

# Good English Learners' Strategies in Building up Speaking Skill

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## Abstract

In the attempt of building up speaking skill, English language learners need to possess and frequently execute certain learning strategies when doing the practice. These strategies could be adapted from those good English learners as they have gone in through the process of learning the language and now become successful (Damayanti, 2009). These of course will give learners an appropriate example of how to sharpen their speaking skill. Therefore, this study was carried out to identify the strategies used by good English learners in improving speaking skill. Using qualitative method, the research instruments employed were questionnaire, interview and observation. This study was done at the English department, the faculty of teacher training and educational sciences, Ibn Khaldun University Bogor. The participant was taken from the students of fifth semester. It consisted of five participants. From the study, it could then be concluded that the strategies used by good English learners in building up speaking skill were practicing regularly, making dialogue or even monologue, memorizing vocabulary, and feeling confidence to use the language. As the learning facilitator, teacher is also strongly suggested to know kind of learning strategies preferred by his students and create optimal learning environment. This is aimed to lead students achieve their learning success.

*Keywords:* Good English learner, Learning strategies, Speaking

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the two productive skills that every English language learner needs to master. As a communicative skill, learners will find it useful to have speaking practice regularly. By frequently carrying out such skill rehearsal, it is then convinced that they will be able to possess a lot of chances to practice using all of the language elements they have learned. As a result, whenever they are in a great need of using such elements, it will automatically come out. In here, learners are actually in the process to become autonomous language users. Another advantage learners may obtain through implementing such skill practice is that they will enable themselves to identify and to become consciously aware of the language problems they might encounter.

Therefore they can notice how well they are doing (Harmer, 2007).

Many English language learners however assume that getting themselves to be able to speak the language they have been learning fluently is not that easy. There exist a number of obstacles that could really bother the flow of the learners' speaking development. These could include clustering, redundancy, reduced forms, performance variables, the existence of colloquial language, the consideration of delivery rate, stress, rhythm and intonation, and interaction (Brown, 2001).

It is somehow believed that the development of learners' speaking ability is extremely determined by their own attempts – the attempts which are effective and efficient. To make it meaningful, such attempts should be accompanied by certain strategies.

Therefore, learners are required to possess such kind of stuff to help them in overcoming the problems mentioned and they could then possibly carry out the practice persistently and build up their speaking skill.

Strategy -- not only related to the sake of learners' speaking development - - should be considered as a highly vital factor that could support the process of language learning and lead learners towards the acquisition of the language itself. Moreover Damayanti (2009) supports the statement by saying that learners' language learning strategies possess an important function for their own language learning. She also emphasizes that such strategies can be employed as medium for active, self-directed involvement, which she thinks essential for developing communicative competence. Therefore it can be concluded that the success of learners' language learning process in attaining such competence cannot be separated from the learning strategies they have chosen to employ.

Considering speaking skill as fundamental for English language learners to acquire, this study was carried out to identify what strategies good English learners often use to solve the problems mentioned before and mainly to build up their speaking skill. It is then expected that this study could give significant contribution towards those, English language learners who are interested in developing their speaking.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study is primarily aimed to obtain detail description of how good English language learners build up their speaking skill. It is done by identifying the learning strategies they often use in rehearsing to speak. Besides that, the researcher also intends to observe who are appropriately defined as good English learners, what difficulties they often

encounter when practicing speaking and how they could figure it out.

### **The Scope of the Study**

To limit the scope of the study, the research is only focused on observing the strategies that most good English language learners use in building up their speaking skill. As a result, this study would be able to produce a new piece of knowledge that could help English language learners to get a much better English language skills, in this regard speaking skill.

### **Significance of the Study**

As it is a good idea to imitate or at least consider the way of how successful English language learners rehearse their language skills--for the purpose of sharpening their speaking skill--this research result is expected to be able to give enlightenment to other English language learners who feel interested in developing speaking skill. They are then on the right track into a success. Therefore this study is really crucial to implement.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Sites and participants**

First of all, students who were classified as 'good' English language learners from the fifth semester of English department, the faculty of teaching training and educational sciences Ibn Khaldun University Bogor were selected as the population of the study. The determination of 'good' English language learner's terminology that was applied towards the students was based upon a particular criterion. That was their satisfactory scores on speaking subjects they had obtained from the first semester until the fourth semester (this is what so called 'categorization: Alwasilah, 2009).

