

**STUDENTS' LEARNING STRATEGIES IN DEVELOPING  
SPEAKING SKILL AT ENGLISH STUDY PROGRAM  
ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY OF INDRAGIRI**

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**ABSTRACT**

English is a language that is used as a medium of international communication. Unfortunately, the ability of English students at the Islamic University of Indragiri in speaking skills is still considered low. They find it challenging to develop their speaking ability. Therefore they need some strategies to develop their speaking skills. Therefore, this study investigates the learning strategies used by English students to develop their speaking skills. The subjects of this study were 20 English students of semester four at the Islamic University of Indragiri. The research design was descriptive. To collect the data, the researchers administered a questionnaire consisting of 18 statements using the Likert scale. The results from the analysis showed that the students used almost all of the strategies proposed by Oxford (1990). They are cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, compensatory strategies, memory-related strategies, effective strategies, and social strategies. In order, the most frequent strategies employed by them were Cognitive Strategies (19%), compensatory strategies (17.75%), and social strategies (16.80%).

**Keywords:** *Learning strategies, Speaking skill*

**INTRODUCTION**

English is a language that is used as a medium of international communication. The large number of speakers who speak English worldwide can be considered valid reasons for English language special status in Indonesia. It becomes crucial for Indonesian people to learn English since their first and second language is not English. Thus, some elementary schools are learned as a different subject and a compulsory subject for all Junior and Senior High Schools in Indonesia. Some Universities also provide English majors.

At the English Study Program of Teachers Training and Education Faculty of Islamic University of Indragiri (UNISI), the students majoring in English learn Speaking from the first semester until they are in the fourth semester. They are then expected to master English, especially to become fluent in English speaking skills as, among others, a means of international communication. Being fluent is the most critical aspect of learning a second or foreign language. Success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language.

Unfortunately, the ability of English students at UNISI in speaking skills is still considered low. Therefore, they find it difficult to develop their speaking ability. Therefore they need some strategies to develop their speaking skills. According to Oxford (1990), learning strategies are the steps used by students to enhance their learning. Strategies are required in learning a foreign language because they are the tools for active and self-directed involvement, essential for developing communicative competence. Therefore, employing appropriate learning strategies would help students to develop their speaking ability. Therefore, this study aims at investigating the learning strategies used by the English students of UNISI to develop their speaking skills with a research question: What are language learning strategies frequently used by the 4<sup>th</sup>-semester English students of the Islamic University of Indragiri to develop their speaking skill?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Speaking Skill**

In language learning, speaking is an essential part of the goal of learning a foreign language. However, sometimes it seems to be difficult to be practiced. Oradee (2012) stated that speaking is the essential skill in foreign language teaching and learning since it is the basis for communication and is the most challenging skill. Therefore, the students have to take learning strategies to develop their speaking skills. Speaking is also an instrument to express a message to the listener, whether the listener understands or not. As quoted in Šolcová (2011), speaking has its patterns and structures different from writing.

Moreover, speaking is also building and sharing meaning through verbal and non-verbal symbols in various contexts (Chaney:1998). So, speaking is vital in

communication since it is the fundamental point of communication. It is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information. Moreover, Andriani Putri, S., Amri, S., & Ahmad, A. (2020:117) argues that it is one of the productive competencies in the spoken language. It seems more arduous than just uttering words. Five of its peripherals consist of pronunciation, language use, diction, fluency, and comprehension. Therefore, the speaking class activities should involve those producing, receiving, and processing information.

Fulcher and Davidson (2006) state there are five components of speaking skills that can be defined as follows:

a. Pronunciation

It is the way for students to produce more precise language when they are speaking.

b. Grammar

It is needed for the students to arrange sentences in conversation both in written and oral forms.

c. Vocabulary

It is the knowledge of the meaning of words.

d. Fluency

It is defined as the ability to speak communicatively, fluently, and accurately.

e. Comprehension

The ability of knowledge and process stretches of discourse to formulate representation of the sentence meaning.

### **Language Learning Strategies**

Learning strategies are specific behaviors or thought processes that students use to enhance their learning. Learning strategies can make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, self-directed, more effective, and transferable to new situations. They can also enable students to become more independent, autonomous, and lifelong learners. A significant part of learning strategies is the language learning strategies. Language learning strategies refer to process that learners employ in practicing speaking activities.

