



**THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE STUDENTS' LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND THEIR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY**

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**Abstract**

This research aimed at finding out the degree of the correlation between students' learning strategies and their English Proficiency. It was based on the rationale that students still had problems with their English proficiency and did not know what to do to improve it. On the other hand, there are some successful language learning strategies that can be applied based on some experts to help them. To find out whether there was positive correlation between students' language learning strategies, data were collected. To collect the data about language learning strategies, a questionnaire was used which had been tried out to know its validity and reliability. To find out the students English proficiency, TOEFL was used. To test the hypothesis, the results of questionnaire and TOFL were correlated by using Pearson Product Moment. The hypothesis was tested by comparing  $r$  computed with the Pearson table on the level of significance 0.05. The result of  $r$  computed was 0.523, and the critical value was between 0.325 and 0.304 with the degree of freedom 37 ( $n-2$ ). It was found that the value of  $r$  computed was higher than the Pearson table  $r$  value. It can be concluded that there was a positive correlation between students' language learning strategies and their English proficiency. In other words, the research hypothesis was accepted.

**Keywords:** Correlation; Language Learning Strategies; English Proficiency

**I. Introduction**

English is one of the compulsory subjects taught at junior high schools,

senior high schools, and colleges or universities. If a student graduates from a senior high school, it means that he/she has

learned English for six years. In such a long time, it is expected that he/she can use English for various purposes. Unfortunately, not many students are successful in learning English, which can be known from their English proficiency. In other words, some learners are successful while others are not.

In fact, learning a language involves some aspects and strategies. Students' achievement in learning will be influenced by some factors such as teachers, learners, materials, curriculum and approaches/methods of teaching. Savignon (1983) states that only a learner can do learning. From this idea, it is clear that the learner is the main aspect of learning especially learning English. Thus, if there is no learner, there is no learning process.

From the explanation above, it can be known how important the role of students in learning process is. Their success in learning English depends much on themselves. As Rubin and Thompson (1982:3) propose, many learning learners tend to blame teachers, circumstances, and teaching materials for their lack of success while the most important reasons for their success or failure can ultimately be found in themselves. Moreover, some learners

approach their language learning tasks in more successful ways than others. The failing learners sometimes do not know that they obtain the approaches that do not promote success, but they blame their teachers and curriculum. Finally, it can be concluded that every learner may have his/her own learning strategies to learn English.

Based on the explanation above, students' proficiency in English depends on much on themselves. One of them is the way he/she approaches the language. Therefore, the writer was interested in finding out whether there was a positive correlation between students' language learning strategies and their English proficiency.

## **II. Review of Related Literature**

### **2.1 Language Learning Strategy**

A number of definitions of learning strategy have been given by some experts. First, Oxford (1990:18) states that language learning strategies are specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language. It can be said that

strategies are tools that direct students' involvement which is necessary for their communicative ability. Learning strategies have been described (Wenden and Rubin, 1987) as "any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information" (p.19). it was argued (Richards, Platt and Platt, 1992) that "learning strategies are intentional behavior and thoughts that learners make use of during learning in order to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information" (p.209). Learning strategies were also illustrated (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) as "special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (p. 1). Hence, learning strategies were seen as special ways of processing information that improve comprehension, learning, or retention of the information.

Moreover, in line with Oxford, Wenden (1991) and Willing (1988) claim that language learning strategies are mental steps or operations that learners use to learn a new language and to regulate efforts to do so. From those definitions, it can be concluded that learning strategies are ways

used by language students to help them improve their proficiency in English.

### **2.1.1 Successful Language Learners' Strategies**

Good learners are the learners who are successful in their language learning or the can be said successful language learners. Viera (1991) states that a good language learner is one who knows both the language and how best to learn it. From this statement, it is known that the good language learner knows the best strategies of learning a language.

