

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES:
ATTEND TO FORM AND ATTEND TO MEANING STRATEGIES
(A CASE STUDY AT SMA NEGERI 9 MAKASSAR)**

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Abstract

This study examines the most dominant of the English Language Learning Strategies (ELLSs) employed by secondary school students in Indonesia, and the relationship between language learning strategies (LLSs) use and students' English proficiency level. The main instrument used was a 26-item Inventory of Language Learning Strategies by Good Language Learners (GLL) developed by Rubin which was conducted on 85 students from two classes which focused on social sciences at secondary school. Data analysis relied heavily on statistical analysis i.e., Multiple Comparison Tests. The results of the study revealed that the most dominant (popular) of English Language Learning Strategies (ELLSs) used by secondary school students was "Attend to Form" and "Attend to Meaning," and others were the least popular, and the students who employed various strategies had good scores in the test. This revealed that language learning strategies facilitate the learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia.

***Keywords:** English learning strategies, secondary school students, Indonesia*

A. Introduction

Indonesia is presently amidst drastic social change and transformation towards democratization and reformation of societal system. In the context of development, Indonesian government develops all development aspects. In the international context, Indonesian people need to participate in a wide variety of activities. Consequently, we need an international language which is used in the international current of technology and commerce, and English is the major language of diplomacy, and the most frequently used language of the world today. Knowing English gives many advantages. With this, there is an assumption that there is a high demand for English as a language for communication in Indonesia. Acquiring a high proficiency in English is also seen as an asset for daily activity. This is because someone can improve his or her knowledge through various media in which English becomes tool of instruction.

Therefore, English is a top requirement for those seeking good jobs or career, where its speakers of approximately 400 million people as the mother tongue and by 700 million people as a second or foreign language (Crystal in Luciana, 2004). In Indonesia, English has vital role in everyday life and it has been the first foreign language taught in Indonesia, and become a compulsory subject of the secondary schools and tertiary level, and currently there are some elementary schools place English as a local content in their curricula.

The teaching of English in secondary schools in Indonesia hopefully will improve students' English communicative competence as stated in competency based curriculum, but the facts reveal that the ability of secondary school students is low. Nur (1994: 2) states that the result of the teaching of English in Indonesia has long been considered unsatisfactory.

Jaenal (2011) reports in his research that there are some problems in teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia that relate to teachers and learners. One of those problems is the students' speaking achievement is still low.

Accordingly, Hijrawati (2011) argues that English language teaching and learning has not given satisfactory results. She therefore quotes some research findings revealing the students' low ability in English. Algamasing in Hijrawati (2011) found that many students in SMP Negeri 9 Bau-Bau had difficulty to learn the reading comprehension and the students did not master the text they had read. Harwanto in Hijrawati (2011) reported that among the 24 students at the second grade in SMP Negeri 4 Sampolawa, no one of them can write a paragraph. Karra in Hijrawati (2011) also reported that most of senior high school graduates do not acquire enough vocabularies. This is because, they are afraid of making mistakes in expressing their ideas in English and they are reluctant to learn by heart.

The majority of the secondary school graduates do not have adequate proficiency in English, and question then arises: what are the underlying causes to this problem? Finochiaro and Bonomo in Manda (1998) point out that there are many interrelated factors to this problem, vis., the students, aptitude, aspiration and needs, motivation, native language, socio-economic status, previous language experience, etc. Other causes are the teachers' quality is still low, students' motivation to learn is low, learning aids are limited, and supports from parents are not optimal.

Young in Golchi (2012: 115) stated that poor listening ability results from many factors, such as insufficient emphasis on listening, immature teaching methodologies, ineffective learning strategies, and students' lack of vocabulary.

To improve students' English communicative competence, the teachers hopefully give their students various strategies in teaching – learning processes, and the students are expected to employ those strategies in learning process. Language learning strategy plays a significant role in L2/FL learning, due to the fact that the language learning strategies can help learners to facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval or use of information and increase self-confidence (Chang, Ching-Yi & Liu, Shu-Chen & Lee, Yi-Nian in Ruslan (2014: 2).

Dealing with English language learning strategies (ELLSs), there are some pertinent studies relating to learning strategies which are frequently employed by some researchers, those strategies are Inventory Learning Strategies by Oxford and Inventory Learning Strategies by Rubin. In this study, the writer employed Inventory Learning Strategies developed by Rubin which consists of 26 items.