Language learning strategies are defined differently by many researchers. For example, Rigney (1978) defines language learning strategies as the often conscious steps or behaviors used by language learners to enhance the acquisition, storage,

retention, recall, and new information. On the other hand, Oxford, Lavine, and Croola; (1989) stated that language learning strategies as “actions, behaviors, steps, techniques—such as seeking out target language conversation partners or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a problematic language task—used by learners to enhance learning.

In 1990 Oxford divided two significant strategies in language learning:

a. Direct Strategies

1) Cognitive Strategy

Cognitive strategies enable students to manipulate the language material, e.g., through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, reorganizing information to develop more robust schemas (knowledge structures), practicing in naturalistic settings, and practicing structures and usually sounds.

2) Compensatory Strategy

Compensatory strategies are behaviors used to compensate for missing knowledge, e.g., using synonyms and "talking around" the missing word to aid speaking and using gestures or pause words.

3) Memory-related Strategies

Memory strategies are the techniques helping students to store new information in memory and retrieve it later. However, they do not necessarily involve deep understanding, e.g., create learning and retrieval via sounds (rhyme), images, a combination of words and images, body movement, or location.

b. Indirect Strategies

1) Meta-cognitive strategy

Meta-cognitive strategies are employed for managing the learning process overall, e.g., arranging a study space and schedule, monitoring mistakes, evaluating success, and identifying the learning style preferences and needs.

2) Affective Strategy

Affective strategies are the ways to gain better control over students' emotions, e.g., identifying the mood and anxiety level, talking about feelings, rewarding oneself for good performance, and using deep breathing or positive self-talk.

3) Social Strategy

Social strategies are actions involving other people in the language learning process. They help the students work with others and understand the target culture as well as the language, e.g., asking questions to get verification, asking for clarification of a confusing point, asking for help in doing language task, talking with a native-speaking conversation partner, and exploring cultural and social norms.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The type of research used in this study is the descriptive research design. It was adapted from the research design by Lodico et al. (2010). The steps were identifying a research topic, reviewing the literature, developing a research question, determining the questionnaire being used, selecting participants, administering the survey, analyzing and interpreting the survey results, and having research results.

The research was conducted in English Study Program, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Islamic University of Indragiri, Tembilahan. The population, as well as the sample of this research, are 20 students of fourth-semester students. It was held in May 2020. The researchers distributed a questionnaire consisting of 18 statements using *the Likert Scale* type to collect the data.

All the entries were analyzed statistically. To answer the research questions, descriptive statistics were utilized to find the means, standard deviation, and the rank for each learning strategy being chosen by the participants in the form of a percentage. The results of mean score for each item then were categorized into high use (often used (3.5-4.4) & always (4.5-5.0)), medium use (sometimes used (2.5-3.4)), and low use (rarely used (1.5-2.4) & never used (1.0-1.4)) (Oxford 1990).

## **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

Two parts are being highlighted in this section; findings and discussion. The findings present the demographic information, the overall descriptive statistics, and the frequency of each item.

**Table 1. The descriptive statistics of all items**

Item	Statement	Mean	SD
<b>Cognitive Strategy</b>			
1	I use idioms or other routine formula patterns such as: hello, how are you? That is not too bad, tell me more) in daily life.	3.8	0.89
2	I use reference materials such as Google, glossaries, dictionary, or some books to help me to prepare the material of speaking skills.	4.3	0.73
3	I guess the meaning of the sentence with logical thinking or divide the words into understandable parts.	3.8	0.95
<b>Metacognitive Strategy</b>			
4	I decide in advance to pay special attention to specific language aspects; for example, focus on learning about the way native speakers pronounce certain words	3.65	1.03
5	I try to find out how to be better in speaking skills by reading books/articles, talking with others, or watching a video about learning.	3.35	0.81
6	I arrange a schedule to increase speaking skills consistently, not only when there is an exam.	2.9	1.12
<b>Memory-related strategy</b>			
7	I put the new word in developing the vocabulary of speaking skills.	3.4	0.82
8	I associate the sound of the new word with the sound of a familiar word.	3	0.97
9	I schedule to study the new material of speaking skills with reviewing so that the review sessions are initially close together and gradually become more widely spread apart.	2.55	0.99
<b>Compensatory Strategy</b>			
10	I use mime or gesture to say a word if I cannot think of the proper expression	3.65	0.93
11	I ask the other person to tell the right word if he cannot think of it in a conversation.	4	1.17
12	Whenever I cannot think of the expression concept, I try to find different ways to express the idea; for example, I use a synonym or describe the idea.	3.55	0.94

