

PROFILE OF SUCCESSFUL ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Abstract

English is one important skills to be acquired by the students for achieving a prospective job with a good salary. Hence, the appropriate learning strategies to be successful English language learners are essential to boost the learning achievement. The facts, some UIN Mataram English I students have depicted themselves as successful English language learners. Furthermore, this present study is a descriptive qualitative case study involving ten students of S1 Islamic Elementary School Teachers Science (PGMI) Departments students at the UIN Mataram who were in academic year 2016-2017 and passed English I program. The subjects was chosen on the basis of their English achievement and their language capability. The subjects had good scores for the English subject and they also had excellent language achievement proven by being winner of some English contest such as debate competition, speech contest, English business meeting presentation, and TOEFL score. The data will be collected through observation, questionnaire responses, and interviews. The study found that the successful language learners are overall, taking responsibility for their learning, self-initiating and well motivated, and initiating learning opportunities for themselves. They also did a lot of independent learning activities which suit their interest. From the six learning strategies employed by those learners, namely, memorizing strategy, affective strategy and social strategy, cognitive strategy, compensation strategy, metacognitive strategy, it seems that those belonging to direct strategies are all used since the strategies help students directly.

Keywords: *Successful language learners, profile, language learning strategies*

Introduction

Good English proficiency now becomes one of the major criteria to get a prospective job with a good salary. Many vacancies require the applicants to have proficiency in oral and written English. Generally, the measurement of language proficiency can be seen from how well a job applicant produces the oral language. As example, on the job interview test, a successful applicant is seen from how fluent he or she speaks and expresses his or her ideas in English. However, learning a foreign language such as English is not easy since learner cannot acquire the

language within an instant time. It is a cumulative and continuous process. Some learners think that learning a foreign language such as English is an inexact process. Very few people learn to use a foreign language like what native speakers do. Thus, when they want to be successful in studying the foreign language, they need to be realistic and aware of their goal (Cahyono, 1997).

In Indonesia, not like in Malaysia or even Singapore, English is considered as a foreign language. In fact, the language input and practices that the students get in an English classroom are limited. As the example, at the S1 Islamic Elementary School Teachers Science (PGMI) Departments of UIN Mataram, the general objective of teaching English is that the students will be able to acquire not only receptive skills (listening and reading) but also being able to achieve productive skills such as communicating in English orally and in written form, as well as to express ideas, opinions, and/or feelings related to business and accounting (Wahyuningsih & Cahyani, 2009). English is taught for two credit hours (once a week) and is discreetly taught in four language skills (Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking). Despite the time allocation, the success of English teaching is still far from the expectation.

Today, it seems that a lot of language research studies concern with teaching strategies and methodologies and how effective they are implemented in a language classroom. In the era of technology, some research employing the use of technology in the language classroom has also been conducted (Cahyani & Cahyono, 2009). However, not many of the research studies concern with aspects that support the success of learning language such as learning strategies. As what Mistar (2009) says that among 1970s until 1990s in Indonesia the studies about the foreign language learning strategy were not very much among the learners compared to the western countries. But, after that the Indonesian pays attention to do the research about it. Hence, this research was intended to explore some profiles of successful language learners through survey and their language learning strategies. Profiles of successful language learners is a crucial especially for language learners who want to be successful in mastering a foreign language. Students who are familiar with

strategies of language learning knew what they should do with the language and why they used those strategies.

Method

This research study is a descriptive qualitative case study involving ten students of S1 Islamic Elementary School Teachers Science (PGMI) Departments students at the UIN Mataram who were in academic year 2016-2017 and passed English I program. As a descriptive study, it focuses on specific nature of individual subject and go into very deep discussion and detail in to describe them. Individual variation is not only allowed for but studied. The intended approach is called a case study as it tries to describe the subjects' entire range of behavior and the relationship of the behaviors to the environment (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002: 440).