On the second stage, their, particularly, academic behavior was observed, including: class participations,

task performance, self-confidence, discipline, etc. It could lead into a comprehension on who were appropriately categorized as 'good' English language learners opposed to those the 'bad' ones. Once it had already been obtained an apparent idea or reached the saturation on such categorization, purposive sampling would then be employed to choose the sample of the study. Finally, five participants were chosen.

### **Data collection methods**

This study used qualitative method. It was found to be proper using such method as the problem observed here was closely related to social phenomenon regarding to human's behavior. Guba and Lincoln (cited in Alwasilah, 2009) additionally state that through benefiting the existence of qualitative approach -- which was discovered to be more suitable -- into our research, we could really feel the essence of the typicality of natural setting that mostly appeared when employing the research,

To gain the data, three types of research instrument were applied, namely questionnaire, interview and observation. Questionnaire functions to gain data on the distribution of various behavior or characteristics appearing in natural setting. Interview was implemented as an instrument to get in-depth information on the problems being observed. Observation was done to facilitate the researcher in acquiring tacit understanding. These three instruments were carried out to assist the researcher obtain detail and complete information about the problems being observed. So that it would be valid and reliable.

### **Data analysis methods**

The researcher first analyzed the result from the questionnaire that he distributed to his research participants. This was aimed to get a general overview

of the topic and problem that he was interested in observing. Afterwards, he would be able to formulate questions that were going to be addressed to his participants on the interview section. As the questionnaire was designed in the closed-question format, he then found it necessary to have an interview.

Through the interview, the researcher was able to paraphrase the questions that could not be comprehensible enough to several participants. Moreover the researcher would possess an opportunity to raise follow-up questions. Having finished with the interview, the researcher tried to prove whether or not the participants told honest answer when being interviewed. This could be done by doing an observation. The conclusion of the study came up after the researcher noticed that the recurring patterns happened. After all of the three instruments were carried out, the results were then analyzed.

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Describing Good English Learners**

Rubin and Thompson (cited in Brown, 2001) make some generalizations on what become the major characteristics of good language learners. They suggest that good language learner should possess the following criterion:

- They find their own way, taking charge of their learning.
- They organize information about language
- They are creative, developing a 'feel' for the language by experimenting with its grammar and words
- They make their own opportunities for practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom.
- They learn to live with uncertainty by not getting flustered and by continuing to

talk or listen without understanding every word.

- They use mnemonics and other memory strategies to recall what has been learned.
- They make errors work for them and not against them.
- They use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of their first language, in learning a second language.
- They use contextual cues to help them in comprehension
- They learn chunks of language as wholes and formulized routines to help them perform 'beyond their competence'.
- They learn certain tricks that help to keep conversations going
- They learn certain production strategies to fill in gaps in their own competence
- They learn different styles of speech and writing and learn to vary their language according to the formality of the situation.

However, Naiman et al (cited in Johnson, 2001) proposes his seven hypotheses about good language learners. He implies that good language learners: 1) are willing and accurate guesser, 2) have a strong drive to communicate, or to learn from communication—they are willing to do many things to get their message across, 3) are often not inhibited—they are willing to appear foolish if reasonable communication results or they are willing to make mistakes in order to learn and to communicate, 4) are prepared to attend to form, 5) do practice regularly, 6) monitor their own and the speech of others, and 7) attend to meaning.

In summary, good English language learners will not hesitate to do any efforts for the sake of their language mastery, in this regard speaking skill. They will highly trust the expression which states that if there is no pain, there

will be no gain. It all means that they are suggested or even obliged to do pains taking efforts to become such learner. Moreover, it seems impossible to improve speaking skill without being consciously aware of trying to fulfill the requirements elaborated above.

### **Learning Strategy**

In learning a language, strategy is important as well. By using an appropriate strategy at an appropriate time, language learners can have a favor to learn the language much better. Learning strategy could also help to make language learners more independent or autonomous (Spratt and Pulverness, 2005).