<b>Affective Strategy</b>				
13	I make encouraging statements to myself to continue to try hard and do the best in a speaking activity.	4.3	1.21	
14	I know the improvement and note my development in speaking, keep private a diary or journal where I write feelings about speaking learning.	2.35	1.30	
15	I try to relax (deep breathing or mediation) whenever I feel nervous about speaking up.	3.9	1.02	
<b>Social Strategy</b>				
16	I ask other people (friends or lecturers) to correct my mistakes in speaking.	2.7	1.26	
17	I learn and increase my speaking skill in a group with friends or native speakers.	3.95	1.23	
18	I pay close attention to the thoughts and feelings of other people with whom I interact in speaking skills.	2.95	1.14	

Table 1 shows the overall descriptive statistics of students' responses. The learning strategy mostly chosen is Cognitive strategy in the second statement, mean = 4.3, and the least one is Affective Strategies in the fourteenth statement, mean 2.35.

**Table 2. The frequency of Speaking learning of Cognitive Strategies**

Item	Statements	Mean	SD	Strategy
1	I use idioms or other routine formula patterns such as: hello, how are you? That is not too bad, tell me more) in daily life.	3.8	0.89	High
2	I use reference materials such as Google, glossaries, dictionary, or some books to help me to prepare the material of speaking skills.	4.3	0.73	High
3	I guess the meaning of the sentence with logical thinking or divide the words into understandable parts.	3.8	0.95	High

Table 2 shows the frequency of participants' responses regarding the Cognitive Strategies the students used. All items are at a high level, and item number two gains 4.3 or the most chosen strategy. Students prefer to practice speaking English whether they are engaged during the teaching-learning process or any activities they do outside the classroom.

**Table 3. The frequency of speaking learning of Meta-cognitive Strategies**

Item	Statements	Mean	SD	Strategy
3	I decide in advance to pay special attention to specific language aspects; for example, I focus on learning about the way native speakers pronounce certain words.	3.65	1.03	High
4	I try to find out how to be better in speaking skills by reading books/articles, talking with others, or watching a video about learning.	3.35	0.81	Medium
5	I arrange a schedule to increase speaking skills consistently, not only when there is an exam.	2.9	1.12	Low

Table 3 shows the frequency of students' responses regarding the meta-cognitive strategies they used. Item number 3 gains 3.65. Students focus on how to say the words or pronunciation as one of the five indicators of speaking skill by paying attention to the way the native speakers talk. On the contrary, they increase their speaking skills inconsistently; they study when they have an exam. It is showed by item number 5, mean 2.9 in the low level.

**Table 4. The frequency of Speaking learning of Memory-related Strategies**

Item	Statements	Mean	SD	Strategy
7	I put the new word in developing the vocabulary of speaking skills.	3.4	0.82	Medium
8	I associate the sound of the new word with the sound of a familiar word.	3	0.97	Medium
9	I schedule to study the new material of speaking skills with reviewing so that the review sessions are initially close together and gradually become more widely spread apart.	2.55	0.99	Low



Table 4 shows the frequency of students' responses regarding the memory strategies they used. For example, item number 7 gains 3.4, and item number 8 gains 3; they are medium. While item number 9 gains 2.55 in the low level. The results describe that the students do not like to use new English lexical items in speaking to remember what words or material they have learned already.

**Table 5. The frequency of Speaking learning of Compensatory Strategies**

Item	Statements	Mean	SD	Strategy
10	I use mime or gesture to say a word if I cannot think of the proper expression.	3.65	0.93	High
11	I ask the other person to tell the right word if I cannot think of it in a conversation.	4	1.17	High
12	Whenever I cannot think of the expression concept, I try to find different ways to express the idea; for example, I use a synonym or describe the idea.	3.55	0.94	High

Table 5 shows the frequency of students' responses regarding the compensatory strategies they used. All three items are at a high level. Item number 11 gains 4. Students do not only focus on their speaking but also make use of gestures, ask another person, and use a synonym or describe the idea to express a certain expression when they cannot remember or do not know what lexical items they should produce during a conversation.