This is an endeavor to make an intensive study of English language learning strategies employed by senior secondary school students at SMA Negeri 9 Makassar. Therefore, it would be right to say that language learning strategy research is crucial to be studied because the English proficiency of the senior secondary school graduates at SMA Negeri 9 Makassar was very low as revealed in the national final exams in three academic years in which students had average score 4.43 in 2001, 4.07 in 2002, and 4.45 in 2003. Therefore this present study confines its investigation on the use of English language learning strategies employed by secondary school students in English at SMA Negeri 9 Makassar. The research questions and research objectives are postulated in detail as follows:

Objective 1: To identify the most dominant of English language learning strategies used by secondary school students in Indonesia.

Objective 2: To explore the relationship between language learning strategy use and English proficiency test.

Question 1: Which English language learning strategies were most frequently used by secondary school students in Indonesia?

Question 2: What is the relationship between language learning strategy use and English proficiency level?

The findings of the study hopefully will give a substantial original contribution not only as input for teachers and students at secondary schools to improve students' English proficiency but also for learners of English and people who are interested in English teaching and English learning process. It will then become a part of the available information about the use of particular language learning strategies which may explain successfulness in language learning, and the study will suggest a model of training learners or learning on how to learn based on good language learner (GLL) learning strategies. Last but certainly not least, the research findings also will become reference for further researches in relevant discipline.

B. Review of Related Literature

Every person who wishes to widen his or her knowledge or insight must learn. To be successful in learning, one needs to use his or her own strategies. Why learners strategies? By identifying the learners' learning strategies, we can identify the learners' knowledge about their own learning (Oxford in Nuswantara, 2004).

Strategies as the important factors in learning a language should be taken into account. As Altan (2004) argues that if the strategies are ineffective or less effective, the learning will occur more slowly. Strategy is a way the so-called art in determining one's position to be successful in learning (a language). Strategies as techniques or devices which the learner should use to acquire second language knowledge (Stern, 1983).

Learning strategies are techniques, approaches, or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and context area information (Chamot in Wenden and Rubin, 1987). Oxford in Lan and Oxford (2003) defines language learning strategies as specific techniques used by individual learners to facilitate the comprehension, retention, retrieval and application of information in the second or foreign language.

Similarly, Chamot in Chambers and Norman (2003) states that learning strategies are "the techniques or procedures that facilitate a learning task," "the special thoughts and behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information." An important area of research on language learning has been concerned with the cognitive operations that learners apply in classrooms or other learning situations. These behaviors, termed "learning strategies" Chamot (1987).

Ramires in Arifin (2000) simply defines learning strategies when he says, “the technique, approaches, or tactics that learners use are classified as learning strategies.” He does not further specify what such concepts as techniques, approaches, and tactics refer to, except that he, following Chamot and Kuper in Arifin (2000), maintains that these strategies enable students to develop competence in the target language through the use of various techniques to help them comprehend, store, and remember new information and skills.

Accordingly, Strevens (1990) states that learning strategies are operations employed by the learners to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information. Language learning strategies (LLSs) have been identified as one of the individual factors that contribute to differential success rates among second language learners (Larsen – Freeman and Long, 1991, Larsen-Freeman, 1991, Ellis 1994 in Kayad, 1999). The term strategies have generally been used interchangeable with tactics, techniques, and move (Zhang, 2003).

In relation to the important factor of language learning, various attempts have been made by a few researchers to find out how learners can cope with the difficulties in language learning. Some researchers have produced inventories of learning strategies (for example, Rubin 1975, Stein 1975, Frohlich 1976, Naiman et al 1978 in Stern 1983 and Arifin 2000), but their list comprising more or less similar categories are divided up into somewhat different ways. Therefore, this present study will try to answer the basic question: Why a certain group of learners or certain individual of learners are successful whilst others are not?. This study also focuses on examining the strategies of good language learners based on a list of seven strategies developed by Rubin in Reiss (1983).

- (1) Good language learners are willing and accurate guessers.
- (2) Successful language learners have strong motivation to communicate.
- (3) Successful language students are often not inhibited.
- (4) Good language learners are prepared to attend to form.
- (5) Good language learners practice.
- (6) Good language learners monitor their own speech and that of others.
- (7) Good language learners attend to meaning.

