INVESTIGATING EFL LEARNERS' LEARNING STRATEGIES IN SPEAKING SKILL

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to find out the learning strategies used by EFL learners in developing their speaking skills. It employed a qualitative method with triangulation instruments including questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The results of the questionnaire showed that metacognitive has become the most frequently used learning strategy by successful learners with a mean score of 4.22 indicating as strategies are always or almost always used because this strategy help learners regulate their learning, such as paying attention, planning to learn as much as they can and doing self-evaluation to be better in speaking English. This study also found that learners who are successful in speaking skills used a combination of all kinds of learning strategies to improve their speaking skills. Learners have positive improvement in speaking components such as the better pronunciation of English words, use of good grammar, have more vocabulary, fluency in speaking, and can overcome the problems that may occur when they speak English.

Keywords: *Language Learning Strategies, Speaking skill*

INTRODUCTION

English has played an important role in many parts of our life, for instance in international communication, business, education, science, computer technology, internet and media. People use English to communicate with other people from many countries in the world. In the context of education, the purpose of teaching English is to improve learners' ability to use English as a communication tool. Speaking is one of the most important skills because speaking is a form of direct communication. According to Gadsby (2000) speaking is saying things, express thoughts, ideas, be able to talk in language, make a speech, and to speak of worth mentioning. It means, by uttering what we think or feel orally, the listener can easily understand and directly respond what we say either by action or by arguments.

Choosing a good learning strategy is an important thing that must be done by students in order to achieve their learning goals. Cohen (2011) defined that learning strategies as thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalized by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target-language performance. Successful learners are believed to be critical in choosing their own way of learning as Ellis (2010) states "successful learners are people who are wise and aware of themselves in relation to the learning process". In other words, learners are categorized as successful if they are able to think critically because they can easily identify their own needs during the learning process.

In speaking class, the learners have their own behaviors of learning that are intended to influence how they process information. This can be defined as learning strategies. According to Wael et al., (2018) learning strategies consist of direct strategy; direct strategies cover memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies while indirect strategies cover metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The first is memory strategy, it is refers to the way learners store and retrieve new information in their mind. The second is cognitive strategy, it is refers to the way of EFL learners learn from many sources in improving their speaking skill. The third is compensation strategy, it is refers to the way learners overcome the problems faced when they speaking English. The four is metacognitive, it is refers to the way learners developed the learning from their prior knowledge. The fifth is affective strategy, it is refers to how students control their emotions or feelings in dealing with the learning process. The last is social strategy, it is refers to how leaners learn through interaction with other person.

On the field of learning strategy, Language Learning Strategy (LLS) plays an important role in learning process. In language research, learning strategies are conscious, teachable, intentional, self-chosen, and self-regulated thoughts and actions for learning the target culture and language. One of the aspects that are involved in the process of developing speaking skills is the language learning strategies used by the learners themselves. This is how the learners learn by themselves. Learning strategies are steps taken by students to enhance their own

learning. Seeking out conversation partners, asking for correction, and practicing out loud are some examples of learning strategies used by learners to develop speaking skills. In addition, the use of appropriate language learning strategies is a major contribution for development of communicative competence. It can be assumed that if inappropriate strategies are applied it will not result in much improvement of proficiency to be communicatively competent. Thus, learning strategies are among the main factors that help to determine how, and how well, learners learn a foreign language (Wegner et al., 2021).

To identify the learning strategies used by EFL learners', it is used questionnaire developed by Oxford which serves to investigate the types of the learning strategies by giving range for certain behaviors representing learners in learning speaking. There are also some previous research about learning strategies, one of them was conducted by Utami (2020) the result reported that the students applies almost all of English speaking learning strategies include metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies in mastering their speaking skill. As well as another study conducted by Gani et al. (2015) also found that high performance speaking students had better balance in using all kinds of learning strategies (memory, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social) for enhancing their speaking skills; the same could not be found with low performance speaking students.

After studying about the previous research about learning strategies and its' importance for EFL learners, the researcher conduct a preliminary study at English Education Study Program of Tadulako University, it was found that learners used a variety of learning strategies to enhance their progress in developing speaking skills. Some of the learners confirmed that their strategies give greater impact toward their learning process. Meanwhile, there were also several learners who thought that their strategies only gave a small contribution; hence their learning may not have improved significantly.

