions, and implications of the findings. Language learning strategies (SBB) has become a part of the learning process of various subjects offered in English Language Study Program Guidance and Counseling University of Riau, Indonesia. English courses can be categorized into these subjects: Skill Courses (SC), Method Courses (MC), and Content Courses (CC). Language learning strategies has particularly been a subject in the programme called Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The subject is incorporated into the MC with the purpose to familiarize the students with the content so that they are able to adapt with relevant language learning strategies. Thus, students can find these solutions when they face problems in their learning. An impact is that students will be more independent in solving any problems that are found in the lecture program, which is the rate of 145 units per semester. Correspondingly, the lecturers, as facilitators or co-communicators would provide assistance only when needed by the students.

There are 202 outstanding students who are taking English Studies Programme at the University of Riau, who have a performance index (IP) ranging from 3.00 s / d 4:00. Based on a simple interview about the use of language learning strategies, the following language learning strategies were used:

- a. following lectures on a regular basis,
- b. performing work in accordance with instructions,
- c. reviewing what is taught in class,
- d. discussing lecture materials with students who are more intelligent,
- e. singing songs in leisure time,
- f. taking advantage of time-off each day,

- g. getting adequate support from family funds, and
- h. living in a common room at the hostel students.

These strategies do not reflect the language learning strategies held by the students as reflected in the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford; 1989). SILL consists of 6 aspects: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social.

Based on the above phenomenon, language learning strategies used by outstanding students must be thoroughly identified. The data clearly show the use of language learning strategies have a positive impact on English lecturers and the outstanding student themselves. In addition, the results of this study are also useful to the courses TEFL 1 and TEFL 2 in the English Language Studies Program Guidance and Counseling, University of Riau, in which English has a status as a foreign language. In short, it can be concluded that a clear identification of the use of language learning strategies by outstanding students is considered as an important factor (crucial).

2. Literature Review

Wenden & Rubin (1987) states that language learning strategies refers to behaviors in which language learners incorporate and keep up as ways of learning a second language. Chamot (1987) defines language learning strategies as techniques, approaches, or actions by students to facilitate learning and recognize linguistic and information content. Ellis (1994) categorizes learning strategies in line with Tarone's concept: skills and language learning. Lan (2005) looked at language learning strategies as language learning behaviors, which are easily done to make changes, and vary according to learning styles, effective or ineffective in different situations, regularly in varying degrees of conscious control. Language learning strategies can be inferred based on the basic elements such as the contents of the use of language and the use of the target language in accordance with the steps to learn the language, including learning English.

Oxford (1990b) defines language learning strategies as: a. contributing to the ultimate goal: the ability to communicate, b. directing students to become self-directed, c. developing the role of teachers, d. problem-oriented, and specific actions taken by students, e. involving many aspects of students, f. supporting directly and indirectly, g. not always observable, h. can be taught, i. often a conscious effort, j. flexible, and, k. influenced by various factors. Cohen (1996) suggests language learning strategies a. have clear goals that help students improve their knowledge, b. include cognitive processing strategies, strategies to solidify patterns of a new language acquisition, and strategies to determine the cognitive energy required c. display language and communication strategies, and d. can be further distinguished into cognitive, metacognitive, affective, or social.

The characteristics of bright students in language learning, including learning English, has been known. In general, these students can take risks (Rubin, 1975), have a high level of confidence (Larson & Freeman, 1991), has the will to find (Willis, 2001). Rubin (1975) also identifies the characteristics of outstanding student as follows: a. able to expect things that are not yet definite, b. communicating and learning through communication, c. practicing the language whenever possible, d. managing their own learning styles and ways of others, e. want to construct sentences, and f. focus on the meaning of the communication itself. Rubin (1975) further concluded that there are several determining factors for a student's success in learning a language, such as a. language tasks with a clear structure, goals and needs, b. learning style, c. positive attitude towards the target language, language learning motivation, age and personality, e. the target language being learned, and f. level of general ability to learn a language.

