

An Analysis of Learning Styles and Learning Strategies Used by a Successful Language Learner

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Abstract

This study aimed to describe major learning styles and learning strategies used by a research subject from four years of a college student of English Education Study Program. It was a qualitative study and conducted through a case study design. The subject was a successful four years college student. The data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and documents. Two questionnaires were administered, Perceptual Learning Style Preferences Questionnaire (PLSPQ) to determine the student learning style preferences, whereas, Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) to determine the student learning strategies. A semi-structured interview was applied to gain the primary data, while, the document was provided to support it. The results revealed that the successful language learner performed two major learning styles proposed by Reid (1984), i.e. visual, in which the subject learns best by reading and taking notes; and the individual, in which the subject learns better individually. Subsequently, the subject uses two major learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1990). The first learning strategy is the cognitive strategy includes practicing along with receiving and sending messages. The second strategy is the compensation strategy includes guessing intelligently in listening and reading and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing.

Keywords: learning styles, learning strategies, successful language learner.

INTRODUCTION

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four main skills of English as an international language and they are integrated. These skills must be studied by language learners because English is used as a lingua franca to convey information and knowledge

in both written and spoken during the teaching and the learning process by English lecturers in the English Education Study Program. Therefore, to carry out studies properly, language learners must master all English skills. The chosen learning style is very important for language learners to master all English skills mentioned above. Brown (2000) cited in Gilakjani (2012, p. 105) defines learning styles as “the manner in which individuals perceive and process information in learning situations.” He argues that learning style preference is one aspect of learning styles, refers to the choice of one learning situation or condition over another. Students learn in different ways from each other. They often choose to use what has become known as a preferred learning style. Therefore, every language learner should be aware of their learning style preferences to create a good atmosphere in learning English.

Awareness of preferred learning styles is very important because it has impacts on language learners' achievement in acquiring English. Honey and Mumford in Pritchard (2009, p. 42) says that an inability or reluctance to adopt any particular style has the potential to hamper language learners' ability to learn effectively. For that reason, language learners must be familiar with the existence of learning styles within themselves that encourage them to learn effectively.

In addition to learning styles, learning strategies are also important to be investigated by language learners. Learning strategies are steps taken by learners to improve their learning process. According to Oxford in Shi (2017), learning strategies as the often steps of behaviors used by language learners to enhance the acquisition, storage, retention, recall, and use of new information (p. 24). As also mentioned by Oxford (1990), strategies can make it easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to a new situation (p. 8). Because of that, being aware of learning strategies will help language learners to learn English better.

The writers have built up information from four years of college students of English Education Study Program in the academic year of 2018/2019 and found that most of them were not conscious of their learning style preferences as well as the best learning strategies used to learn English. They found English difficult, hence, they were yet satisfied with their English ability. This condition, in contrast, did not happen to a certain student who became the participant of this research. This student was seen very skillful in English by most of her peers in the class. She actively gave some input when her peers faced difficulties in absorbing the knowledge from the lectures. Her outstanding idea during the class discussion was well delivered both spoken and written. She also answered all tasks given by the lecture effortlessly. For those reasons, this student was not surprised to have exceptional English language achievements, for example, she got 3.62 for the average grade (GPA); 660 for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and she won an academic competition in the English Language as a Foreign Language Test (TOEFL) in Pontianak, became one of the finalists of the 365 Network Telling Story in Jakarta, and became the winner of the 2018 Spelling Bee Competition in Pontianak. Therefore, this research aimed to investigate and find out the most frequently learning styles and the learning strategies used by a successful language learner in the language learning process.

METHODS

This study focused on analyzing a student's learning style preferences and students' learning strategies in English. This study used a case study as the research design because this method helped the writers to dig deeper information about certain phenomena. This

concept was approved by Yin in Woodside (2010, p. 1) "case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". Moreover, a broader definition proposed by Woodside who defines "case study research is an inquiry that focuses on describing, understanding, predicting, and/or controlling the individual (i.e., process, animal, person, household, organization, group, industry, culture, or nationality)." Meanwhile, Creswell (2012, p. 465) claims that "a case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g., activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection." In short, a case study is an empirical study in deep exploration.

Research Participant

The participant is the basis of a case. It can be an individual or group of people. Therefore, purposive sampling was used to determine the participant. There were three requirements, first, grade point average (GPA) 3.5 and/or above; second, Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) 600 and/or above; third, good English achievements. The population was 100 students, consisting of 27 male students and 73 female students taken from four years of English Education Study Program. Finally, the participant was a successful language learner whose well competence in English from four years college student in academic year 2018/2019 of English Education Study Program, Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Tanjungpura University.