The subjects will be chosen on the basis of their English achievement and their language capability. The subjects had good scores for the English subject and they also had excellent language achievement proven by being winner of some English contest such as debate competition, speech contest, English business meeting presentation, and TOEFL score. The data will be collected through observation, questionnaire responses, and interviews. Before the research will be done, a preliminary study will be conducted by observing the activities of the subjects in their language classroom. Then, the collected data will be described qualitatively.

The instrument to collect the data about the profiles of successful English language learners was questionnaire. For developing the mentioned questionnaire, the researcher referred to information gathered from the writer's observation on the learners' submitted questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of items regarding students' experience as well as how their efforts to be successful as English learners.

Finding and Discussion

There are some points that can be used to show that a language learner is successful: language class grades, scores of proficiency tests such as TOEFL,

TOEIC, and IELTS, the learners' ability to use the language, and a more experiential treatment of language proficiency (Gass and Selinker, 1994). In addition, the term "Successful learners" means that the learners have good language performance which is reflected in their language achievement. It seems that they have a knack to learn language. They can adsorb and memorize new vocabulary easily, master the rules of grammar, speak the other language in accurate and fluent way, and learn how to write quickly compared to the other students. This section discusses the profiles of ten successful English language learners with their language learning profiles.

Tuti. She has learnt English since she was on the seventh grade or when she was about 13 years old, which is not an early age to learn language. She stated that she did not have systematic and in ordered ways of learning the language. To her case, she used to go to Bali where some foreigners come. It was the time when she got a lot of language exposures and gained her English considerably. Her mother had some foreign friends with whom she could have chats and practiced English occasionally. She liked to listen and repeat words said by native speakers and her English teachers. For her, repeating words out loud was an effective way to get the right pronunciation. She actually did not join additional formal activities like English courses, English speaking community and debate club. But how could she speak fluently in English? The clue was that she liked to mingle with people who use the language. She is a kind of extrovert learner to use the language. Even with her English teacher, she always looks for opportunities to have a small or long conversation using English. She never gets bored to practice her language ability. Outside classroom, she reads English newspapers and articles, translate papers, joins interactive programs on the radio, watches Western movies with English subtitles and listens to English songs and translates the lyrics. She is fond of watching movies likes watching movies for the whole day on the weekends, she picks new words and expressions from those activities, she confesses that those activities indeed give her fun thus she keeps doing that.

Munawwir. Munawwir achieved the highest English score in national examination when he was in senior high school. Finding the high school English subject material was full of theories, he made schedule for himself to learn grammar and text genre a little. Further, associating what he had learnt with authentic materials in newspaper, magazine, TV program, and others made the materials easily inhibited his memory. He assumes that many think English as difficult since they look English is compilation of rules and science which is separated from life. In fact, English is actually mean to understand life. So, applying theory and vocabulary to real daily life makes learning English easier. The result, he achieved highest A (4.00) for ESP program held by UIN Mataram in academic year 2016-2017. Furthermore, he sometimes invites friends to sit together and discuss certain topics in English.

Emi. Emi describes a language learning as natural experience in which she never intended to have before. She just liked English and being fluent is merely the effect. She is smart and diligent students and that is explicitly confirmed from her high GPA in ESP program State Islamic University Mataram. She knows that English is not her area but if she can use English productively, it can make her easier doing English presentation, reading articles, and chatting with foreigners through facebook. Like Tuti, she started learning English when she was in junior high school class. She learnt English from her English teacher in grade 1 and 2. However, when she entered Grade 3, she found that the teacher was very supportive. The teacher did not only teach English in the classroom, but also gave the students some extra activities outside the classroom through English speaking community. He was interested in joining the activity with his friends and felt that the learning of foreign language was not that easy. But, he found that the community contributed a lot to his enhancement. She turned to be an active student both in class and in speaking community. When she was in a vocational high school (SMK) she was chosen as the representative of a business meeting and accounting English presentation competition for all vocational high schools in West Nusa Tenggara. There were two

representatives from her high school but she was the one who got the first winner. This showed that she is a smart and diligent students in English subject.