A number of language learning strategies models have been made by various experts. O'Malley (1990) combines three components in a language learning strategies model: metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective. Stern (1992) classifies language learning strategies into 5 categories: processing, planning, cognitive, communicative experience, interpersonal and affective strategies. Oxford's (1990b) model is composed of two main strategies: direct strategies and indirect strategies. Direct strategies consist of memory, cognitive, and compensation. Indirect strategies include metacognitive, affective and social. MacIntyre (1994) creates a strategic model based on social psychology. The model states that language learning strategies can be implemented if: a. students are aware of a variety of strategies which are appropriate for them, b. students have strong support to use certain strategies, c. students do not have excuses for not using the strategy and, d. a strategy being used is reinforced by positive and impressive results.

Mohammed Amin Embi (1996, 2000) designs a language learning strategies model by combining three aspects: environment, situation and atmosphere of a language. Purpura (1997, 1999) classifies language learning strategies based on information processing models (Gadne et al., 1993). This model consists of two components: structures and functions of an information. Macaro (2001) suggests four main strategies: cognitive,

metacognitive, social and affective.

There are five factors that may influence the language learning strategies; gender (male and female), ethnicity, economic status, academic background, and the type of school. Politzer (1983) found that women used significantly more strategies than males, which explains that women have stronger social orientation. Oxford (1989) made a similar conclusion in his study. Hirschman (1995) argued that the Chinese are economically strong in small- and large-scale trade in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. As a consequence, the Chinese people are more earnest in learning English. Politzer & MCGoarty found that Asian students are more highly competent in linguistics and communication, so they use less strategies compared to Hispanic students in learning the English language. Abdan (1991) states that middle-class parents in Saudi Arabia send their children to private schools because they can afford the tuition fees. In Indonesia, there are parents who invest heavily in the education of children to ensure them a good career and a good future. Yang (1993) and Banya & Cheng (1997) report that the rich are willing to invest a lot of money in the tuition fees and extra classes for the children to learn foreign languages or send them overseas where they would obtain more exposure to foreign languages.

Oxford (1994) mentions two types of purposes of learning a language: academic language and social language, out of which the academic language is considered to be more difficult. Cummins (1982) states that achievement of success in academic language would take a much longer time. Gardner dan MacIntyre (1993) supports the theory of language learning strategies which is associated with situational variables in school. They found that the characteristics of language learning, situational variables and types of language learning strategies interact in a complicated situation to affect the students' ability in a second language.

A considerable amount of study has been conducted on language learning strategy by researchers world wide. Al-Otaibi (2004) found that male students' in Saudi Arabia use language learning strategies to a greater extent compared to their female counterpart. However, it is also shown that male students and outstanding students have one thing in common: they use more strategies to improve their learning ability. Mohammad Riazi (2005) dan Saif (2005) shows that most of their respondents use medium strategy. Landan Rae (2005) analyzed by using SILL 1911 pupils from primary school in Taiwan, and found that, in contrast to Al-Otaibi's (2004) findings, female students use language learning strategies to a greater extent.

Nada (2006) concludes that there is no significant change in the use of language learning strategies for all the research respondents, but female students use more strategies on memory, cognitive and compensation than male students. Zamri Mahamud, et al, (2010) concluded that there is no inventory of strategy to describe language learning strategies used by outstanding students to learn English in Malaysia. The strategies are needed as a guide for them to learn English easily, quickly and effectively.

Several studies were conducted in Indonesia on the use of language learning strategies. Nenden Sri Lengkanawati (2004) reported that there is a significant distinction in the intensity of use of memory strategies, cognitive, compensation, affective, and social between IFL and EFL learners. However, there is no significant distinction in the use of metacognitive strategies between the two groups. He also concluded that memory, metacognitive and affective strategies are more frequently used by EFL students in Indonesia than IFL Australian students. He also found that cognitive, compensation and social strategies are more widely used in Australia than in Indonesia.