Data Collection

A questionnaire, interview, and document were utilized as the instruments of data collection. First, the writers administered Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (LSPQ), a questionnaire developed by Reid in 1984 particularly for foreign language learners to the successful language learner to gain fundamental data especially her learning style preference. This questionnaire consists of thirty items that represent six learning style preferences, namely Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Tactile, Group, and Individual. Five items for each learning style category were arranged randomly. Items 6,10,12,24,29 are Visual, items 1,7,9,17,20 are Auditory, items 2,8,15,19,26 are Kinesthetic, items 11,14,16,22,25 are Tactile, items 3,4,5,21,23 are Group, and items 13,18,27,28,30 are individual.

Second, the writers handed the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), developed by Oxford (1989), a questionnaire designed to find out language learner's learning strategies. Strategy Inventory for Language Learning consists of fifty items and represents two categories of learning strategies both Direct and Indirect strategies. Direct strategies include Memory strategies, Cognitive strategies, and Compensation strategies, otherwise, indirect strategies include Metacognitive strategies, Affective strategies, and Social strategies. Every learning strategy has a different number of items. Memory strategies represented by items 1-9, Cognitive strategies represented by items 10-23, Compensation strategies represented by items 24-29, Metacognitive strategies represented by items 30-38, Affective strategies represented by items 39-44, and Social strategies represented by items 45-50. Finally, the writers interviewed to enrich the data and to cover major areas of interest that were not covered yet by the questionnaires, such as biographical data, general opinion about language learning, as well as strategies used to learn reading, writing, listening and speaking. A semi-structured interview where predetermined questions provided was used to guide the interview, especially to apply open-ended questions. In addition to the interview, document-study was used to get

supporting and realistic data of the interview result. Documents in this research, for example, learner's document; notes, certificates of achievements, and other important information were used to support the data of the interview.

Data Analysis

The writers analyzed the result of each questionnaire by checking the number of each item and calculated accordingly based on the formula provided. To analyze the data obtained through the first questionnaire, the writers grouped every question into six big groups of learning styles accordingly since the questions were not well structured. After that, they were calculated and the highest number of average became the representative of the most dominant learning style preferences performed by the language learner.

The data obtained through the second questionnaire were analyzed by calculating each number in each item or question according to the formula since the questions were well organized and the highest average of learning strategies became the representative of major learning strategies used by the successful language learner. Meanwhile, the data obtained through the interview was analyzed by transcribing the voice recording during the interview. Then, it was analyzed to categorize them appropriately between learning styles and learning strategies. Some relevant quotations were chosen and put in the finding session.

FINDINGS

The questions were completely answered by collecting data through multiple instruments, a questionnaire, an interview, and documents. The first research question was "What are the learning styles employed by a successful language learner of English Education Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Tanjungpura University in academic year 2018/2019 in learning English?" was answered by using a questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions focusing on the major learning style preferences performed by the participant. Hence, language learning styles proposed by Reid (1984) was chosen as the interview guideline. The second question was "What are the learning strategies used by a successful language learner of English Education Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Tanjungpura University in academic year 2018/2019 in learning English?" was answered by using a questionnaire and semi-structured interview questions focusing on the most frequent strategies used by the participant. Consequently, language learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1990) was taken as the guideline of the interview. The finding showed that the participant carried off two major learning style preferences, they were, Visual learning style and individual learning style.

1. Visual style

The successful language learner performed a visual learning style. She reported that she learned better by reading and writing basically. She took most of the information effectively by reading and writing, therefore, a verbal explanation was not well received because it slowed her learning down. This learner also enhanced her English capacity by jolted down the vocabulary that she found in the reading books, consequently, she had various English words.

2. Individual Style

The successful language learner defined that she preferably learned English alone. She was an autodidact learner who did not have any particular partner and a learner who could not concentrate much when studying among crowded people or a noisy place. Studying alone in a quiet situation was the most productive condition of hers because she could set her phase. For that reason, she started studying at 09.00 P.M and as a result, she could study English productively. Meanwhile, Cognitive strategies and Compensation strategies were the most frequent learning strategies performed by the participant.