What Emi believes in learning a language is that every language learner should not be worry so much about the grammar, and should concentrate more on communicating and delivering the information. However, she tries to look for patterns for her language (Rubin 1975). This strategy is not her absolute and formal way that she uses, but it may occur when she uses her language. She may stop in middle of her talk or even a sentence, for example, and ask herself whether she is using the correct word or tense or not. In preparation for her classroom presentation, she said that she prepared alot before her show in class. She told that she could practice her speaking ability by talking to herself or speaking in front of the mirror or carrying imagery dialogues. To her belief, doing the language is not necessarily joining a conversation club or community first. Even with herself alone, she still can practice the language. Compared to other learners, she is quite and aware alot with her language. She focuses more on fluency and accuracy, and uses a variety of techniques to get her meaning across such as asking for help, using synonyms, and making gestures.

Adip. He started to learn English when he was at junior high school but he initiated to join a debate club when he was at senior high school. Joining the club, he was trained to think critically, to be a good public speaker, to solve some cases that become the issue of the day, and to ensure people that the argument is true based on the logics. After graduating from the high school, he decided to continue his study at UIN Mataram with the reason that the university is public university with sincerity to develop Islamic values. In fact, he could make great achievement by having good score in ESP program and achieved high TOEFL.

Dealing with his success in learning English, he claims that he is actually a guesser. If he listens to and/or reads something in English and comes across a word that he is not familiar with, he will take risk to guess it, using contextual or structural clues, or by looking for cognates. Only if that word is used on and on, and he still

has no idea, he will finally use a dictionary. Guessing activity is in line with what Rubin stated that the successful language learners are good guessers (Rubin, 1975), and this is clearly an important part of his learning process for learning the foreign language.

Azzohrawani. She is the best TOEFL score (510) achiever in Islamic Elementary School Teacher Science (PGMI) department. She found herself enjoying learning English since she liked watching western movie in her junior high school time. She liked to listen and grab what words were used and what the meaning are. Lately, when she was watching drama korea, she searched for korean drama with English subtitle. She thinks that if she does that she would get double benefits, they are: the joy of Korean drama story and her new words understanding from the drama English subtitle. Her way to put difficult thing to remember, like English grammar, in enjoying subtitle of Korean drama, makes her easier to comprehend the meaning of sentence or utterance. Hence, it influence her achievement in doing TOEFL test that consist of listening, reading, and structure. In listening, she has been accustomed to listen to English expressions and information from movies. Doing the structure, she is being used to look at the correct sentence pattern in the subtitle and through what she is listening. Then, she is accustomed to comprehend meaning of word, utterance, and sentence through context in movie and it is useful to doreading test.

Lesna. She is also an English debater but there are some interesting things that can be learnt from her. Memorizing is his favorite method to learn how words which finally sheuses in a productive language. Although she enjoyed memorizing, she said that she is actually having short term memory or poor in memorizing things. It is not easy for her to memorize grammar and list of difficult words. She uses mnemonic techniques to memorize words, such as: thinking of cognates of words that sound similar or words that make him remember of something, and relating words with images in her head. She may also create auditory images, or write the words down and memorize the words. She, moreover, likes doing fun activities like playing game and listening to English songs in her leisure time. She

does not think much about grammar and she is not worried of making errors. She speaks very loudly and enthusiastically. She always feels proud when she can speak English with his lecturers and friends. In an English class, she also seems to be active. Joining a debate club, she built his great confidence. She stated that in a debate, her priority is getting the meaning across, not worrying about producing mistakes even appearing foolish.

Rosdayana. She is student that contribute a lot in ESP class performance. She is open and easy going student that makes her feeling ease to apply her English competence as practice. When she is in class, she often used her time to speak with friends and teacher in English. She thought that her only chance to practice her English was only in her class because she stayed in her house that nobody speak in English. On the other hand, to improve her vocabulary mastery, she always brings small notebook to write new words that she learn at the day. The note is very important to recall words that were forgotten.

Rosda thinks why she has those learning personalities is because she likes English. Her interest in English also makes her active in English school organization and others.