Studies of the effect of implementing a particular strategy in language learning employed by learners in the world have been carried out by some researchers with varying degrees of success. Those researchers are Naiman et al (1978), Bialystok & Rrohlich (1978), Politzer (1980), Politzer & McGroarty (1985), Chesterfield & Chesterfield (1985), Willing (1985), O’Malley et al (1985), Mochizuki (1996), Kayad (1999), and Smais (2000) as illustrated in table 1 and table 2.

Table 1. Studies of Learner Strategies in 1970s to 1980s

| <i>Study</i> | <i>Class level (s)</i> | <i>Data Collection</i> | <i>L1</i> |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| Naiman, et al (1978) | Graders 8, 10, 12 | Classroom observation, interviews | English |
| Bialystok & Rrohlich (1978) | High School | Questionnaires | English |
| Politzer (1983) | University | Questionnaires | English |
| Politzer & McGroarty (1985) | University Graduate Preparation | Questionnaires | Mixed |
| Chesterfield & Chesterfield (1985) | Pre School & Grade 1 | Classroom Observation | Spanish |
| Willing (1985) | Adult Immigrants | Questionnaires | Mixed |
| O'Malley et al. (1985a) | High School | Interview, classroom observation | Mixed |

Cited from Chaudron (1988: 110)

Table 2. Studies of Learner Strategies in 1990s to 2000s

| <i>Study</i> | <i>Class level (s)</i> | <i>Data Collection</i> | <i>L2</i> |
|------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| Mochizuki (1996) | University Students | Questionnaire, test | English |
| Kayad (1999) | University Students | Questionnaire, placement test | English |
| Shmais (2000) | University Students | Questionnaire, Progress Report | English |

The previous studies on language learning strategies were conducted by foreign researchers. In Indonesian context, there were still little studies deal with language learning strategies applied by Indonesian learners of English, and the following four researchers focused their studies on English learning strategies used by Indonesian learners' of English. Those researchers are Wello, et al. (1993), Haryanto (1998), Djiwandono (1998), Arifin (2000), and Husain (2003) as revealed in table 3.

Table 3. Studies on English Learning Strategies in Indonesian Context

| <i>Study</i> | <i>Number of Subject (s)</i> | <i>Class Level (s)</i> | <i>Data Collection</i> |
|--------------|------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|--------------|------------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|

| | | | |
|---------------------|-----|---|--|
| Wello, at al (1993) | 40 | Third semester students of English Education Department | Questionnaire |
| Haryanto | 1 | Senior High School | In-depth interview, observation activities, document administration, test administration |
| Djiwandono (1998) | 27 | Second-year secretarial students at university | Questionnaires, diaries, interview |
| Arifin (2000) | 115 | Indonesian adult learners | - Strategy Inventory language Learning , - Proficiency test |
| Husain | 54 | Students of English Department (University) | Questionnaire and vocabulary level test |

This study therefore shows the most frequently strategies use by the secondary school students in learning English at SMA Negeri 9 Makassar and it gives information about how the use of strategies may explain successfulness in English language learning, especially in Indonesian context.

C. Method of the Research

The method used was preexperimental (one group – pretest – post test design). The design has one group, a pre test, a treatment, and a post test. It lacks a control group and random assignment (Neuman, 2000). The research was carried out in the population of 85 students from two classes which focused on Social Science classes. Social Sciences Classes were chosen to be the object of this research because the students of these classes notably seemed to be lack of attention in learning and teaching process, and this condition occurred when the research took place in the classroom setting. The students were within the age of 17 – 19 years old, and in term of English proficiency were estimated to be in the range of beginners and pre-intermediate level. All subjects have studied English formally for 6 years, 3 years at junior high school and 3 years at senior high school.

The population of this study was all Social Science classes of SMA Negeri 9 Makassar, South Sulawesi Indonesia. The subject referred to those who were in the third year, as they were all assumed to have the same exposure in English as a foreign language (EFL). The total number

of subjects participating in this study was 85 students from two classes at SMA Negeri 9 Makassar. The sampling technique used in this research was cluster random sampling technique.

After the pre-test was administered, it was then followed by the introduction of learning strategy (GLL – Rubin). The students were then treated with learning strategy followed by exercises. The two classes were trained and taught with the same materials during the research. The material which were trained and taught to students in the classroom dealt with “guessing strategy,” “attend to meaning,” and ”attend to form.” While some of other learning strategies covered in a wide variety of exercises. After a few weeks of strategy treatment, post test was administered to get data whether the students could handle the test well and had score improvement.