**Table 6. The frequency of speaking learning of Affective Strategies**

Item	Statements	Mean	SD	Strategy
13	I make encouraging statements to myself to continue to try hard and do the best in a speaking activity.	4.3	1.21	High
14	I know the improvement and note my development in speaking, keep private a diary or journal where I write feelings about speaking learning.	2.35	1.30	Low
15	I try to relax (deep breathing or mediation) whenever I feel nervous about speaking up.	3.9	1.02	High

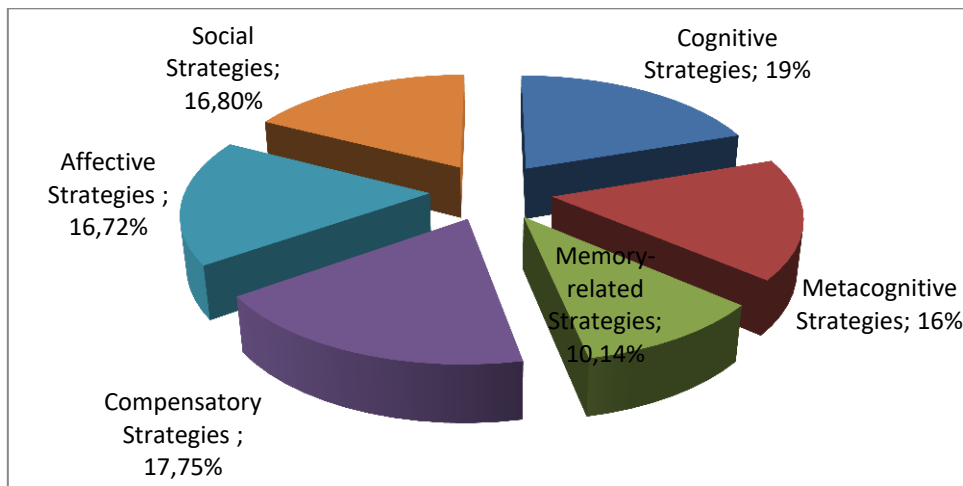
Table 6 shows the frequency of students' responses regarding the affective strategies they used. Item number 14 gains 2.35, which is at a low level. The two other items, number 13 and 15, are high, which gain 4.3 and 3.9. Most students their a high effort to encourage themselves and try to relax, although they get worried and nervous about speaking up.

**Table 7. The frequency of speaking learning of Social Strategies**

Item	Statements	Mean	SD	Strategy
16	I ask other people (friends or lecturers) to correct my mistakes in speaking.	2.7	1.26	Low
17	I learn and increase my speaking sill in a group with friends or native speakers.	3.95	1.23	High
18	I pay close attention to the thoughts and feelings of other people with whom I interact in speaking.	2.95	1.14	Low

Table 7 shows the frequency of students' responses regarding the social strategies they used—item number 17 gains 3.95 in the high level. For the social strategies, students primarily practice speaking with other students.

After analyzing each item, the researchers found some final findings, which are presented in the figure below:



**Figure 1. Recapitulation of Students' Speaking Strategies**

Regarding the given responses, the fourth-semester students of the English Study Program at the Islamic University of Indragiri use different learning strategies frequently. However, they simultaneously utilize all six strategies. Thus, cognitive strategies are in the first position as the most frequent strategies implemented by the students. Then, the other strategies, such as compensatory strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, social strategies, and memory-related strategies, are in the next order.

It must be highlighted as the research question that to develop their speaking skills, the students mostly use cognitive strategies. They implement common English expressions daily, take some references to prepare speaking material, and guess the meaning to understand the conversation. These direct strategies create habit and repetition, so the students become accustomed to speaking English. They realize that they cannot develop quickly by only attending speaking class once a week.

The next preferred strategies used by the students are compensatory strategies. They utilize this strategy because it allows them to use gestures to help them deliver the message to their partners in conversation and ask other people to tell the right words or make up new words if they do not know the correct words.

Another strategy used by the students is social strategies. Related to their level of education, social strategy is widespread because substantially they have to cooperate with friends or even the lecturer during the teaching-learning process inside the classroom or outside the classroom. In short, social strategy is taken into account as one of the strategies to develop speaking skills. It is correlated to the cognitive as the most frequent dominant strategy used that through practicing with other people, their speaking skills can be developed continuously.

## **CONCLUSION**

As this article has outlined, the most frequent learning strategies used by the 4<sup>th</sup>-semester students are cognitive, compensatory, and social strategies. Hence, they prefer direct strategies to indirect ones. However, it cannot be considered to be direct because they combine it with indirect strategies.

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