3. Cognitive Strategies

Based on the result of the questionnaire, strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) showed that the successful language learner was aware of certain strategies in her learning process, one of them was cognitive strategies. This strategy was the most frequently used by the student. In connection to this, based on the interview conducted, this student specifically used two sets of cognitive strategies, they were Practicing and Receiving and Sending Message.

a. Practicing

Practicing as the first and the most important sets of cognitive strategies was implemented by the student. The result was equivalent to Cognitive Strategies proposed by Oxford (1990, p.69) who stated that practicing contained repeating, formally practicing with sounds and writing systems, recognizing and using formula/ patterns, recombining, and practicing naturalistically.

1). Repeating

Repeating might not at first sound strategy, particularly creative, important, or meaningful. However, it can be applied in highly innovative ways. The successful language learner was executed this strategy in her learning process. She improved her English competence through reading and writing. Even so, she gave much attention to reading books. However, the novel was one of the books that she likes to read as well as one of the activities that she usually did to gain new information. She revealed that from reading novels she got a lot of input, for example, finding new vocabulary and figuring out grammar patterns.

2). Formally Practicing with Sounds and Writing Systems

This strategy was used by the student in her learning process. She realized that being able to search for any information in English assisted her to develop her English ability. Therefore, she used many sources that could courage her to keep up with English. Not only reading, but the student also watched YouTube videos every day and the language was almost always English. The channels that she watched, for example, engVid, Unreported World, and Broadly. Mostly, the student learned about grammar stuff from eng Vid. Broadly and Unreported World was news in English. Those were three YouTube channels that the student likes most. The videos trained her listening and speaking skills but she was more comfortable when closed captioning was provided. The videos helped her notice how to pronounce words correctly since most of the time she encountered words from reading first. She usually imitated the native users of the language. She talked to herself loudly delivering her thought like a native English speaker as well as

communicated to her friends in English as often as possible. These activities were done regularly by the student to keep maintaining her English capacity.

3). Recognizing and Using Formulas and Patterns

Recognizing and using formulas and patterns is a strategy that allows students to improve comprehension and production of students. In this strategy, the student learned to recognize the formula of writing and finding grammar patterns from novels. After getting the formula and recognizing the grammar pattern, this student applied them in her writing. Since she read the novel substantially, ideas came forwards easily in her mind and she expressed them in writing, particularly short stories. The student said that, because she had a lot of ideas, the stories usually were unfinished. One of the stories that she wrote was *Undead Princess*. It was a story written by the student that initiated from reading the young adult novel at most.

4). Recombining

Constructing a meaningful sentence or longer expression in speaking or writing is one of the activities that the student usually does in daily life. Moreover, writing is one of the daily routines of the student. She usually writes her own story after reading books. She absorbed a lot of words, phrases, and expressions from reading and she used it in her writing. Recombining is a strategy that can be used in writing as well as in speaking, Oxford (1990, p.74). Accordingly, the student told that she usually constructed a meaningful sentence or longer expression for her own stories however it was constructed differently. This activity was vividly showed that she applied this strategy in her learning process.

5). Practicing Naturalistically

The practice was one of the ways in maintaining the English ability of the successful language learner, therefore, she used English in actual communication in everyday life. For example, she messages her friends and googles information by using English. Oftentimes, she found information and wrote a report in English. Besides, the student also communicated to her friend in English as often as possible. This activity was an example of realistic communication, therefore, most of the time, she used English in her everyday life.

b. Receiving and Sending Messages

Alike practicing, the second strategy, receiving and sending messages, was also used by the student. This set of strategies consisted of two strategies getting the idea quickly and using resources for receiving and sending messages.

1). Getting the Idea Quickly

Getting the Idea Quickly is used for listening and reading. It helps learners home in on exactly what they need or want to understand, Oxford (1990, p.80). The successful language learner employed this strategy in her learning process, especially reading. The student read articles and did comprehension of a passage. She like tasks very much. She used basic reading techniques for answering the comprehension question, the techniques were scanning and skimming. However, when she did not understand the words in the passage, she usually guesses the words from the context.

2). Using Resources for Receiving and Sending Message

Using resources to receive and send messages is a strategy that is considered important. As mentioned by Oxford, this strategy involves using resources to find out the meaning of what is heard or read in the new language (1990, p.81). Therefore, this strategy allows students to use the source of English knowledge well, therefore students may be well-supported by existing sources, like, dictionary, word lists, grammar books, and others. The successful language learner, whenever found new vocabularies in her reading books, she marked and jotted the words down in her gadget and applied them into writing. However, before using the words, she found out first the meaning of the words, since the vocabulary that she found mostly with high difficulty. Consequently, she used Merriam Webster and Dictionary.com to get the meaning of unfamiliar words.