In collecting the data, the instruments of this study were questionnaire and test. Questionnaire was used to identify learning strategies and pre - test was used to find out the students’ English competence level. Post – test was used to find out the progress of students’ English proficiency.

Data for this study were collected using two main instruments, namely 1) self-administered questionnaire comprising strategy inventory items or a 26-item of Language Learning Strategies by Good Language Learners (GLL) by Rubin (1975), and 2) Proficiency test which covered English structure, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

The data obtained from the test and questionnaires were analyzed statistically by applying Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Multiple Comparison Test. The data were processed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 11 for Windows. The first two procedures were applied to determine profile of strategy used, and T-test was applied to determine the differences between students’ English proficiency before and after giving treatment.

D. Findings and Discussion

The average in the GLL indicates how frequently the students use learning strategies in general in table 4 below, and the mean, degree, and rank are illustrated in table 5.

Table 4. Average Use of Strategies

| Strategy | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
|------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Mean | 2.352 | 2.343 | 2.377 | 2.750 | 2.600 | 2.611 | 2.716 |
| SD | 0.6392 | 0.6518 | 0.5640 | 0.6060 | 0.5926 | 0.6380 | 0.4856 |
| Full Score | 4.000 | 4.000 | 4.000 | 4.000 | 4.000 | 4.000 | 4.000 |

A= Accurate Guesser

B= Strong Motivation to Communicate

C= Often not Inhibited

D= Attend to Form

E= Practice

F= Monitor Their Own Speech

G= Attend to Meaning

Table 5. Mean, Degree, and Rank of Strategy Groups

| Strategy | Mean | Degree | Rank |
|----------------------------------|-------|--------|------|
| Attend to form | 2.750 | High | 1 |
| Attend to meaning | 2.716 | High | 2 |
| Monitor their own speech | 2.611 | Medium | 3 |
| Practice | 2.600 | Medium | 4 |
| Often not inhibited | 2.377 | Low | 5 |
| Accurate guesser | 2.352 | Low | 6 |
| Strong motivation to communicate | 2.343 | Low | 7 |

Strategy A refers to “Good language learners are willing and accurate guessers.” Strategy B refers to “Successful language learners have strong motivation to communicate.” Strategy C refers to “Successful language students are often not inhibited.” Strategy D refers to “Good language learners are prepared to attend to form.” Strategy E refers to “Good language learners practice.” Strategy F refers to “Good language learners monitor their own speech and that of others.” Strategy G refers to “Good language learners attend to meaning.”

The results of the study reveal that (1) the most dominant (popular) of English Language Learning Strategies (ELLSs) used by secondary school students are “Attend to Form” and “Attend to Meaning,” and others were the least popular.

The findings are therefore discussed to give theoretical arguments. The above strategies employed by secondary school students in the Indonesian context based on Good Language Learners Strategy (GLLS) by Rubin (1975). Those strategies are therefore elaborated ranging from the most dominant to the least dominant of the strategy use as follows: a) *Good language learners are prepared to attend to form*, which is “behaviors used for creating well-form of

language in terms of grammatical structure,” b) *Good language learners attend to meaning*, which is “ways used for handling the meaning of others’ utterances (sentences), and if there are some difficult/unfamiliar words, they use clues to understand the meaning of the sentences,” c) *Good language learners monitor their own speech and that of others*, which is “behaviors used for monitoring and/or correcting one’s speech or others’ speech,” d) *Good language learners practice*, which is “opportunity used for practicing language in various kinds of skills,” e) *Successful language students are often not inhibited*, which is “the physical, emotional, and cognitive changes of the pre-teenager and teenager bring on mounting defensive inhibitions to protect a fragile ego, to word of ideas, experiences, and feelings that threaten to dismantle the organization of values and beliefs on which appraisals of self-esteem have been founded,” f) *Good language learners are willing and accurate guessers*, which is “techniques used to help the learners to learn to make intelligent guesses if there is missing knowledge of understanding the words or sentences uttered by others,” and g) *Successful language learners have strong motivation to communicate*, which is “behaviors used to participate in meeting, discussion, and so on to communicate one’s ideas or feeling to others.

Therefore, other than strategies, students’ motivation and opportunity to express ideas in English becomes a must if they wish to be proficient in English.