Some experts have stated some strategies of successful language learners. First, Rubin (1975) lists seven strategies as follows:

- a. The good language learner is a willing and accurate guesser.
- b. The good language learner has the strong drive to communicate or to learn from a communication.
- c. The good language learner is often not inhibited.
- d. The good language learner is constantly looking for pattern in the language.
- e. The good language learner monitors his own speech and the speech of others.

- f. The good language learner attends to meaning.

Moreover, Stern (1980:62) describes ten strategies for language learning. They are as followings.

- a. A personal learning style or positive learning strategies
- b. An active approach to the learning task
- c. A tolerant and out going approach to the target language and empathy with its speakers
- d. Technical know-how to tackle a language
- e. Strategies of experimentation and planning the object of developing the language into an ordered system, and revising the system progressively.
- f. Constantly searching for meaning
- g. Willingness to practice
- h. Willingness to use the language in the real communication
- i. Self-monitoring and critical sensitivity to language use
- j. Developing the second language more and more as reference system and learning to think of it

Stern's strategies are quite similar to Rubin's. Both of them agree that the successful language learners are learners who have willingness to communicate and practice, search for meaning while communicating, not form, and monitor his own and others' language.

In addition, Willing (1988:92) proposes fifteen strategies of successful language learners.

- a. Valuing: the good language learner learns the culture, the language and its speaker.
- b. Panning: The good language learner thinks about his language and how best to fulfill them.
- c. Evaluating: the good language learner thinks about how well he is learning the language and what could be done to improve the learning process.
- d. Monitoring: the good language learner monitors all facts of his and others' language.
- e. Internalizing: the good language learner thinks what is being learnt and incorporates it into developing system.
- f. Hypothesizing: the good language learner considers

- possible manifestation of the language.
- g. Rehearsing: the good language learner rehearses her speech when preparing for interchange.
  - h. Communicating: the good language learner looks for opportunities to communicate.
  - i. Persisting: the good language learner tries again, if necessary in other ways, when there has been communication breakdown.
  - j. Risk-taking: the good language learner is willing to make mistakes, or to appear foolish in order to communicate.
  - k. Practicing: the good language learner practices.
  - l. Inference: the good language learner is far-ranging and accurate guesser.
  - m. Attending to meaning: the good language learner searches for meaning.
  - n. Attending to form: the good language learner pays attention to the pattern in the language that expresses meaning.

- o. Absorbing: the good language learner immerse him/herself in the language.

Willing adds some more strategies to Rubin's and Stern's lists. He has more complete strategies than the two experts previously. For example, the good language learner is not afraid to make mistakes even though he/she will look foolish in communication that is by taking risk. Finally, it can be concluded that the successful language learner is a creative learner because he/she can apply appropriate strategies that work for him/herself based his/her learning style.

### **2.1.2 Unsuccessful Language learner Strategies**

The unsuccessful language learners have been defined in different ways of different experts. First, Reiss (1983) states that the unsuccessful language learners are the learners who do not seem to be aware of, or have not yet found a particular learning style. Second, Wenden (1985) in Vann and Abraham (1990) defines the unsuccessful language learners as inactive learners who do not have an appropriate repertoire of learning strategies. It can be summarized that unsuccessful language learners are learners who do have

appropriate language learning strategies that are based on their learning styles.

However, Vann and Abraham (1990:183) said that unsuccessful language learners are necessarily inactive or lacking in their repertoire of strategies. They discovered in their research that some unsuccessful learners used relatively many strategies, and more important, the unsuccessful learners used many of the same strategies as the successful learners, but their strategies do not promote success.

This case shows us that the unsuccessful language learners or are sometimes called poor learners, also have their own strategies. They use their strategies, but they still fail in obtaining a good result. Related to this, Vann and Abraham (1990) describe two factors that make learners fail even though they have the same strategies as the successful learners. These factors are as follows. First, they fail to apply strategies appropriately. Second, they apply no systematic set of strategies.