Ika. Ika is good in public speaking which was proven by her achievements when she was in high school as the second winner of English speech contest and second winner of story telling. The interesting thing is she is now thinking that she is not really good English speaker which shows that she has higher expectation toward her English competence level. She thinks that learning grammar and memorizing that helped her successfully winning the competition are still not enough to boost her English. She said that her environment where she stays with sisters who are great willingness to speak in English and build language environment in her house is beneficial for her English improvement. She also believes that being force to use the language in social communication just like in her house will be essential strategy to gain better English. Also, talking in her own house will reduce shy than using English in un familiar environment or having friendly environment is really supporting the English competence improvement.

Safratul. Safratul has been living in islamic boarding school since when she was in junior high school. Fortunately, she came into bilingual islamic boarding school which insist all students to speak in both Arabic and English. Consequently, her English competence increased significantly until one of her achievement was as the third winner in English Quiz Contest among high schools in her city.

Based on her experience, anxiety is the biggest factor that hinders students' English competence improvement. Just like her, before, using English in public area was something scary and full of burden. She found her confident was empty because of many fears in her mind. Also when she became student in islamic boarding school for the early time, she decided to keep silent and avoid conversation with friends rather than breaking the ice to speak in English. She thought her grammar was bad, she was not sure how to pronounce words, etc. Then, because of her need to communicate in English day, it made her bravery breaks the great ice to use English. Happily, she found that all friends did not care about her grammar and she found that the interlocutor always showing positive response to her language. So, she finally saw English was easy.

To upgrade her English learning, she decided to memorize five new words in English each day and use them in sentence which she associates with her daily activities or things she finds in her surrounding. Also, she practices alot to speak by herself anytime she has leisure time. She tries to retell what she has experienced in a day until now. Moreover, her involving in ESP program in PGMI UIN Mataram contributed alot to her improvement.

Nihayatuzzahra. She has successfully acquired the TOEFL score target that has been established by the university, that should pass 450 score, only in a semester learning through ESP program conducted by UIN Mataram. On the other hand, her ESP GPA is 4.00 (Excellent level) which means that she has shown an image of successful English as foreign language learner. Based on her questionnaire, she told that her success was not only because of talent. But, her routine to use English in daily activities contributes alot. Also, her motivation to find speaking partner

improves her confidence. Her last comment is putting aside shy is very important for English learner. During the English class performance, she always creates motivating feeling on herself by thinking that she is good in English.

Learning Strategies

Language learners can learn effective strategies in learning a foreign language. Those who apply and use some learning strategies are more likely to continue their language learning after the class has been completed and thus maintaining their foreign language skills than learners who have no grounding in strategies (Oxford, 1990). There are some significant research strategies proving that learning strategies foreshadow second language acquisitions (SLA). Rubin (1975) found that learner strategies did enhance SLA. Naiman (cited by Shekhan, 2003) revealed that successful English language learners attribute their language learning success to the use of five general strategies: realization of language as a system, an active learning approach, monitoring progress, realization of language as a means of communication, and handling of effective demands.

It is true when students learn a language they cannot get their success since they do not know what and how to get the language. Training in learning strategies help learners become aware of strategies they use and wide variety of available strategies (Oxford, 1990). In Indonesia, some studies of learning strategies were done to show the important role of learning strategies in determining the students' success in learning a target language. Sadtono (1995) mentioned that learners do not realize that learning foreign language needs knowledge of techniques of assimilating new habits, perseverance, self-evaluation, a great deal of practice, that the whole business take along time, and discipline. Similarly, Mistar (2001) stated that motivational factors affect the learners' use of learning strategies more significantly than personality traits and language aptitude.

Oxford (1990) noticed the goal of language learning strategies is directed towards the development of communicative competence. Oxford divided the language learning strategies into two main classes, direct and indirect, which are

further subdivided into six groups. Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of language learning strategies is shown in table I.

Table I. Oxford Taxonomy of Language Learning Strategies.