Johari Afrizal (2005) found that two strategies mostly used by students are metacognitive and affective strategies, while memory strategies are used to a lesser extent. The results also showed that there was no statistical significance with regard to the selection of strategies by gender and socioeconomic status, however, it differs significantly on the level of language skills and strategies used. Kartika Nuswantara (2010) concluded that students have varied learning styles. Some students are excellent in terms of listening, and some are excellent in visual, but almost the same in heyday way to learn. Both groups of students are able to survive the time spent in their studies.

In his study, Fakhri Ras (2012) found that 1) the level of usage of language learning strategies measured with SILL has an average of 3.15 (medium); 2) there is a significant relationship between the use of language learning strategies and student achievement in high school English city of Pekanbaru; 3) there is a significant distinction in language learning strategies between gender, income level of parents, selected majors in high school (social science, natural science, language science), and type of school (public and private).

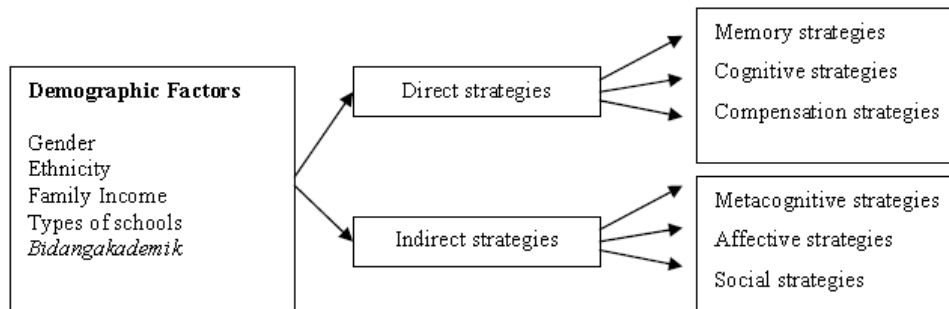


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

This study was carried out to determine outstanding students' learning strategies based on demographics: gender, ethnicity, income of parents, school type and academic field. Learning strategies that were examined in this study is an adaptation of Oxford (1990) namely from the aspect of memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social. In Oxford's (1990) model of language learning, the strategies are divided into two, namely, direct learning strategies and indirect learning strategies.

Previous studies show a lot of factors that influence learning effectiveness in the field of social sciences and language factors may be categorized into psychological and sociological factors. Psychological factors refer to students' individual abilities and personal factors and also a teacher. In the meantime, sociological factors include aspects of demographic factors and environment. However, these factors are interrelated with each other. For example, teacher creativity, maximum use of resources and teachers' wisdom in choose teaching materials (Ahmad, Rahim, & Seman, 2013) is a psycho-social factor that affects the students' interests to explore various fields of knowledge. Although many strategies have been suggested by various professional parties, the teachers and students have the freedom to practice the strategies that they think effective (Awang, Ahmad, Wahab, & Mamat, 2013) which in turn became a source of differences in learning behavior in school (Awang, Jindal-Snape, & Barber, 2013).

3. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the relationship of the use of language learning strategies used by outstanding students based on socio-economic status, school type, and academic background in English Studies Programme in University of Riau. This study was undertaken to determine the level of language learning strategies used by high achievers. Language learning strategy use is associated with gender (male and female), ethnic group, parental income, school type, and academic background in high school. This study was to describe how outstanding students learn English in general and gain language skills (gather, speaking, reading comprehension, writing, vocabulary, and grammar) in English Language Studies Programme in University of Riau.

4. Research Methodology

This population of this study is 202 high achievers from a total of 322 overall number of students. The sample consists of 101 outstanding students. The data is collected using a questionnaire to illicit outstanding students' learning strategies. Descriptive analysis was conducted involving the mean to determine the best students learn strategies baed on demographics. A pilot study was conducted involving a total of 30 outstanding students. A pilot study showed Cronbach alpha values between 0.82 to 0.91 learning strategies for each student. This shows the reliability of the instrument is high and remains to be used in the actual study.

5. Findings and Discussions

Use of language learning strategies among students based on gender as a whole is moderate. The level of use of learning strategy based on gender is shown in Figure 2 below.

