



THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH LEARNING EXPERIENCE AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES ON THE ENGLISH PROFICIENCY OF SRIWIJAYA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Ridha Ilma

English Study Program, Tridinanti University

E-mail: ridhailma@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigated the influence of English experience and language learning strategies on English proficiency of EFL learners. Two hundred and six semester-4 students of Law Faculty of Sriwijaya University were selected as the sample. This study was an ex post facto study. Questionnaires of English learning experience, English learning motivation, Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL), and TOEFL Test were the instruments to collect the data. The results showed that: (1) students' learning experience gave significant contribution to their English proficiency as much as 12.6%, (2) students' language learning strategies gave significant contribution to their English proficiency as much as 31%, (3) students' English learning experience and language learning strategies gave significant contribution to their English proficiency as much as 43.8%, (4) students' language learning strategies contributed most to their English proficiency. It is hoped that the results of this study can be used by teachers or lecturers of English, learners of English, and other concerned parties as ideas to improve students' English proficiency.

Key Words: English learning experience, language learning strategies, language proficiency

INTRODUCTION

English today is considered as an international lingua franca and spoken at various levels of competence by more than 2,000 million people around the globe, including native speakers (over 380 million) and those who learn it as a second or foreign language (Munat, 2013, p. 143). The need for English increases in line with the development of international communication network. In this era of globalization, in which communication with foreign countries is a necessity, it will be very difficult to ignore English.

The necessity to understand English is inevitable for Indonesian citizens to access communication and development in many areas. Philips (1996) stated that English had a dominant position in science, technology, medicine, computer, research, transnational business, diplomatic field, mass media, and educational system as a foreign language which is learned worldwide, so that English takes the biggest part among the other languages in the world. In other words, English is the language of air and maritime navigation, of the worldwide web and of diplomacy, as well as the vehicle for international scientific exchange, and its pervasive presence that can be felt in pop culture and the worldwide media.

Afterwards, English has become the de facto language of communication not only in international business, but also in nearly every context where two people do not share a language (EF EPI, 2013, p. 2). Even within countries where several regional or tribal languages meet, English serves as a common communication tool. Language proficiency is a person's skill in using a language for a specific purpose (Richards, 1983, p. 204).

From the description above, it can be summarized that English proficiency is the ability of an individual to use English as the communicative language. English proficiency index refers to a report of which attempts to rank countries by the average level of English skills among adults (EF EPI,



2013, p. 4). Based on the data of English Proficiency Index (2011) which ranked the proficiency of English among a broad population in 44 countries and territories, Indonesia was in the rank of 34 with score 44.78 below India and Russia. In other words, Indonesia was still in the very low proficiency category. In the following year, 2012, Indonesia had a little improvement. It was the rank of 27 with the score 53.31 below Uruguay and above Iran. Indeed, Indonesia as the developing country has to increase its level of English proficiency through a lot of treatments of four skills of English in teaching and learning process as Singapore and Malaysia which were in the rank of 12 and 13 had higher school attendance of their students and asked the students to have a lot of practices in English classes.

In teaching and learning process, English lecturers have to consider many different aspects such as students' levels, backgrounds, social contexts, interests, purposes, personalities, ages, learning styles, and abilities in order to get proper teaching strategies to achieve the learning goals. Lightbrown and Spada (1997, p. 33) assume that intelligence, aptitude, motivation, attitude, and the age at which learning begin were the relevant factors of language learning. Besides, most researchers and practitioners in the field of second language (L2) acquisition would agree that language experience plays an important role in L2 learning. Experience is a metaphor for a host of different activities, all describing learners' encounter with a language (Trofimovich, 2011). In other words, language experience is all input and output of the learners of a system of sounds as the results of speakers used to communicate in a whole community. Furthermore, the researcher had done a small research investigating some Law Faculty students of Sriwijaya University in 2013 as the researcher had taught them for 4 semesters related to their English learning experience and their competency of English. The result showed that the students who had taken an English course or had much English learning experience before they went to Sriwijaya University had better grades of English than those who had not.

