

Language Learning Strategies Used by Awardees of Affirmation Scholarship in IELTS Preparation Class

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to find out the type of language learning strategies (LLSs) used by two groups of awardees for Affirmation Scholarship of Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (LPDP) in IELTS preparation classes. Those groups were preparing for the IELTS examination as the minimum requirement score for university entrance. The study attempts to investigate the particular pattern of LLS used by students with different gender, academic majors, and IELTS band score. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning was used as an instrument to collect data from the two groups of IELTS preparation class. The results revealed that respondents tend to use meta-cognitive strategies as their main LLS with females being the more active users than males, while language major students used strategies more often than those who study in science and social studies. Participants who had good score in IELTS employed social strategies, besides affective strategies used by students who were less proficient in English. The findings have implications for students and teachers of IELTS class to utilize appropriate LLS in language learning.

Keywords: language learning strategies, IELTS

1. INTRODUCTION

The success of the English learning process is not only determined by the teachers but also by the students. One of the factors that influence the success of English learning is the strategies applied by the students. Oxford (1990) suggests that language learning strategy is an important factor for improving active learning in the classroom and self-directed movement that is crucial to improve communicative competence. This learning strategy is also an influential factor for the success of the Affirmation Scholarship awardee of LPDP who attend a training to increase their IELTS scores.

Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (LPDP) is an institution that serves to manage scholarship funding in Indonesia. The width of Indonesian territory with its heterogeneous geography and heterocultural characteristics leads to a hindered equity of development in each region. Therefore, special efforts are needed to improve the quality of human resources in frontier and underdeveloped areas in order to become a catalyst for the expansion and acceleration of such development. For this reason, LPDP issues Affirmation Scholarship policy for any social communities that require special serves with the categories: 1) they are from the frontier or underdeveloped areas; 2) they devote themselves to the government institutions in border areas, Bidikmisi scholarship alumni, and 3) those who are high-achievers from poor families, and outstanding individuals in the Olympic fields of Science, Technology, Sport and Arts or Culture at both National and International levels.

With this Affirmation Scholarship, it is expected that the best candidates of the social communities can pursue their Master or Doctoral study in the range of various fields, both in national and foreign universities. Meanwhile, the requirement of IELTS score from LPDP for the scholarship awardee is lower than those of other equivalent scholarships for getting into either national or overseas study. To apply for Affirmation Scholarship in Indonesia, LPDP requires a minimum band score of 4.5 in IELTS for Master degree and band 5.0 for the Doctoral program. Meanwhile, for Master and Doctoral programs in foreign universities, LPDP requires a minimum band score of IELTS 6.0.

The lower IELTS requirement for the awardee of the Affirmation Scholarship urges them to attend IELTS training in order to increase their IELTS scores to meet the requirement of the target college in foreign countries. It is because the foreign universities generally require band 6.5 of IELTS with a minimum writing band score 6.0. IELTS preparation training is conducted about 3 months intensively. The participants can also attend the second training if they have attended the first training under the circumstance that their IELTS scores are not eligible yet for the admission to the foreign universities.

Based on the above description, there is an interest to conduct a research related to Language Learning Strategies (LLS) of the participants who attend IELTS preparation class. The focus of this research is to find out the most frequent- and least-used English learning strategies by the IELTS training participants. In addition, this study also intends to examine the influence of gender, academic major, and IELTS score on their LLS used. Thus, this study is expected to provide the description for the IELTS trainers in some aspects of language learning strategies that will benefit the participants to achieve higher IELTS scores.

Language learning strategies (LLS) has an important contribution to the process of learning language. It is important to reach an understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of language learning strategies and of where they are situated in the pedagogical literature and in the theoretical accounts of how language is learnt (Griffiths, 2003).

Wenden & Rubin (1987) associate LLS as a set of work methods, plans or daily habits used by students to facilitate the regaining, storing, and using of information. Cohen & Macaro (2007) define LLS as a set of work methods used by students to help obtain, store, and retrieve any information. In addition, Cohen & Macaro (2007) state that LLS is a conscious step or action chosen by students.

Furthermore, Oxford (2003) suggests a more comprehensive definition of LLS: that is work methods used by students to help acquire, store, retrieve, and use information or specific activities done by them to make the learning easier, faster, more fun, more focused, more efficient, and more adaptable to new situations. Language learners use language learning strategies as a means to facilitate the acquisition of language and the use of the information they receive, store and recall (Hardan, 2013).