Language learning strategies are good indicators of how learners approach tasks or problems encountered during the process of language learning, especially in speaking (Hakan et al., 2015). In other words, language learning strategies give

teachers clues about how their students assess the situation, plan, select appropriate ways to understand, learn, or remember new input presented in the language classroom.

Based on the previous research, the researcher was interested in conducting a qualitative study of learners' learning strategies in the speaking classes at the English Education Study Program, Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Tadulako University. Since the previous researchers only identified learning strategies in speaking that were used by learners in general. Meanwhile, this study aims to identify and analyze in depth how learners who are successful in speaking use their learning strategies.

METHODOLOGY

This research used qualitative research design. This research was conducted in Tadulako University. The participants of this research were the third semester students of English Department Study of Tadulako University. In choosing the participants, the researcher used snowball sampling technique. As Sugiono (2011) has explained that snowball sampling is a technique for sampling data sources, which initially are small in number, but gradually become large. This is done because of the small number of data sources that have not been able to provide satisfactory data, so look for other people who can be used as data sources. In doing this research, the researcher selected certain people who are considered to provide the necessary data (learners who got A score in Speaking for General Communication subject). Furthermore, based on the data or information obtained from the previous participant, the researcher can determine other participants that are considered to provide more complete data. The total of the participants were 10 learners.

In order to collect the data needed for this research, questionnaires, interviews and documents were the main instruments used. The researcher used learners' achievement records prepared by the lecturer for getting prior information about the learners who got A score in Speaking for General Communication subject. Further, for the questionnaire, the researcher used language learning strategy

questionnaire. It is containing 50 items as an instrument for assessing language leaning strategies used by the learners. 30 items were selected as instruments for assessing the language learning strategies used by the leaners in improving their speaking skill. It consisted of six parts: (a) remembering more effectively (memory strategy); (b) using mental processes (cognitive strategy); (c) compensating for missing knowledge (compensation strategy); (d) organizing and evaluating learning (metacognitive strategy); (e) managing emotions (affective strategy); and (f) learning with others (social strategy). This instrument has helped the researcher to answer the research question that have categorized the learning strategies used by participants.

For the interview, this activity was conducted to obtain more detailed information about how the participants improve their speaking skill. In collecting the data, the researcher has interviewed the participants using semi-structured interviews by telephone. This instrument was followed up after distributing the questionnaire to the participants.

The participants were asked 5 questions, namely:

1. What do you do to make your pronunciation better?
2. What do you do to enrich your vocabulary?
3. What do you do to make your grammar better when you speak?
4. What do you do to improve your fluency?
5. How do you overcome the problems when you speak English?

During the interview, the data was recorded using phone recorder.

The procedure for data analysis of this research was as follows; first, after collecting the learners' grade transcript, the researcher noted the learners who got A score in Speaking for General Communication subject to identify the participants for this research; second, the data from the questionnaire and interviews were gathered and translated in English; third, the data was then coded to classify learners' learning strategies; fourth, the data was grouped based on the parts of the learning strategies used by learners; fifth, the result of the document interpretation, questionnaire, and interviews were describe in the form of narrative; the last step was to draw brief conclusions of the research findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Data from Questionnaire

The result of the questionnaire from the learners who have good grades in speaking subject showed the highest mean score of the strategies used is metacognitive strategy with the mean score of 4.22, followed by cognitive strategies with the mean score of 4.13, social strategies with the mean score of 3 .74, compensation strategy with the mean score of 3.7, affective strategy with the mean score of 3.67 and memory strategy is on a medium scale with the mean score of 3.17. it shows that learners often use almost all direct and indirect strategies in improving their speaking skill.

