

## Choices of Language Learning Strategies and the TOEFL Score Achieved by Indonesian EFL Learners

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui strategi belajar bahasa Inggris yang digunakan oleh mahasiswa jurusan Teknik Sipil Politeknik Negeri Lhokseumawe dalam meningkatkan ketrampilan membaca dalam bahasa Inggris. Sampel penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa yang sudah mengikuti tes TOEFL sebagai persiapan pendaftaran pada program internasional. Sebanyak 9 mahasiswa diberikan kuesioner dengan 3 Likert scale. Kuesioner berisi 20 pernyataan dan mahasiswa diminta memilih frekuensi penerapan setiap strategi. 20 pernyataan yang diberikan memuat 3 strategi yaitu *cognitive*, *metacognitive* dan *social*. Data dianalisa dengan menghitung persentase mahasiswa yang menggunakan strategi tertentu dengan frekuensi tertentu. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa yang menerapkan strategi *cognitive* lebih banyak, diikuti dengan *metacognitive* dan *social*. Mahasiswa yang mendapatkan skor tinggi menerapkan semua strategi, tapi menerapkan strategi *cognitive* lebih sering sedangkan dua strategi lainnya diterapkan kadang-kadang. Mahasiswa yang berhasil dengan nilai skor yang tinggi dapat dijadikan sebagai model atau contoh bagi pemelajar lain yang masih mengalami kesulitan dalam meningkatkan skil membaca dalam bahasa Inggris. Walaupun pemilihan strategi setiap pemelajar berbeda, dosen dapat membantu mahasiswa untuk menggugah dan membuat pemelajar secara sadar menerapkan strategi belajar dalam mencapai keterampilan yang ditargetkan. Dosen perlu mengajarkan semua strategi yang dapat diterapkan dalam belajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing dan mahasiswa disarankan untuk memilih strategi tertentu yang cocok dengan pilihan gaya belajarnya.

**Kata kunci:** strategi belajar reading, skor tes TOEFL

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### INTRODUCTION

Learning strategies are defined as “specifications, 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” (Scarcella&Oxford,1992). When the learner consciously chooses strategies that fit 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 (Oxford, 2003).

The studies in the area of English Language Learning Strategies (hereafter, LLS) have been done since decades to enhance the proficiency of L2 learners (Alfian, 2021; Behabadi & Behfrouz, 2013;

Fithriyah, et al, 2019; Griffiths, 2013; Griffiths & Cansiz, 2015; Habok & Magyar, 2018; Sukying, 2021). Many of these studies have confirmed that LLS help students become more effective language learners and enhance their English language mastery. There are some strategies of language learning that commonly used among the researchers of language learning strategies to assess the strategies used by language learners. Those were introduced by Oxford (1990) that involved six learning strategy categories: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies.

Oxford (1990) divided LLS into two main categories: direct and indirect. Direct strategies directly influence the learning process by helping learners to achieve the goal in the target language. The strategies consist of memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. While indirect strategies involve metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

Memory strategies assist learners by memorizing and store new information then use it in the new context. Cognitive strategies involve processing information and structuring it to help learner understand and produce language in different ways. Compensation strategies is used in managing to have a balanced receptive and productive skill. The strategies include guessing the meaning of unknown words, gesturing while reading, listening for or using synonyms, and paraphrasing when dealing with difficulties that occur in communication. Metacognitive strategies include organizing, planning, and evaluating one's learning process. Affective strategies connect to emotions, feelings, motivation, and anxiety. Social strategies interact with friends or people in the surrounding to help learners gaining the learning target.

Reading is one of the receptive skills in language proficiency. Most of learners who learn foreign language in academic setting start the process of learning by reading. They start reading new language like English from any resources they could access. Nowadays, the online resources to learn English are so massive. So, the rapid growth of the resources may bring positive impact to the language learner in enhancing the language proficiency. However, most of the students do not focus on what strategies fit them the most. Students are not always aware of the power of consciously using L2 learning strategies for making learning quicker and more effective (Nyikos & Oxford, 1993). Skilled teachers help their students develop an awareness of learning strategies and enable them to use a wider range of appropriate strategies (Oxford, 2003).

Therefore, it is required the assistance from the teacher to make them realize so that the students can maximize the result of language learning. To increase L2 proficiency, some researchers and teachers have provided instruction that helped students learn how to use more relevant and more powerful learning strategies (Oxford, 2003).