Learning strategy can be defined as personalized activities, which are different from one person to another, that function to help language learners identify what they have to learn and process new language. It involves some sets of ways—could be in the form of procedures or techniques—chosen and used by language learners to learn language and facilitate a learning task (Spratt and Pulverness, 2005; Iskandarwassid and Sunendar, 2008; Chamot et al, 1999).

Oxford (cited in Johnson, 2001) presents six examples of learning strategies. They are taking risks wisely, remembering new language information according to its sound, finding out about language learning, cooperating with peers, switching to the mother tongue, and repeating.

### **Speaking Skill**

Speaking, as mentioned in the introduction part, is one of the productive skills besides writing. When talking about speaking, we are actually referring to oral language. Speaking involves interaction between or among speakers that could result two-way traffics of communication (Spratt and Pulverness, 2005). Thus, speakers have to get the

message across each other if not, it is not called 'communication' (Prator, 1983).

Speaking is also closely related to producing sounds of language. In practicing speaking, learners will have to deal with pronouncing words, being aware of the crucial use of intonation, and thinking of some grammatical aspects as a part of the accuracy elements (Spratt and Pulverness, 2005). Those have become some reasons why acquiring speaking competence is absolutely difficult for language learners. Because speaking is such a complex skill, learners certainly may need a lot of assistance to prepare for speaking. Thus, they are required to be provided with some options of learning strategies they could make use as a way to help them build up their speaking skill.

### **Related Research Report**

One related research entitled 'Students' Learning Strategies in EFL Classroom' was taken into account. It was written by Sri Damayanti. She wanted to emphasize the important role of students' language learning strategies in class to improve their English acquisition. Therefore she really intended to observe what strategies her students applied inside the class when having English subject.

### **FINDINGS**

After having finished with working on the whole research activities, all of the data that was obtained from the three research instruments was then combined and analyzed. The findings were as follow:

1. In building up speaking skill, good English learners consistently practice to speak everyday. Though they are busy with their daily routines, they will take time--10 to 15 minutes--to give a chance to practice. They said 'It does not have to be long. The main

important thing is that it must be effective and efficient and we try to be familiar with the use of the language in our everyday life. Thus we may get accustomed with that'.

2. Some good English learners are also those learners who have ever failed in their specialized subjects, particularly speaking. They said that have ever got a C. But they never give up to get an A. Thus they frequently practice their speaking to make it much better.
3. Good English learners will have a willingness to do a monologue practice. When I asked them whether or not they had another activity, besides having conversation (dialogues) with friends, to sharpen their speaking, they replied that making a short speech in front of mirror was also a good thing to do.
4. Most good English learners have strong interest to learn the language. Therefore, although there are many obstacles, as they like it, they will try hard to get a way out of the problems.
5. Good English learners are those who have confidence and never feel shy in making mistakes when speaking. They said that it was just impossible for them to be able to speak English fluently in a short period of time. It needs long process. Making mistakes is actually a part of the process to be better English learners.
6. Good English learners are constantly aware of the importance of memorizing

vocabulary. This will help them speak.

## CONCLUSION

Learning strategy will, in this regard, help English learners improve their speaking skill. There are of course a lot of strategies they may want to use. They, however, need to consider whether or not the strategy itself is good to be applied. Thus they had better take good English learners' strategies as their example to assist them in building up speaking skill as it has already been proven.

The strategies that are often employed by good English learners are actually the simple ones, namely: having speaking practice regularly, memorizing vocabulary and trying to use it in conversation. Besides having those two activities, good English learners also do monologue to develop their speaking skill. They never feel shy and afraid of being failed in trying a new thing. They regard failure as a part of the learning process into success.

## RECOMMENDATION

Although this study was primarily aimed to identify the students' strategies in building up speaking skill only, by considering the result obtained, it is also highly recommended for English teachers to facilitate various kind of teaching strategies in class. As it is widely known that teacher is also one of the factors that could influence the success of their students' learning success, it is better for him to know kind of learning strategies preferred by his students and create optimal learning environment. By doing this, teacher will really contribute their function as a learning facilitator for his students.

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