Moreover, Vann and Abraham (1990) add that there are other characteristics of unsuccessful language learners. The unsuccessful language learners spend little time on tasks, use relatively few strategies, and have a smaller range of strategies. It

can be concluded that unsuccessful language learners are learners who have strategies that successful ones apply but they are not as diligent and serious as the successful ones.

## **2.2 English Proficiency**

English proficiency can be said as someone's ability in using English with certain level in comprehension and production. First, Oller and Damico (1991) succinctly state that the nature and specification of the elements of language proficiency have not been determined and there continues to be debate among academicians and practitioners about the definition.

Then, The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (1992, p. 7) defines English language proficiency in this way. A fully English proficient student is able to use English to ask questions, to understand teachers, and reading materials, to test ideas, and to challenge what is being asked in the classroom. There are four language skills contributing to proficiency as follows:

- a. *Reading* - the ability to comprehend and interpret text at the age and grade-appropriate level.

- b. *Listening* - the ability to understand the language of the teacher and instruction, comprehend and extract information, and follow the instructional discourse through which teachers provide information.
- c. *Writing* - the ability to produce written text with content and format fulfilling classroom assignments at the age and grade-appropriate level.
- d. *Speaking* - the ability to use oral language appropriately and effectively in learning activities (such as peer tutoring, collaborative learning activities, and question/answer sessions) within the classroom and in social interactions within the school.

Moreover, Valdés and Figueroa (1994) state,

...what it means to know a language goes beyond simplistic views of good pronunciation, "correct" grammar, and even mastery of rules of politeness. Knowing a language and knowing how to use a language involves a mastery and control of a large number of interdependent components and elements that interact with one another and that

are affected by the nature of the situation in which communication takes place. (p. 34)

It can be concluded that language proficiency is someone's ability in understanding and using a language which involves skills and language aspects or components which are related and influenced by the context the communication.

### **2.3 Language Learning Strategies and English Proficiency**

In the previous sections, learning strategies have been reviewed. This is considered to be the factor influencing English proficiency. As Bialystock (1978) defines, learning strategies are optimal means for exploiting available information to improve competence in a second language. It can be said that the students' learning strategies will determine their success in learning English. In other words, the students who apply good strategies in learning English will succeed and have good English proficiency, but those who do not have good strategies will fail and have poor English proficiency.

Research findings in the area of second language acquisition have repeatedly verified the significant role that

learners can play in the process of language learning. The research has also gone through deliberate changes from teachers and teaching methods towards learners and learning techniques to show its correspondence with these fundamental moves during the past decade (Chamot, 2005; Lee, 2003; Reiss, 1985). While learners received more attention and a more prominent place in research studies on second language learning, so did the engaged strategies and techniques they employed to learn the language and overcome its barriers. From among these techniques, language learning strategies have received a particular attention since the late 1970s (Zare, 2010; Brown, 2007; Hong-Nam and Leavell, 2007; Baker and Boonkit, 2004; Oxford, 2003).

Moreover, O'Malley *et al.*, (1985) clearly highlighted the importance of learning strategies by defining them as “any set of operations or steps used by a learner that will facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval or use of information” (p.23). In a study (O'Malley *et al.*, 1985), it has been found that successful language learners have reported to use more and wider range of learning strategies than less-successful students. It can be concluded that student's

language learning strategies are contributed to their proficiency.

### **III. Methods of the Research**

This research was a correlation study, studying the correlation between two variables. The first variable was the students' learning strategies and the second variable was the students' English proficiency. The population of the research was the fourth year STBA Prayoga students. The sample was total sampling where all students of the fourth year became the samples because the number of them were only 39.

The students' learning strategies were collected by using a questionnaire. The items were developed based on Willing's (1988) successful language learners' strategies. The items of the questionnaire were valuing, planning, evaluating, internalizing, monitoring, hypothesizing, rehearsing, communicating, persisting, practicing, risk-taking, inferring, attending to meaning. Attending to form, and absorbing. The second data was the students' English proficiency. To measure the students' English proficiency, TOEFL was used which is a standardized test, so it was valid and reliable.