In addition, the research of mid-1790 led to some very careful defining specific learning strategies (Oxford, 2003, p. 1). According to some researchers (e.g. O'Malley&Chamot, 1994) who studied the use of strategies by learners of a second language in the United States, there were three main categories of language learning strategies: metacognitive, cognitive, and socio affective. Brown (2007) argues that strategies are specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information. Those things are good signs of how learners approach problems found during the process of teaching and learning. Hismanoglu (2000) also assumes that language learning strategies gave teachers valuable clues about how their students assessed the situation, planned, selected the appropriate skills to understand, learn or remember new input presented in the language classroom.

According to data from Sriwijaya University Language Institute in academic year of 2011, there were only 20.1 % of Law Faculty students were able to achieve the TOEFL score above 450. This condition needed special attention due the fact that the students had attended 2 credit-hour English subject. To add this pain, most of the students had joined an English class in 4 times (English 100, English 200, English 300, English 400) in Sriwijaya University Language Institute. However, they still had difficulties in achieving the minimum TOEFL score of 450 when they came to judicial day. For this reason, based on all the description above, the writer was interested in conducting the research which discussed the influence of the students' English learning experience and language learning strategies toward their English proficiency.



THEORITICAL BACKGROUND

English Learning Experience

Experience, learning, and experiential learning are three concepts that are not easily defined. Nevertheless, there is a literature that helps us clarify their meanings. Experience is a term which has preoccupied philosophers and which many have tried to avoid. Boud (1989, p. 24) states that experience is the knowledge and skill that you have gained through doing something for a period of time.

Merriam and Clark (1993) opened their overview of learning theories by describing learning as so central to human behavior yet so elusive to understanding, that it has fascinated thinkers as far back as Plato and Aristotle. Theorists that see experience as being fundamental to learning offer their definitions of learning. Kolb (1984, p. 38) defined learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. However, students' learning experience can be defined as their interaction with the teaching and learning environment (Ning & Downing, 2010, p.2). So that, the more interaction that the students have in teaching and learning environment, the more experience that they have. In addition, Students' learning experience can be defined as their interaction with the teaching and learning environment, and hence their study behavior is contingent on their learning experience in response to situational demands in relation to the learning context (Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 25). From the study done by Ning and Downing (2010), there was a connection between the students' English learning experience and their English achievement.

According to Conttia (2007, p. 3), there were some indicators of English learning experience as follows:

Quality of teaching

Quality of teaching is characterized by practices such as providing students with feedback on their progress, explaining things, making the course interesting, motivating students, and understanding students' problems. High scores on the good teaching scale are associated with the perception that these practices are present. Lower scores reflect a perception that these practices occur less frequently.

Enhancement of students' generic skills

Enhancement of students' generic skills is an attempt to take into account the extent to which university courses add to the generic skills that their graduates might be expected to possess. While discipline-specific skills and knowledge are often crucial to prospects for employment and further study, the emphasis on generic skills stems from the belief that knowledge quickly becomes obsolete, and generic skills that may have been acquired in the learning process should endure and be applicable in a broader context. Skills typically identified in this context include communication skills, the capacity to learn new skills and procedures, the capacity to make decisions and solve problems, the ability to apply knowledge to the workplace, and the capacity to work with minimum supervision.

Quality of students' support

Quality of students' support attempts to measure access to, and satisfaction with, key university facilities and services supporting student learning outcomes.

Language Learning Strategies (LLSs)

Oxford (2003, p. 2) states, " Learning strategies are defined as specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to



tackle a difficult language task used by students to enhance their own learning”. When the strategies are chosen by the learner which are fitted with his or her learning style and the L2 task at hand, these strategies become a useful toolkit for active, conscious, and purposeful self regulation of learning.