4. Compensation Strategies

Based on the result of the questionnaire, strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) showed that the Compensation strategy was the most frequent strategy used by the student besides Cognitive strategy. In connection to this, based on the interview conducted, this student specifically used two sets of compensation strategies, they were Guessing Intelligently in Listening and Reading and Overcoming limitations in Speaking and Writing.

a. Guessing Intelligently in Listening and Reading

The successful language learner applied to guess intelligently in listening and reading in her learning process. This strategy was divided into two clustered, using linguistic clues and using other clues. The student used both of the strategies in the strategies in the learning process.

1). Using Linguistic Clues

This strategy allows language learners to understand materials that they heard in the new language and understand the meaning of written passages because they have to guess from useful linguistic clues, for example, suffixes, prefixes, and word order. The student revealed that she usually made a guess when she found unfamiliar words in the passages. She tried to relate among sentences in the passage, then she guessed from the context of the whole passages.

2). Using Other Clues

Using Other Clues is another clustered strategy from compensation strategy that allows learners to understand a new language from other clues, for example, in writing, the description of a situation, and in listening to the use of the title and soon. The student said that when she found an unfamiliar word and she does not know the meaning she tried to guess the meaning of the words from the situation being described by the writer in the written stories.

b. Overcoming limitations in Speaking and Writing

This strategy also helps the learner in improving speaking and writing. She considered speaking is more difficult than writing since she encountered English through reading. Therefore, to overcome speaking and have better writing, the learner used five out of eight clustered strategies in overcoming limitations in speaking and writing. The strategies are:

switching to the mother tongue, using mime or gesture, adjusting or approximating the message, coining words, and using a circumlocution or synonym.

1). Switching to the Mother Tongue

This strategy sometimes called "code-switching". It is used for speaking and involves using the mother tongue for expression without translating. Concerning this strategy, when the student faced a situation where she did not know the meaning of a word in English instead of overwhelming in the confusion, she tried to google the word and searched it in her mother tongue. By finding the word in her native language, it helped her to understand the meaning of the word.

2). Using Mime or Gesture

Concerning this strategy, the learner clarified that when she did not understand what someone was saying she would ask the person to repeat. However, if she still did not understand she would ask the speaker to make it simpler. On the other way around, if she could not deliver the idea or message that she wanted to deliver because the unfamiliar words, she always used gestures and coining words or synonyms to express it.

3). Adjusting or Approximating the Message

This strategy is making an idea simpler to be well understood. It allows the learner to omit some items of information to make the ideas simpler and less precise. This activity was usually done by a successful learner. She used to reduce the use of complex information and make it simpler for the information could be well received by the interlocutor in a conversation. This strategy helped her to communicate with people by using simple sentences.

4). Coining Words

Coining words is a strategy that allows learners to construct words during the conversation if they do not know the exact word, Oxford (1990, p.97). The student explained that she constructed new words during the conversation if she did not know the right words. She also usually used gestures to deliver her message during the conversation, otherwise, she used a word or phrase that has the same meaning if she can't think of English words.

5). Using a Circumlocution or Synonym

Using a Circumlocution or Synonym is a strategy that allows learners to use a synonym of a word that has the same meaning and using roundabout expression involving several words to describe a single concept. The learner usually used this technique when her peers in the class did not familiar with the words used by her. She used synonyms and describe her idea when most of her classmates get lost with the idea she was going to deliver.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, the successful language learner who was categorized as a successful language learner was not achieving the goals of learning immediately. There was certain self-awareness of situations and learning behaviors called style preferences. This learning style preferences helped her to find out good strategies in learning English. The students' learning style preferences were Visual style and Individual style. Besides, the student also had steps taken in learning English. The steps contained various activities.

The writers called the activities Cognitive strategies and Compensation strategies, where all activities are carried out to achieve the learning objectives. The results of this study echo previous studies conducted by Kusumahati (2015) and Chen (2009). They reported the significance of a positive correlation between students' learning styles and learning strategies. Chen (2009) investigated 390 Taiwanese English language learners and found that students with learning style preferences chose strategies reflecting their style preferences. In other words, learning styles and learning strategies were one of the factors that need to be considered to be studied further to support language learners in achieving their learning goals. Accordingly, learning styles preferences proposed by Reid (1984) and learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1990) were the best guidance to be utilized in gathering the data on researches because they were well classified and easy to be understood.