Table . The Mean Score and Frequency of Using Language Learning Strategies in Speaking Skill of EFL Learners

Strategy	Number of learners	Total	Mean	Frequency	Interpretation
Memory		31.75	3.17	Medium	Sometimes used
Cognitive		41.38	4.13	High	Usually used
Compensation	10	37	3.7	High	Usually used
Metacognitive	learners	42.23	4.22	High	Usually used
Affective		36.73	3.67	High	Usually used
Social		37.4	3.74	High	Usually used

Data from Interviews

In terms of improving pronunciation, the participants felt that when applying their learning strategies, there was an improvement in their English pronunciation. The participants responded that they use to make their pronunciation better by listening to western music, watching western movies, listening to English podcasts, some of them also watching You Tube on how native speakers pronounce English words and following it. They added that they do practice as often as possible, pronounce words properly and correctly, especially when finding new words, listen more to native speakers speak in English, when they find new words, they will listen to the pronunciation of the word and also follow the way native speakers pronounce words in English.

To enrich their vocabulary, almost all of the participants reading a lot such as reading dictionaries, books, some of them read articles, and also novel in English. There are also participants who like to read quotes on social media such as Instagram to increase their vocabulary. Besides that, other strategies they use are memorizing words when they find new words, listening to western music while looking at the lyrics, practicing saying words repeatedly so that the words can be stored in their memory, watching western movies, watching English YouTube, listening to podcasts, making vocabulary lists to memorize, and attaching English words to objects at home.

When it came to the strategies to make their grammar better, the participants used various strategies such as paying attention when the lecturer explains in class, they also learning grammar from various sources such as from books, internet, you tube and social media, some of them added they asking for help from those who understand grammar, make small notes about grammar to be studied again, apply good grammar that has been learned when they speak. The researcher also found that the participants practice more using good grammar when speaking, there are even participants who took grammar online class, and there are also those who complete the exercises in the grammar book to practice their knowledge of grammar.

In order to make their fluency in speaking English, the participants use some strategies such as by practicing speaking English with friend, they also mentioned that they repeating words, reading books or articles in English, and try to follow the native way of speaking. Some of them also added they like to talk to themselves in English, sing a song in English, and even practice speaking in front of a mirror. They also said that they try to use English in everyday life.

Meanwhile, to overcome the problems in speaking, the strategies used by the participants are when they were nervous they tried to relax and control themselves to be calm, they also responded that when they forgot a word they would look for synonyms or other words that have the same meaning, they also asking friends by saying *"how to say..in English"* and also using gestures to express what they want to say.

Discussion

Based on the results of the study, almost ten participants who are considered as a successful learners use all learning strategies to improve their speaking skills. From the results of the questionnaire, the researcher found that the first popular strategy used by the participants was metacognitive strategy. This is evident because in the learning process, successful students always look for opportunities to speak English as much and as often as possible in their daily lives.

Furthermore, another metacognitive strategy that showed the most preferred had improved their speaking ability because by paying more attention when a person or native speaker spoke English, the participants could follow and correct the mistakes they might make when they spoke English compared to how the native speaker spoke. The above shows that the participants organize and evaluate their learning to improve their speaking skills. This is supported by previous research conducted by Syafryadin (2020) which found that the most widely used strategy by students was to organize and evaluate their learning, which led to a metacognitive or indirect strategy.

Then the cognitive strategy rated as the second strategy that was widely used by the participants. This strategy leads the participants to find various ways to be better in English. Based on the results of the study, it was shown that successful learners practiced speaking English more in their daily lives. They also try to improve their speaking skills by looking at various sources to be used as their references in speaking English. It implies that learners who are successful in speaking are those who can learn independently not only depending on the material provided by the lecturer but also trying to find suitable learning resources for themselves that can improve their speaking skills. This is supported by (Sherly, 2015) who said that active, independent and successful students often use cognitive strategy processes when they learn to speak English in the classroom. Then strengthened by the results of research from (Prabawa, 2016) which highlights cognitive strategies as the most widely used strategy by Indonesian students to improve their speaking skills because these strategies have a positive impact on them.

The third strategy used by the participants who are successful in improving their speaking skills was the social strategy. It leads to how participants learn the language through interaction with friends or other people who can also speak English or even native speakers. The results showed that participants also increased their ability to understand what their interlocutor was talking about by interrupting when they felt there was something they didn't understand, so that when communicating with someone using English they could understand each other and avoid misunderstandings. The participants also applied other social strategies to improve their speaking skills such as, often practice conversing with friends and even asking a friend or expert to correct when speaking English.