According to Chamot (2004, p. 14), language learning strategies (LLSs) are defined as the conscious thoughts and actions that learners take in order to achieve learning goal. Through repeated use, these strategies become automatic. However, learners, if required, can call them to conscious awareness (Chamot, 2005). In addition, these strategies require learners to develop some degree of meta-awareness that would enable them to think about their thinking, and then analyze any learning task and eventually choose the appropriate strategy requires accomplishing that task (Beetham, McGill, & Littlejohn, 2009).

Actually, some researchers have proposed different classifications and conceptualizations of language learning. Oxford (1990) developed the comprehensive, detailed and systematic taxonomy of strategies to date. Meanwhile, O’Malley & Chamot (1994) who divided LLS into three categories: cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective. Oxford (1990) grouped them into six classes: memory, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Based on these big classes, Oxford (1990) designed a strategy assessment survey, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) to collect information about the learners’ use of language learning strategies. SILL has been widely used for asses strategy use and to explore the effects of various variables on strategy preferences (Khalil, 2005).

The Types of Language Learning Strategies

Oxford (1990) grouped language learning strategies into two big classes; direct strategies and indirect strategies. Here are the clear explanations of those two strategies:

Direct Strategies

The direct strategies are beneficial to the students because they help store and recover information. These strategies help learners to produce language even when there is a gap in knowledge. They also help to understand and use the new language.

1. Memory Strategies

Memory strategies are based on simple principles like laying things out in order, making association, and reviewing. These principles are employed when a learner faces challenge of vocabulary learning. The words and phrases can be associated with visual images that can be stored and retrieved for communication. Many learners make use of visual images, but some find it easy to connect words and phrases with sound, motion or touch. The use of memory strategies is most frequently applied in the beginning process of language learning. As the learners advance to a higher level of proficiency memory strategies are mentioned very little. It is not that the use ceases, but the awareness of its use becomes less.

2. Cognitive Strategies

These are perhaps the most popular strategies with language learners. The target language is manipulated or transformed by repeating, analyzing or summarizing. The four sets in this group are: practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning, and creating structure for input and output. Practicing is the most important in this group which can be achieved by repeating, working with sounds and writing, and using patterns. The tools of receiving and sending



messages are used when learners try to find the main idea through skimming and scanning. It is not necessary to check every word. The adult learners commonly use analyzing and reasoning strategies. These are used to understand the meaning and expression of the target language. These are also used to make new expressions.

3. Compensation Strategies

Learners use compensation strategies for comprehension of the target language when they have insufficient knowledge of the target language. These strategies make up for the deficiency in grammar and vocabulary. When learners do not know new words and expressions, they guess the meaning. A learner brings own life experience to interpret data by guessing. Compensation strategies are also used in production when grammatical knowledge is incomplete. When a learner does not know the subjunctive form of the verb, a different form may be used to convey the message.

Indirect Strategies

Indirect language learning strategies work together with the direct strategies. They help learner regulate the learning process. These strategies support and manage language learning without direct engagement and therefore called indirect strategies.

1. Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies go beyond the cognitive mechanism and give learners to coordinate their learning. This helps them to plan language learning in an efficient way. When new vocabulary, rules, and writing system confuse the learner, these strategies become vital for successful language learning. Three sets of strategies belong to this group and they are: centering learning, arranging and planning learning, and evaluating learning. The aim of centering learning is to give a focus to the learner so that the attention could be directed toward certain language activities or skills. Arranging and planning learning help learners to organize so they may get maximum benefit from their energy and effort. Evaluating learning helps learners with problems like monitoring errors and evaluation of progress. Research has found that compared to cognitive strategies metacognitive strategies are used less consistently by the learners.