Scholars had classified language learning strategies into some categories. Actually, there are no radical changes in their classification of language learning strategies (Hardan, 2013). Moreover, Wenden & Rubin (1987), (Stern, 1992), and Oxford (1990) classified language learning strategies into the following categories:

Wenden & Rubin (1987) classified learning strategies into: direct learning strategies (clarification, monitoring, memorization, guessing inferencing, deductive reasoning, and practice) and indirect learning strategies (creating opportunities for practice and production tricks). Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford (2003) categorized language learning strategies into five main language strategies, they are: management and planning strategies, cognitive strategies, communicative – experiential strategies, interpersonal strategies, and affective strategies.

Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford (2003) classified LLS into two general categories: direct strategies and indirect strategies, which are subdivided into six main groups. Direct strategies require mental processing of the language, they are: memory, cognitive, compensation strategies. Moreover, indirect strategies provide direct support for language learning, they are: metacognitive, affective and social strategies.

- a. Memory strategies empower learners to store and retrieve information but do not necessarily include profound understanding. This strategy consists of creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing well, and employing action.
- b. Cognitive strategies help the students to handle the language learning materials in direct ways, e.g., through practicing, receiving and sending message (getting the main quickly, using resources for receiving and sending message), reasoning and analyzing (reasoning deductively, analyzing expression, analyzing contrastively, transferring, translating), creating structure for input and output (taking notes, summarizing, highlighting).
- c. Compensation strategies enable students to make up for a lack of knowledge (missing information) in the area of grammar and vocabulary, such as guessing intelligently (using linguistic clues and other clues) and overcoming limitations in speaking and writing (switching to mother tongue, using gesture, coining words, etc).
- d. Meta-cognitive strategies help students in controlling their own cognition and provide the way to coordinate their learning process. These strategies involve centering learning (overviewing and linking with the already known material, paying attention, delaying speech to focus on listening), arranging and planning learning (finding out about language learning, organizing, setting goals) and evaluating learning (self-monitoring and self-evaluation).
- e. Affective strategies refer to the regulation of emotions, motivations, attitudes, and value related to learning. These strategies involve lowering anxiety (using music and laughter), encouraging (making the positive statement, taking risk wisely), taking emotional temperature (writing a language learning diary, discussing feeling with someone).
- f. Social strategies enable the students to work with others in order to improve language learning and cultural understanding. These strategies comprise asking questions to get clarification, talking with native-speaking conversation partners, and exploring the culture and social norm.

Furthermore, Oxford develops a questionnaire to measure the use of these six categories of learning strategy called as Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). It is a set of questionnaire which was designed as an instrument for accessing the language learning strategies used by students and it has been used by many researchers. Therefore the version of SILL 7.0 consists of fifty items and it is evaluated by five points of Likert Scale, they are: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = always.

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is a globally recognized test of English proficiency for those who want to study or work in English speaking countries. It is owned by: the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. The IELTS is administered in two version—General and Academic training modules. Both modules assess the four language skills, they are: listening, reading, writing and speaking (Cambridge IELTS, 2006; Moghaddam, 2010; Lari 2012).

The result of IELTS are reported in band scores on a scale from band 1 which is described as non user to the highest score band 9, as expert user. The requirement for university entrance is overall band 6.5 which is described between competent user (band 6) and good user (band 7). The competent user has generally effective command of the language in spite of few mistakes, inappropriacies and mistaken assumption. The competent user also can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly incommomplace circumstances. In addition, the good user has operational command of the language, in spite of the fact that with intermittent mistakes, inappropriacies and mistaken assumptions in a few circumstances. The good user also generally handles complex language well and gets detailed reasoning.

2. METHOD

2.1. Method

This research was designed as a quantitative approach. It was conducted by a descriptive study involving the use of the questionnaire to collect the data.

2.2. Instruments

There are two types of questionnaires: a simple background questionnaire and Oxford's SILL. These two questionnaires were translated into Indonesia language in order for the participants to understand the questions easily and avoid misunderstanding.

a. Simple Background Questionnaire

The questions address the personal identity of the participants that are: age, major, hometown, and the latest IELTS score. It is aimed to seek the participants' background information.

b. Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning

This SILL version 7.0 questionnaire was used to seek the learning strategies in learning language employed by the participants. It contains 50 Likert Scale statements. This version is addressed to non-native speakers of English (Second Language Learners).