The above implies that the participants realized that in the learning process they needed support from partners, friends or even experts to be able to practice speaking with them and be able to correct their mistakes when speaking. This is supported by previous research Yunus et al., (2014) in her research she focused on the use of indirect strategies in speaking. He found that the use of social strategies was higher and significant than other indirect strategies. The use of stronger social strategies is driven by the students' academic, social, and personal reasons.

The fourth strategy is the compensation strategy. This strategy was used to overcome the problems faced by the participants in speaking English. The results showed that the compensation strategy used by the participants was using gestures, asking what English words they didn't know, looking for synonyms for these words, and trying not to panic while finding the right words. In overcoming problems in speaking, the participants choose strategies that are suitable for themselves to be used to minimize errors that may occur when they speak English.

The use of a compensation strategy to improve students' speaking skills is supported by research conducted by Syafryadin & Martina (2020) competent speakers use compensation strategies more than bad speakers. Thus, the main implication for pedagogy is that compensation strategies are very useful as a guide to avoid communication gaps in speaking activities.

Furthermore, the fifth strategy used by the participants was the affective strategy. This strategy refers to how students control their emotions, attitudes and

motivation as they learn. Based on the results of the study, it was found that the participants tended to encourage or motivate themselves to be confident in speaking English even when they were afraid of making mistakes in speaking.

In line with the paragraph above, it implies that in order to improve learners speaking skills, they are not afraid to make mistakes in speaking, and in the learning process they always try to correct the mistakes they make in speaking English so that in the future they can be better at speaking English. Then another strategy they do is they try to handle their own emotions when they are afraid to speak English. What they do to control their emotions is to make positive statements, try to relax, and reward themselves so that the fear of speaking English is gone. The participants believe that by using affective strategies they can control themselves and can be confident when speaking English. This is supported by previous research conducted by Zakaria et al., (2019) which found that the use of affective strategies could encourage students to speak without fear of making grammatical, pronunciation, vocabulary errors, or substandard errors.

The next strategy is memory strategy. This strategy is a medium frequency strategy for use by the participants with a mean of 3.17. This strategy is used to remember information or knowledge which helps language learners to retrieve information or knowledge once they are needed for communication. The results showed that the participants also used memory strategies to improve their speaking skills. When they find a new word they try to save the word in their memory by looking at pictures of the word or demonstrating the word and also always using the new word they find into a sentence. The participants felt that using memory strategies in their learning process could enrich their vocabulary. This is supported by a previous study Yarroh et al., (2020) which found that based on the results of the questionnaire, there were 22 students who used memory strategies on speaking skills. The reason is that most students are used to using memory strategies and are already comfortable with these strategies.

In addition, based on the data obtained through interviews, it became clear that students used and applied appropriate strategies in their learning process because those strategies had some positive effects on their learning outcomes.

Researcher found that successful learners used a combination of learning strategies to improve speaking skills which made their pronunciation better, enriched their vocabulary, could use a good grammar when speaking English, could be fluent in speaking English and can overcome the problems faced when speaking English.

In accordance with the results of this research, a study conducted by (Safari & Fitriani, 2016) revealed that learners with high speaking performance used all kinds of strategies in learning speaking. Furthermore A. Gani et al., (2015) found that students with high speaking were more aware of their language needs; thus, they tend to use strategies that will help them master the target language through practice, reasoning and analysis, as well as strategies that allow them to learn on their own through strategy planning and outcome development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that students with good scores in speaking subject use a combination of all six strategy aspects namely memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies to improve their speaking skill. Some of the learning strategies used mostly by EFL learners are: making a list of words to memorize (memory strategy), trying to follow how native speakers speak (cognitive), use gestures to express the word they want to say (compensation strategy), practice speaking in English with friends (social/metacognitive), encourage themselves to speak English even when they afraid of making mistakes (affective strategy).

Furthermore, the strategies implemented by EFL learners have had several positive effects on them because they are able to pronounce English words, use grammar correctly better than usual, enrich their vocabulary, speak English fluently and they are able to overcome the problems that may occur when they speak English.

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