2. Affective Strategies

The affective factors like emotion, attitude, motivation, and values influence learning in an important way. Three sets of strategies are included in this group: lowering anxiety, encouraging and taking emotional temperature. Good language learners control their attitudes and emotions about learning and understand that negative feelings retard learning. Teachers can help generate positive feeling in class by giving students more responsibility, increasing the amount of natural communication, and teaching affective strategies. Anxiety could be both helpful and harmful. It is felt that a certain amount of anxiety is helpful for learners because it helps them obtain their optimum level of performance. Too much anxiety has the opposite effect where it hinders language learning. Anxiety often takes the forms of worry, frustration, insecurity, fear, and self-doubt. A common high anxiety creating situation for learners is to perform before the peers and teacher when they are not prepared.



3. Social Strategies

Social strategies are very important in learning a language because language is used in communication and communication occurs between people. Three sets of strategies are included in this group: asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others. Among the three, asking questions is the most helpful and comes closest to understanding the meaning. It also helps in conversation by generating a response from the partner and shows interest and involvement. Cooperation with others eliminates competition and in its place brings group spirit. Studies show that cooperative learning results in higher self-esteem, increased confidence, and rapid achievement. Learners do not naturally apply cooperative strategies because of strong emphasis put on competition by educational institutions. Sometimes competition brings a strong wish to perform better than others, but it often results in anxiety and fear of failure. It is important to help learners change their attitudes from confrontation and competition to cooperation. Empathy is very important in communication. Empathy means to put oneself in someone else's situation to understand that person's point of view. Learners can use social strategies to develop cultural understanding and become aware of thoughts and feelings of others.

English Proficiency

Proficiency is the examinees' ability in particular area of competency in order to determine the extent to which they can function in a real language situation. Moreover, Richard (1997) stated that language proficiency is a person's skill in using a language for a specific purpose. In the same line, Stern (1983, p. 341) stated that language proficiency refers to the language ability or ability in language use. It means that the degree of someone's skill in using a language. It is able to be shown as a goal and defined in terms of objectives or standards.

Proficiency ranges from zero to native-like proficiency. The zero is not perfect as the second language learner as speaker of at least one other language, his first language, knows language, and how its function. So, English proficiency can be defined as having or showing a lot of skill in the usage of English. Gust (2013) assumed that a proficiency test is simply, a method that you may use to validate a particular measurement. In the same line, Finocchiaro (1983, p. 186) stated that "proficiency test is used to measure what a person already knows in the target". TOEFL is one of the most commonly used as a proficiency test (Educational Testing Service/ETS, 2004).

TOEFL as Measurement of English Proficiency

McKeon (2008) assumed that having been developed in the mid 1960's, the TOEFL has become standard of measuring proficiency in English as a second language or foreign language throughout the world. As stated by Educational Testing Service / EST (2004), one of the proficiency tests commonly used is TOEFL. The purpose of TOEFL is to evaluate English proficiency of people whose native language is not English. Therefore in this study, student's English proficiency is the student's competence in English which is measured by using TOEFL-Like test. It is the test which evaluates non-native English speakers' skills in three areas:

Listening comprehension: measures the ability to understand English includes short and long conversations and short talks or lectures (50 questions).

1. Structure and Written Expression: measures the ability to recognize standard written English (40 questions).
2. Reading: measures the ability to read and understand short passages at university level (50 questions).



TOEFL is offered in different formats depending on a test taker's location. One of the scoring systems which can be used is by Paper Based Test (PBT). The scoring system of PBT TOEFL uses converted score on each section (listening section, structure section, and reading section) correct numbers.

METHOD

This study used ex post facto because it tried to find out the contribution of students' English learning experience and language learning strategies toward their English proficiency. Besides. Multiple regression analysis was used to find out the contribution of the predictor variables (English learning experience and language learning strategies) and criterion variable (English proficiency).

The writer collected the data in two ways. Firstly, the writer used three different kinds of questionnaires in collecting the data for two predictor variables; the questionnaire of students' English learning experience and the questionnaire of students' language learning strategies. The student's English proficiency, as the criterion variable, was measured by their TOEFL Like - Test.