Direct Strategies		Indirect Strategies	
I	Applying images and sounds Memory Creating mental linkage Reviewing well Employing action	I	Centering your learning Arranging and planning your learning Metacognitive Strategies Evaluating your learning
II	Practicing Cognitive Receiving and sending messages strategies Analyzing and reasoning Creating structure for input and output	II	Lowering your anxiety Affective Strategies Taking your emotional temperature Encouraging yourself
III	Guessing intelligently Compensation Strategies Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing	III	Cooperating with others Social strategies Empathizing with others Asking questions

It can be seen that many of the recent works in language learning strategy area has been underpinned by a broad concept of language learning strategies that go beyond cognitive processes to include social and communicative strategies. The present study found that the successful language learners used learning strategies as described in Table 2:

Table 2. Learning Strategies Used

Types of Learning Strategies	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Direct Strategies		
Memory	10	17.5
Cognitive	10	17.5
Compensation	10	17.5
Indirect Strategies		
Metacognitive	7	12.5
Affective	10	17.5
Social	10	17.5
Total	57	100

From table 2, it can be inferred that the learners employed both direct and indirect learning strategies. It means that they needed all strategies to uphold their

learning experience. The direct strategies had been utilized by all of the learners while there were only three learners who did not use the indirect strategies of metacognitive. The direct strategies directly help learners to acquire the foreign language. In memory strategy, they did some actions like creating mental image by grouping and associating, placing words into a context, using keywords to indicate something, using sound, doing semantic mapping, and employing action by doing physical responses. Then, in cognitive strategies the learners mentioned several things they always did, such as analyzing expressions and contrastive concept across languages, translating, taking notes, summarizing, repeating, practicing naturally, getting an idea quickly, and practicing formally with sounds and writing system. Next, the learners mentioned some activities such as guessing, using synonyms, and getting helps in compensation strategies.

Seen from the indirect strategies, metacognitive strategies such as seeking practice opportunities, setting goals and objectives, and focusing on listening were done. Then, lowering anxiety and taking the learners' emotional temperature were done in affective strategies. Lastly, to convey the social strategies, the learners mentioned that they always cooperated with proficient users of the language and asked for clarification and verification.

As mentioned above, the learners have disclosed their stories of learning English and their activities to improve and maintain their English. Learning English is not simply done in the classroom and what students need to facilitate their language improvement is, among others, doing autonomous learning. Second language learners face more serious problems of independent learning. Thus, they need some strategies enabling them to get the success. Those learners realize that what they get in a formal study does not seem to support all the learning experiences; thus, they liked to undertake a formal study as well as doing some autonomous activities of their own choice. In this case, students in learning a foreign language need to know what autonomous learning is. Dickinson (1987) defined autonomous learning as a situation when the learner is responsible completely for all of the decisions related with his or her learning and the

implementation of those decisions. It is particularly useful as someone examine the concept in out of class self study context where there is no direct teachers' intervention and students freely make their choices about the materials to be learnt and used, when they want to study, and how the learning process, and of course how it will be assessed, then the use of autonomous language learning (ALL) to the highest degree.

With the establishment of that concept, how to boost the learners' autonomy becomes a central attention. Successful language learners tend to be independent and autonomous in doing a self study. They study by reading text books or English articles, listening to English songs, listening to news programs, watching talk show programs or western movies, and translating papers and song lyrics, and seeking an opportunity to practice independently (for example, by joining English conversation clubs, debate clubs, and interactive radio program in English; speaking and making contact with native speakers and English teachers; and being an English debate coach). The language learners mentioned above try to get language exposures from any sources. When someone is exposed to the language, he or she can get language input to be internalized.

Seen from other strong aspects, motivation and attitude have also been considered as strong factors influencing the success of learning a language, two different clusters of attitude are divided by Gardner and Lambert (1972, cited by Brown, 2000) into basic types of motivation. They are instrumental and integrative. The instrumental is acquiring a language as a means for attaining instrumental goals: furthering a career, reading technical materials, and so forth. The integrative side, on the other hand, describes learners who study a language since they wish to integrate themselves into the culture of second language group and become involved in a social interchange in that group. Studies of motivation in language learning indicate that extrinsically motivated behaviors (instrumental motivation) are those actions carried out to achieve some instrumental purposes. Integrative motivation appears only when learners have a greater interest in the cultural and

intellectual values related to the target language and new stimuli occur during the process of learning and using the particular language.