The finding showed that the major learning style preferences of the student were visual and individual. Those learning style preferences assisted the learner to adjust the way she learned English better. Therefore she did not face too many difficulties like other students in her batch. She found English easy and interesting to be learned. Besides, the learner also applied certain strategies, they were cognitive strategies and compensation strategies. She used two sets of Cognitive strategies, they were Practicing and Receiving and Sending Message. Otherwise, for Compensation strategies, she applied all, which included Guessing Intelligently in Listening and Reading and Overcoming limitations in Speaking and Writing. Those strategies gave a positive contribution to the development of language learners in learning English. This research, hopefully, will encourage other students who are unfamiliar with the use of strategies in learning English efficiently to use the same strategies as long as they feel comfortable using them.

Following the explanation above, the writers believe that learners should have the freedom to create their learning atmosphere based on their preferred styles and strategies. Markovic and Markovic (2012) stated that “a good education system gives students the freedom to recognize their capabilities and individual potentials” (p. 87). The student being researched, for example, had her organized situation and behavior which categorized her as a visual and individual language learner and had certain activities in her learning process that included cognitive strategies and compensation strategies. As a visual student, the successful language learner read books, and she used novels as a chosen book to read. Then, she decided to study at home to improve herself because she realized that learning alone with a sufficient situation was the most effective phase for her.

Also, the successful language learner knew her learning strategies to achieve the learning goals. Practicing strategy allows the learner to recognize a new language. Based on the finding, the language learner has applied five sets of practicing from cognitive strategies in her learning process. The strategies are repeating, formally practicing with sounds and writing system, recognizing and using formulas and patterns, recombining, and practicing naturalistically. The second set from cognitive strategies is receiving and sending messages. These strategies include getting the idea quickly and using resources for receiving and sending messages. This student used skimming and scanning in her learning process especially during reading tasks. It was the one implementation of getting the idea quickly. Furthermore, she also used many sources to support her learning, for example, she used Dictionary.com, an online dictionary that provides a good explanation about English words that the student want to know the meaning, then Merriam Webster, an online dictionary which provides not only well explanation but also the example for

the use of a word being searched, the way to pronounce the words correctly, and part of speech. Not only cognitive strategies, but the language learner also used compensation strategies in the learning process. Guessing intelligently in listening and reading and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing are implemented by the student. She usually guessed the meaning of the word that she heard by guessing intelligently, considering the accent, pronunciation, and context of the topic. In addition to this, she also practiced this strategy in reading. For speaking, the gesture was one aspect of non-verbal communication that helping her delivering messages to the interlocutor when she does not know the words. Other than speaking, she used coining words or synonyms when she does not know the exact word. In this situation, the student tried to make up new words to communicate both spoken and written.

In conclusion, the successful language learner whose well competence in English performs at least two different learning styles and applies two different learning strategies to support her learning process in English. This finding is supported by previous research conducted by Kusumahati (2015). She conducted a correlational study between Students' Learning Styles and Strategies in Learning English at Junior High School level and found that there is correlational significance between learning styles and learning strategies that support student's learning English. Therefore the awareness of performing both learning styles and learning strategies is important.

Conclusion

This study proved that a successful four years college student from the English Education Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty was aware of her learning style preferences and particular major learning strategies. The learning style preferences performed by the successful language learner were all provided in Perceptual Learning Style Preference proposed by Reid (1984). The first learning style was a visual learning style that was seeing words in books, on the whiteboard, and in workbooks and remembering and understanding information and instructions better through reading. The second learning style was individual; the learner learned better when she worked alone and remembered information if she learned by herself. Besides, the strategies used by the successful language learner were all provided in learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1990). Cognitive strategies and compensation strategies were mainly used. However, the student used cognitive strategies at most to practice through repetition of practice naturally and receiving and sending messages which guided her to find out a technic to the exact information in English tasks. Also, to learn English in multiple ways.

Suggestion

Based on the findings and discussion, the following suggestions are recommended. Considering the learning styles used by the successful language learner in the English Education Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Tanjungpura University should be attentive to increase their awareness of learning styles. Learning styles applied by the student in the learning process could be a prior knowledge for other students, hence, they can set a better learning phase for their own to achieve quick and efficient English learning. Language learners in the English Education Study Program of Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Tanjungpura University should be aware of what strategies work best for themselves in learning English. Consequently, the learning strategies used by the student in this research could be an example for other language learners who might have similarities to achieve the learning goals. For all English

teachers, wished that they can provide theories of learning styles and learning strategies in English and courage students to know their strategies.

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