RESULTS

In this study, the multiple regressions were intended to support correlation among variables and to see if the predictor variables determined the criterion variable. The researcher used Stepwise method in this study.

The Contribution of Students' Learning Experience, Motivation, and Language Learning Strategies to their English Proficiency

Aspects	R Square	Change Statistics	
		R Square Change	Sig. F. Change
1. English Learning Experience	0.126	0.126	0.000
2. Language Learning Strategies	0.438	0.310	0.000

The Contribution of Students' English Learning Experience to their English Proficiency

Based on statistical calculation, $p\text{-value } 0.000 < \alpha 0.05$. It means that the students' English learning experience gave significant contribution to the students' English proficiency. The R square value showed that the contribution was as much as 12.6 %.

The Contribution of Students' Language Learning Strategies to their English Proficiency

Based on statistical calculation, $p\text{-value } 0.000 < \alpha 0.05$. It means that the students' language learning strategies partially gave significant contribution to the students' English proficiency. Based on the R square value, it was showed that the contribution was as much as 31%.

The Contribution of Students' English Learning Experience and Language Learning Strategies to their English Proficiency

Based on statistical calculation, $p\text{-value } 0.000 < \alpha 0.05$. It means that the students' English learning experience and language learning strategies gave significant contribution to the students' English proficiency. The R square value showed that the contribution was as much as 43.8 %.



The Contribution of Sub-Variables of Students' English Learning Experience to their English Proficiency

Based on the statistical Multiple Regression Analysis Stepwise method, it showed that there were two sub-variables of students' English learning experience which gave significant contribution to their English proficiency, and one sub-variable did not contribute significantly to their English proficiency.

In the first sub-variable, $p\text{-value } 0.001 < \alpha 0.05$, it showed that quality of teaching gave significant contribution to English proficiency as much as 7.1%. In the second sub-variable, $p\text{-value } 0.000 < \alpha 0.05$, it showed that enhancement of students' generic skill gave significant contribution to English proficiency as much as 11%. In the last sub-variable, $p\text{-value } 0.458 > \alpha 0.05$, it showed that quality of students' support did not contribute significantly to English proficiency because it only contributed as much as 0.3%. In other words, the strongest contribution was given by the second sub-variable, enhancement of students' generic skill.

The Contribution of Sub-Variables of Students' Language Learning Strategies to their English Proficiency

In order to determine the contribution of sub-variables of language learning strategies, Multiple Regression Stepwise Method was used. Among six strategies, there were three strategies which did not give significant contribution to the English proficiency; compensation, metacognitive, and affective strategy. The result is as follows.

In memory strategy, $p\text{-value } 0.000 < \alpha 0.05$, it showed that memory strategy gave significant contribution to the English proficiency as much as 25.6%. In cognitive strategy, $p\text{-value } 0.002 < \alpha 0.05$, this result showed that cognitive strategy gave significant contribution to the English proficiency as much as 4.8%. In social strategy, $p\text{-value } 0.003 < \alpha 0.05$, this result showed that social strategy gave significant contribution to the English proficiency as much as 2.5%. In compensation strategy, $p\text{-value } 0.929 > \alpha 0.05$, this result showed that compensation strategy did not contribute significantly to the English proficiency because compensation strategy did not contribute at all to English proficiency. In metacognitive strategy, $p\text{-value } 0.534 > \alpha 0.05$, this result showed that metacognitive strategy did not contribute significantly to the English proficiency as the contribution was only 0.2%. In affective strategy, $p\text{-value } 0.119 > \alpha 0.05$, this result showed that affective strategy did not contribute significantly to the English proficiency because the contribution was only 1.2%. In conclusion, the strongest contribution was given by the first sub-variable, memory strategy.