2.3. Participants

Thirtyfour participants in IELTS training become the subject of this study in which they are the awardees of Affirmation Scholarship held by LPDP. Twenty participants were at State Islamic University of Syarif Hidayatullah (UIN), Jakarta. The other fourteen participants were at Bandung Technology Institute (ITB). Those who returned the questionnaire were 31 consisting of 17 participants from UIN and 14 participants from ITB.

2.4. Procedure

The procedure in this study involves two steps: (1) asking for permission, and (2) distributing the questionnaire to the IELTS training participants. In the questionnaire, there is an introduction providing information related to the research. The questionnaire distribution was done at the end of the training session before they took the IELTS test from the authorized body.

2.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis was done through three steps:

a. Process the questionnaire data through Microsoft Excel.

This step was conducted based on the collecting data from the questionnaires. The Likert Scale written in the questionnaires are as follows: 1-never, 2-rarely, 3-sometimes, 4-usually, and 5-always.

- b. Process the results by using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) 16 version.
The descriptive statistics was used in this study which contains: frequencies, means, standard deviation and ranking. The scale by Oxford (1990) was used to categorize learning strategies: 1). High use (3.5-5.0), 2). Medium use (2.5-3.4), 3). Low use (1.0-2.4).
- c. Analyze and report the results in discussion section elaborated by other previous studies or theories from the experts whose expertise are in language learning strategy

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The result and analysis is presented based on research questions.

Questions One: What were the most and the least language learning strategies used by IELTS training participants?

Table 1. Language Learning Strategies Used by the IELTS Training Participants

Strategy	Mean	SD	Rank
Memory Strategy	3.29 (Medium Use)	0.54	6
Cognitive Strategy	3.53 (High Use)	0.48	3
Compensation Strategy	3.32 (Medium Use)	0.53	5
Meta-Cognitive Strategy	4.18 (High use)	0.51	1
Affective Strategy	3.36 (Medium Use)	0.6	4
Social Strategy	3.80 (High Use)	0.53	2

Based on table 1 above, it can be concluded that the most frequently used language learning strategy among the IELTS training participants of the LPDP Affirmation Scholarship at UIN and ITB language centers is meta-cognitive strategies (M = 4.18). Besides meta-cognitive strategies, they are also categorized as high users of social strategy (M = 3.80) and cognitive strategy (3.53). While, affective, compensation, and memory strategies become moderate strategies in their usage; in other words, they are sometimes used by the IELTS training participants in learning English.

Wu (2008) defines Oxford's meta-cognitive strategy as a way to organize the students' learning, such as: planning and managing learning tasks, targeting, monitoring learning errors, and evaluating progress. The tendency to use meta-cognitive strategy as the main LLS is the same as the choice of international students of Law Faculty, Brawijaya University in Ayuningtyas' (2013) study. The IELTS training participants categorized as the users of meta-cognitive strategy were those who have completed S1 and some respondents that have completed S2, so they have the ability to practice themselves in improving their IELTS scores. In addition, they were also able to create learning targets and evaluate their learning in order to achieve the target score.

Questions Two: Does learner gender influence IELTS training participants' use of language learners strategies?

Table 2. The Influence of Gender on the Use of English Language Learning Strategies

Gender	Method					
	Memory Strategy	Cognitive Strategy	Compensation Strategy	Meta-Cognitive Strategy	Affective Strategy	Social Strategy
Male	3.11(M)	3.44(M)	3.27(M)	3.98 (H)	3.13(M)	3.62 (H)
Female	3.54(H)	3.65(H)	3.39(M)	4.45(H)	3.66(H)	4.05(H)

Note: M = Medium Use, H= High Use

Table 2 suggests that female training participants are more likely to use meta-cognitive strategy with the mean as much 4.45 indicating high users of LLS. They are also categorized as high users of social, affective, cognitive, and memory strategies. Interestingly, the male participants also tend to use meta-cognitive strategy with the mean as much 3.98 (high users) followed by the social strategy with the mean as much 3.62 in learning the language.