Learners of a foreign language can be more successful if they feel that they need to learn the foreign language. It means that they are well-motivated. They have strong willingness to improve and maintain their language competence by doing a series of activities; however, it is possible for learners to get frustration in learning a language. They can feel demotivated when they realize that their English will never reach the level of native of the language. Some learners do not feel easy with error correction. They dislike people correcting things that they have already known, but appreciate it as something that they do not know. They are hard on themselves, especially when they repeat similar mistake, which is against with popular research suggesting that good language learner employs positive self-talk to cope his or her anxiety (Gardner and Smythe, 1981). It is normal and natural for feeling frustrated or anxious at sometimes, but the important thing is how someone deals with such feelings which of course influence their motivation.

Learners should understand that it is impossible to use the foreign language perfectly all the time and the existence of errors is inevitable. In fact, this frustration may also be an advantage to them, as it seems to encourage them to keep learning. They have the urgency to learn the language, such as preparing for their job, and relating to the people around them, to seek out every possibility to practice.

We can see that they are learners with high aspirations and a strong need for achievement. They also display most of the motivational characteristics that Gardner and Smythe (1981) considered to be important to learn a language well. This includes willingness for communication, being emphatic with the people and target culture, and having outgoing attitude and a tolerant towards the foreign language. They do not, however, use positive self-talk to contrast anxiety.

When we take a look at another point about what the learners do improving their language, we can also see that learners do copy the language accents in

English. Since learning is different with acquisition, it is critical that Moulton (1966) stated that most people have the skill to mimic foreign sounds, but only those with a low inhibition will actually get results.

Most of learners above are aware of their dominant sensory style that is visual, for learning in general, but they will use both visual and auditory for learning a language. They sometimes need to see the letters of words which are written down before they can memorize them. They often memorize by creating brain imagery and have problems remembering words from verbal instructions.

Seen from the personality behavior, those language learners display many characteristics of successful language learners as being described by the researcher. They are extrovert and having excellent self-confident; they also said that they learnt language easily. They are assertive learners in most of the situation and condition, and can be either cautious or spontaneous. They can be described as creative, stubborn, strong-willed, opinionated, intellectual, passionate, energized, and interested,. They are talkative and out-going, attracted with foreign cultures and brave to make mistakes in using a foreign language as learning foreign language experience.

Seen from their language grade and language achievements, those language learners above can be categorized as intelligent people. As proposed earlier, their high intellectual ability may be partly due to their persistence. This ability seems to help them to keep developing their foreign language abilities.

Learning strategies in fact are the issues of language learning which nowadays seem to be important to know and to do by language learners. Some strategies will be useful to some learners more than others, even being given identical learning situations. Different goals of learning also indicate different choices of strategies. The use of strategies depends on why the learners wish to maintain the foreign language – to get a better job, to be an excellent debater, to be able to read technical materials, or to pass a language test.

Since language uses are various, and because each particular strategy may be useful for maintaining several different language users, it is hard to indicate the best one the learners can use. Only the individual learner can decide this. Learners will know whether a particular strategy is appropriate for them or not but they may often have to learn specific strategies in the first place.

Conclusion

From the above discussion we can conclude that the successful language learners are overall, taking responsibility for their learning, self-initiating and well motivated, and initiating learning opportunities for themselves. From the profiles, we can learn that what they do outside the classroom has a greater portion in improving their language competence. It is important to note that they actively involve themselves in classrooms activities and some other activities outside the classroom which are related to their interest and hobbies. Their reason is basically that they love and enjoy doing such activities. In short, the English language learners do a lot of independent learning activities which suit their interest. They used direct and indirect learning strategies though they seemed not really realizing in using the strategies before. However, they believed that those strategies are helpful for boosting and maintaining their language. From the six learning strategies employed by those learners, namely, memorizing strategy, affective strategy and social strategy, cognitive strategy, compensation strategy, metacognitive strategy, it seems that those belonging to direct strategies are all used since the strategies help students directly.

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