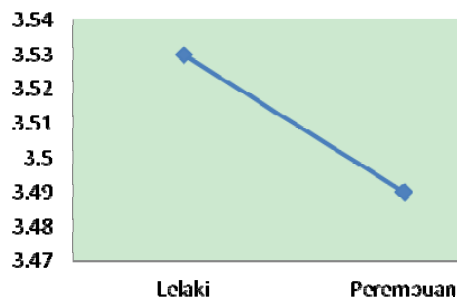


Figure 2. The use of language learning strategy based on gender

Figure 2 shows that male students (mean = 3:53) use language learning strategies more than girls (mean = 3:49). These findings indicate that male students use language learning strategies more than girls. The findings of this study are not in line with the study conducted by Nada M.S. (2006) who found that girls made more efforts and had a higher perception of learning English as a foreign language in Asia. In addition, the finding is not in line with Tatsuya Taguchi (2002) who obtained the results that female students use language learning strategies in a wider span than the boys.

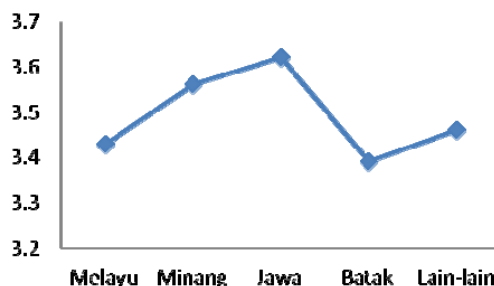


Figure 3. Use of language learning strategies based on different ethnic groups

Figure 3 shows that the highest use of language learning strategies by Javanese students (min = 3.61), followed by Minang (3.56), other ethnic (min = 3.46) and Malay (min = 3.42). The lowest use of language learning strategies is by students from Batak ethnic group (3.39). There are several possible explanations for this result. One of the factors that lead to differences based on ethnic group in the use of language learning strategies by the students is associated with their culture. The students are influenced by the prevailing habits in the society. Among the cultural habits is the way parents in the community educate their children to learn. This is in line with findings by Nenden Sri Lengkanawati (2004) who concluded that there are differences in language learning strategies associated with different cultures / ethnic backgrounds in Australia. Ming-Nuan Yang (2007) stated that ethnic backgrounds play a significant role in choosing the language learning strategies and has identified the strategies that are favored and not favored by the various ethnic groups. RaoKusumi (2006) also found a significant difference in the use of learning strategies among Sri Lankan students from various cultural backgrounds who highly use metacognitive strategies compared to cognitive, compensation, memory, affective and social. Whereas Japanese students highly use compensatory strategies as opposed to the use of affective and social strategies.

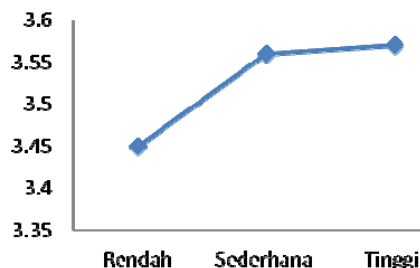


Figure 4. Use of language learning strategies based on parental income

Figure 4 shows that outstanding students with the highest parental income (min = 3.57) have the highest language learning strategy. This is followed by outstanding students with parents with modest incomes (min = 3.56). Outstanding student who use the least learning strategies are students with low-income parents (min = 3.45). This demonstrates that parental income affects the outstanding students' learning strategies. The higher the income of the parents, the better the use of learning strategies. Ortiz (2001) found that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds experienced difficulties in using the experience of students with modest parental income. Abdallah Hussein EL-Saleh El-Omari (2002) concluded that students from high-income families use more strategies than students from middle class backgrounds. Faizahani Ab. Rahman (2002) also stated that socio-academic background illustrates the level of difference in the use of language learning strategies.