DISCUSSION

From the classification of students' English learning experience, enhancement of students' generic skills gave biggest contribution to their English proficiency. Since the students had good communication with their lecturers and it could help them to learn English well. Then, they also had large capacities to learn new things in order to enlarge their knowledge of English. Besides, English lecturers also gave them chance to make decision about what to do in their classroom and capacity to make decision in teaching and learning process. The second sub-variable was quality of teaching. It gave bigger contribution to English proficiency than the third variable. In fact, their English lecturers did not provide such feedback on the students' progress that the students became less motivated and the classroom became uninteresting. To sum up, the lecturers did not understand the students well. The last sub-variable, quality of students' support, gave the smallest contribution to English proficiency. It means the students only had limited access and satisfaction to their university facilities and services.



Then, among six categories of language learning strategies, memory strategy was the most preferred strategy. Memory strategy was a technique that helped learners store and retrieve new information. It was a technique that was used for creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, reviewing in a structured way. In other words, the students were capable to associate and review some new materials which they got in the classroom. Besides, there were four strategies which contributed less than memory strategy; (1) cognitive strategy, (2) social strategy, (3) affective strategy, (4) metacognitive strategy. It was also clear from the findings that the students made very little use of compensation strategy. It was shown by the data that compensation strategy did not contribute significantly to English proficiency. Some of compensation strategies mentioned in the questionnaire are: guessing wisely in listening and reading, using gestures, switching to the native language, and using a synonym or description in order to get the meaning across in speaking or writing. The researcher had assumption that the students probably did not know about compensation strategy. The students were not able to comprehend English as the target language when they had insufficient knowledge especially in grammar and vocabulary. They had difficulties in guessing meaning of the new words.

The fourth semester students of Law Faculty of Sriwijaya University had low TOEFL score. The lecturers should keep attention on them as they were not majoring in English. The lecturers should think about their English learning experience and their language learning strategies to be more exposed properly so that two of them become trigger to improve their English proficiency.

The implication of this study was essential to provide the students with the knowledge of their learning experience, language learning strategies, and the most important is motivation of learning English. Both of the lecturers and the students should realize that those factors will affect and contribute the improvement of English proficiency although there were other factors that also need to be considered.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

Based on the results and discussion of the study, English learning experience gave significant contribution to English proficiency of the fourth semester Law Faculty students of Sriwijaya University as much as 12.6%. After a closer examination of each sub- variable, it showed that enhancement of students' generic skill had the greatest contribution to the students' English proficiency, and the least contribution was given by quality of students' support dimension. Then, language learning strategies gave significant contribution to English proficiency of the fourth semester Law Faculty students of Sriwijaya University as much as 31%. After a deeper study of each sub-variable, memory strategy gave the greatest contribution to the students' English proficiency, and the least contribution was given by compensation strategy. There were three strategies which did not give significant contribution to students' English proficiency; affective metacognitive, and compensation strategy. The contribution of students' English experience and language learning strategies to English proficiency the fourth semester Law Faculty students of Sriwijaya University as much as 43.8%. In other words, there were still 56.2% of other factors that influence the students' English proficiency.

Next, between the two variables, students' language learning strategies contributed most to students' English proficiency. The last is students' English 'language learning strategies were very essential to be considered and revealed to the students. The result also showed that students' English learning experience simultaneously with the students' language learning strategies gave significant contribution to their English proficiency.



Suggestions

Considering that learning experience and language learning strategies are related to the students' English proficiency, it is important for those who are related to the field of education to pay more attention to these factors. In English classrooms, the lecturers should think deeply about the different characteristics of the students. Lecturers as the facilitators in the classroom should have enough knowledge and information about the individual differences of the learners. It is essential for the lecturers to recognize the variability of students' learning experience and language learning strategies because it will determine how the students behave in the teaching and learning process. On the other hand, it is necessary for the students to be aware and develop all language learning strategies which will help them in the process of language learning. It is also expected that the more English learning experience and exposure that the students have, the high English proficiency that they achieve.

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