Regarding meta-cognitive and social strategies, both groups are categorized as high users, but the female participants' scores are higher in both strategies than the male ones'. Similarly, both groups are categorized as medium users regarding compensation strategy, although the female participants' scores are slightly higher than the male ones' with a difference of 0.12.

Overall, it can be seen that there is a tendency for women to be more active in using LLS compared to men. The results of this study are similar to those obtained by Alkahtani (2016), Shafie (2013), and Hong-Nam & Alexander (2007).

Questions Three: Does learner academic major influence IELTS training participants' use of language learners strategies?

Table 3. The Influence of Academic Major on the Use of English Language Learning Strategies

Academic Major	Method					
	Memory Strategy	Cognitive Strategy	Compensation Strategy	Meta-Cognitive Strategy	Affective Strategy	Social Strategy
Language	3.64(H)	4.01(H)	3.33(M)	4.46(H)	3.8 (H)	4.3 (H)
Natural Science	3.15(M)	3.37(M)	3.5 (H)	4.05(H)	3.33(M)	3.74(H)
Social Studies	3.30(M)	3.50(H)	3.15(M)	4.19(H)	3.21(M)	3.66(H)

Note: M = Medium Use, H= High Use

In this study, the academic major consists of three majors, namely: language, natural science, and social studies. The training participants from language major are all from English language concentration. Those from natural science major are from Oil Engineering, Physics Education, Chemistry, and Nutrition departments. Those from Social Studies major are from State Administration, Social and Political Science, and Visual Communication Design departments.

It can be concluded that the respondents from language major are more often to use LLS compared to those from natural science and social studies. However, the language-major respondents occupy the second position in the use of compensation strategy.

Question Four: What is the correlation between language learners' strategies and IELTS score?

Table 4. The Influence of Language Learning Strategy on the IELTS Score

IELTS Score	LEARNING STRATEGIES					
	Memory Strategy	Cognitive Strategy	Compensation Strategy	Meta-Cognitive Strategy	Affective Strategy	Social Strategy
Very good	3.66(H)	3.85(H)	3.83(H)	3.8(H)	3 (M)	4.5 (H)
Good	3.37(M)	3.55(H)	3.38(M)	4.19(H)	3.35(M)	3.68(H)
Moderate	3.01(M)	3.35 (M)	3.08(M)	4.24(H)	3.26(M)	3.98(H)
Low	3.22(M)	3.71(H)	3.5 (H)	3.55(H)	3.83(H)	3.16(M)

Table 4 summarizes four categorical groups based on the IELTS score, they are: Very good (score \geq 7), Good (6 \leq score $<$ 7), Moderate (5 \leq score $<$ 6), and Low (4 \leq score $<$ 5).

The lowest score of the IELTS training group was band 5, and the highest score was band 7. It can be concluded that the participants who got the IELTS score with very good category are more often to use social strategy. Those using this strategy are described as active learners because they have a tendency to work with their peers in achieving the learning goals.

The participants who got the IELTS score with good category are quite more often to use meta-cognitive strategy. The results of this study are in line with that of Shafie's (2013) study. This type of learners is described as learners who are able to make a learning plan according to the learning objectives. In addition, they are also able to evaluate their learning progress. This is an important criterion to become

successful language learners. The last but not least is the participants who got the IELTS score with low category are more often to use affective strategy.

4. CONCLUSION

Language learning strategies have significant effect to build independent and active learners to be successful in language learning. These strategies also influenced the awardee of Affirmation Scholarship to get a higher score in IELTS preparation class as an entry requirement to study abroad. The aims of this research are to find out type of LLS used by the IELTS training participants and to determine whether there is a certain relationship between gender, academic major, and IELTS score and the type of LLS used. According to the results and data analysis above, it can be summarized as follows: (1) the most frequently used type of LLS among the IELTS training participants was meta-cognitive strategy, (2) women tended to be more active gender in using LLS, (3) the participants from language major used LLS more frequently compared to those from natural science and social studies majors, (4) the participants who got the IELTS score with very good category were more likely to use social strategy. While those who got IELTS score with low category were more often to use affective strategy. Further research in this field can be done to seek whether the results of this study can be replicated or generate new findings. Besides, the results of this study are expected to be useful for teachers, trainers, and facilitators for the IELTS class in helping the learners get higher IELTS scores.

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