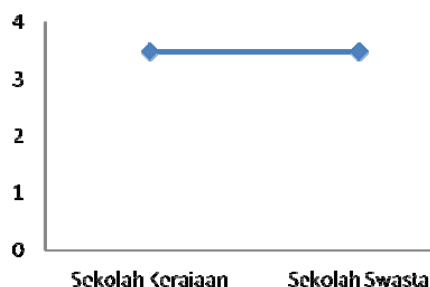


Figure 5. Use of language learning strategies based on types of school

Figure 5 shows that outstanding students from government schools and outstanding students from private schools have the same level of language learning strategy. The findings demonstrate that government schools and private schools have almost the same teaching and learning strategies. As a result, the students' learning strategies are not much differed. From the results of his study, Abdallah Hussein El-Saleh El-Omari (2002) describes that learning strategies used by the outstanding students varies according to the language use, school location and type of school. He mentions that students from private schools have higher learning strategies compared to students from government schools. Even so, this study found that type of school does not affect outstanding students' learning strategies.

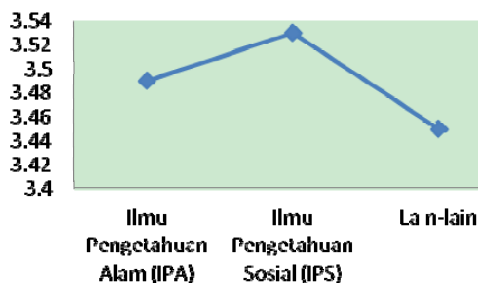


Figure 6. Use of language learning strategies based on academic streams in secondary school

Figure 6 shows that outstanding students who major in Social Sciences (IPS) (mean = 3.53) in secondary schools have higher learning strategies compared to outstanding students majoring in Natural Science (IPA) (mean = 3.49) or other academic areas (mean = 3.45). A possible explanation for this might be that outstanding students

majoring in Social Sciences are more involved in group learning activities compared to outstanding students taking Natural Science (IPA). This finding is parallel with a study conducted by Co Yu Chen (2002) who found that students taking courses in a foreign language use language learning strategies more than students taking other courses.

6. Implications and Recommendation

The results show that outstanding students' learning strategies are at a moderate level. This finding has important implications for developing the learning strategies used by outstanding students, which would impact on the development of quality human capital. One of the issues that emerges from these findings is that the parental income is an influencing factor on students' learning strategies. The results showed that outstanding students whose parents are with high income have a better learning strategy. outstanding students whose parents have low income show low learning strategies. This situation implies that a greater effort should be made possible, whether at the national level or family level to enhance the families' socio-economic standing which would have a direct and positive impact on children's education. It is suggested that a scheme for families with very low income is to be worked out immediately for the improvement of the students' academic quality. Since learning a language is related to many factors, it is important to take into account all of the factors in the planning and management of learning, whether at the school, classroom, or individual level. It is an important consideration for teachers conducting the teaching and learning process to a diversified group of students with different intellectual levels.

These findings offers an important input to educators to be able to provide better treatment to students whose parents have low income, so that the students are facilitated to increase and develop their learning strategies.

The finding of this study is useful for a variety of parties such outstanding students, lecturers in English, English Language Studies Programme Administrators, and curriculum planning. English lecturers get clear information on how students learn English in general and the individual ability of the English language, vocabulary and grammar. Consequently, English lecturers can use an appropriate approach to teach and motivate their students. English Language Studies Programme Administration also obtains information useful in providing learning and teaching resources such as English textbooks, English reference books, teaching aids, and so on. Curriculum planners also benefit from the data for redesigning the curriculum to suit the new English language learning development in the future.

7. Conclusion

Based on the results, it can be concluded that learning strategies used by outstanding students in Universiti Riau Indonesia are at a moderate level. Among the factors that influence the top students' learning strategies are parent with high income, ethni groups and chosen academic fields. These findings suggest several courses of action to help the students improve their language learning strategies. Various parties should participate in the efforts to improve the students' learning strategies, especially when they are in secondary school. Different strategies have to be applied by teachers in schools to give students the opportunity to use a variety of learning strategies in teaching and learning whether at school or at home. The findings of this study provide some insight for further research to explore the learning strategies employed by high achievers in a more detailed manner. Further research might compare learning strategies practiced by the top students' from different higher institutions in different locations, involving a variety of demographic background and parental occupations.

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