**Table 1 The Grids of Questionnaire Items**

No.	Indicator	Description	Number of Item	Item
1	Valuing	- Valuing culture	1	1
		- Valuing language	1	2
		- Valuing its speaker		3
2	Planning	- Schedule	1	4
		- Target	1	5
		- Language goal	1	6
3	Evaluating	- Evaluating their own achievement	1	7
		- Finding their own difficulties	1	8
		- Trying to look for solutions for improvement	1	9
4	Internalizing	- Analyzing what's being learnt	1	10
		- Making conclusion	1	11
5	Monitoring	- Monitoring their own language	1	12
		- Monitoring other's language	1	13
6	Hypothesizing	- Making hypothesis from what's being learnt	1	14
		- Testing the hypothesis		
		- Making some modifications	1 1	15 16
7	Rehearsing	- Rehearsing what they have learnt	1	17
		- Rehearsing what they will perform	1	18
8	Communicating	- Making their own opportunities	1	19
		- Using opportunities as well as possible	1	20
9	Persisting	- Trying to communicate again if they have failed	1	21
		- Trying to look for another way to communicate	1	22

10	Practicing	- Practicing the language Inside the class	1	23
		- Practicing the language outside the class	1	24
11	Risk-taking	- Having willingness to make mistakes	1	25
		- Not being afraid to make mistakes	1	26
12	Inferring	- Inferring the meaning of the language	1	27
13	Attending to meaning	- Searching for meaning	1	28
14	Attending to form	- Paying attention to the pattern that expresses meaning	1	29
15	Absorbing	- Absorbing what is being learnt	1	30

In order to find out the relationship between the students' learning strategies and their English proficiency, Pearson Product Moment was used.

$$r_{xy} = \frac{n \sum xy - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{\{n \sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2\} \{n \sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2\}}}$$

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$r_{xy}$  = the coefficient correlation

$\sum x$  = sum of the students' learning strategies

$\sum y$  = sum of the students' English proficiency

$\sum x^2$  = sum of squared students' learning strategies

$\sum y^2$  = sum of squared students' English proficiency

$n$  = the number of students

#### IV. Findings

To find out the correlation between the students' learning strategies and their English proficiency, statistical analysis was applied.

From the analytical procedure, the value of

the variables shown in the following table was used.

**Table 2 Summary of Statistical Analysis**

N	x	Y	x <sup>2</sup>	y <sup>2</sup>	xy	r	$\alpha = .05$
39	4364	16067	536568	6652347	1818769	0.523	0.325

The table shows that the correlation coefficient is statistically significant with the critical value between 0.325 and 0.304 at the level of confidence ( $\alpha$ )0.05 with the degree of freedom 37.

The hypothesis was tested by comparing  $r$  computed with the Pearson table  $r$  on the level of significance 0.05. The result of  $r$  computed was 0.523, and the critical value was between 0.325 and 0.304 with the degree of freedom 37 ( $n-2$ ). It was found that the value of  $r$  computed was higher than the Pearson  $r$  table  $r$  value. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

The result of this study supports the research hypothesis that the correlation between the students' learning strategies and their English proficiency is significant. The increase of the students scores in learning

strategies tends to be followed by the increase of their scores in English proficiency. On other hand, the decrease of their scores in learning strategies tends to be followed by the decrease of their scores in English proficiency

## V. Conclusion

Related to the findings above, it can be concluded that there is a positive correlation between the students' learning strategies (variable  $x$ ) and their English proficiency (variable  $y$ ). This implies that the students' language learning strategies becomes the important factor which influences the students' English proficiency. In other words, the students' language learning strategies contribute to their English proficiency. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that

English teachers should consider the teaching of language learning strategies in order the students will apply successful strategies that are appropriate to their learning styles and that improve their proficiency in English.

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