Yusuf (2012) conducted research to two Indonesian children, Gina and Nadia. He found that Gina and Nadia were good English learners: they had what Rubin called “three variables” of good language learning: aptitude, motivation, and opportunity. They were bright children and they knew how to use their knowledge in learning a “new” language; they were good guessers and fearless risk takers. They were also integratively motivated: they practiced their English; they were gregarious and eager to communicate; they had positive attitude toward school and made a lot of friends, and reacted positively to the people and their environment.

By employing a wide variety of strategies, the learners of English as a foreign language in Indonesia hopefully will get good communicative competence.

The score differences between pre-test and post-test for the two classes (IPS 1 and IPS 2) are revealed in table 6 below.

Table 6. The Score of Pre-test and Post-test

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation | P-value |
|--------------------|-------|--------------------|---------|
| Pre-test | 13.47 | 6.764 | 0.006 |
| Post-test | 15.38 | 6.373 | |
| Paired differences | -1.91 | | |

Table 6 illustrates that P-value is 0.006. This means that statistically the difference between pre-test and post-test was significant because $P = 0.006$ is smaller than 0.05. This means that the difference between pre-test and post-test was significant. This also reveals that the learning strategies had positive contribution towards English proficiency and their contribution was significant.

E. Conclusions and Suggestions

1. Conclusion

Firstly, the results of the study show that the senior secondary school students at SMA Negeri 9 Makassar were high to low users of strategies. Furthermore, “attend to form” marked the highest usage or the most frequently used strategy followed by “attend to meaning” strategy, and “strong motivation to communicate” was the least dominant.

Secondly, this study shows that statistically, there was a positive correlation between pre-test and post-test and their correlation was significant. This means that the learning strategies had positive contribution on students’ English proficiency. The students’ English proficiency increased after giving treatment or after introducing and training the strategy use of the Inventory of Language Learning Strategies by Good Language Learners (Rubin, 1975) to students.

Finally, on the basis of the opinion that the teaching of English as a foreign language in Indonesia should begin teaching the students how to employ various learning strategies to develop their English proficiency. This is because LLSs can facilitate the learning of the target language by language learners.

It is therefore expected to employ a wide variety of learning strategies because it is believed that one of determinants for learners’ success in learning English is the result of the learning strategies used by the learners. In post – test for the whole classes, the students’ scores improved and the number of students in poor position reduced.

2. Suggestions

This current study is one of investigations on the use of learning strategies in senior secondary school students at SMA Negeri 9 Makassar, Indonesia which involved 85 students. The results of the study hopefully provide comprehensive information on such a multi-dimensional phenomenon as language learning strategies.

Further investigations dealing with learning strategies are needed to allow for establishment of a better paradigm and a comprehensive understanding of those phenomena. The followings are some suggestions required for further investigation and a model of training learners or learning on how to learn based upon language learning strategies (LLSs).

Firstly, it is suggested on the basis of the results that the teaching of English as a foreign language in Indonesia should begin teaching the students how to employ various learning strategies to develop their communicative competence.

Secondly, based upon this study, both learners and teachers need to become aware of the learning strategies through strategy instruction. On the one hand, the learners as the core of learning process have to be risk-taking in terms of trying to communicate with others, becoming good or accurate guesser, practice, etc. By dealing with the research findings, it is therefore suggested to the learners to employ a wide variety of language learning strategies in order to achieve English proficiency.

Thirdly, the teachers have to introduce and train learning strategies to students and provide them with opportunities for practicing the strategies by integrating them into the classroom instructional plan.

Fourthly, the possibility of be-directional effect of strategy use and proficiency level suggests that some strategies are more effective and useful for improving English proficiency, i.e.: **Attend to form** and **Attend to meaning**, which were used significantly more often by the students who had score improvement in post-test, and have been noted as strategies that are directly related to learning as they involve the use of the target language to process language input.

Finally, there is a need for more comprehensive investigation on a wide range of variables affecting language learning strategies (LLSs) employed by Indonesian learners such as cultural background, motivation, attitude, age, cognitive, affective, personality in terms of learners' internal factors, and external factors like teachers, material, and facilities. Furthermore, because this study confines its investigation on Social Science classes at senior secondary school, further investigation on English learning strategies employed by Natural Science classes may be

conducted, and the learning strategies employed by elementary school, junior secondary school students and students at tertiary level are also suggested.

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