Learners employ different strategies in learning a foreign language. Therefore, the result they achieve is also different. Those who are more active in applying various strategies which suit their needs tend to achieve better result rather than those who are not. This is as pointed out by Macaro (2001) “learners who are pro-active in their pursuit of language learning appear to learn best”.

Some studies have discovered different strategy most preferred by students. Sukying (2021) found that affective strategies were used the most frequently by the first year university students in Thailand, followed by metacognitive, compensation, cognitive, social and memory strategies, respectively. On the other hand, Alfian (2021) in his study found that the most favored strategy used by the EFL students in Islamic University was metacognitive strategy. Fithriyah, et al (2019) who compared the strategies of language learning used by the students of English and Arabic major found that metacognitive strategy was mostly applied.

This study was aimed to identify the English language learning strategies employed by the students in enhancing their reading skill and the result of TOEFL score for reading section achieved by civil engineering students of Lhokseumawe State Polytechnic. This research was also to find out the English language learning strategies used by students who achieved good score which may be a best practice for less successful learners who achieve low score and still find difficulties in learning. The skill-based research with the comparison to achieved score in the standardized international test is still very limited, therefore, we focus this research considering LLS used based on the skill.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research was conducted by gathering data from the questionnaire that filled in by the students of Civil Engineering, Lhokseumawe State Polytechnic, Indonesia, who also involved as a member of college English community in Civil Engineering English Corner (hereafter, CEEC). The study applied purposive sampling. The sample were the students who have taken the TOEFL test for

their application to the international program. The students came from different year of study. The respondent were nine students. The questionnaire was adopted from the language learning strategies introduced by Oxford (1990) and simplified based on the skill. The skill assessed in this study was reading skill only. The three categories applied in the questionnaire were the combination strategies between cognitive, metacognitive and social. This was taken into a consideration because all the three skills are related to greater L2 proficiency and self-efficacy, as learners' progress to higher proficiency. The questionnaire consists of 20 questions of 3 Likert-scale. It was to know the frequency of each strategy use. The scale used were "frequent, seldom and never". The question number 1-11 were to measure cognitive strategy, the question number 12-17 were to measure metacognitive strategy and the question 18-20 was to measure social strategy. Data was tabulated in two decimal. It was 0.00% = no; 0.01%-24.99% = fraction; 25%-49.9% = nearly half; 50% = half; 50.01%- 74.99% = majority; 75%-99.9% = in general; dan 100% = wholly. The data was tabulated separately based on the frequency "frequent, seldom and never" and each category of strategy "cognitive, metacognitive and social". Then it was analysed by evaluating the strategies tend to be used by the leaners. Comparison is made where needed.

## DISCUSSION

The result of the study divided into three parts: cognitive strategies; metacognitive strategies; and social strategies. The analysis was done by discussing two research question separately. Each was evaluated. The data was tabulated in percentage of two decimal.

Table 1. The percentage of cognitive strategies employed by the students.

The following is the result for cognitive strategies employed by nine respondents:

### COGNITIVE STRATEGIES

NO	QUESTION	N (IN PERCENTAGE )		
		FREQUENT	SELDOM	NEVER
1	To understand unfamiliar English words while I am reading, I guess from available clues	77,8%	22,2%	0%
2	I learn English by reading English books, news and magazine	33,3%	66,7%	0%
3	I connect the spellings of English words with similar Indonesian words to understand the meanings	55,6%	44,4%	0%

4	I try to understand sentences by analysing their patterns	100%	0%	0%
5	I try to translate word by word	77,8%	11,1%	11,1%
6	I try to understand the passage by using my general knowledge and experience	88,9%	11,1%	0%
7	I use the key words to understand the whole ideas	77,8%	22,2%	0%
8	I read the passage aloud	22,2%	55,6%	22,2%
9	I take notes to remember the ideas	44,4%	33,3%	22,2%
10	While I read a text, I try to anticipate the story line	55,6%	44,4%	0%
11	I read a text more for ideas than words	55,6%	44,4%	0%

As shown in the table, it can be seen that all students employed strategy in item number four frequently. While other 4 items used frequently by 77,8% above, and 3 items was applied frequently by majority of the students, that was 55,6%. On the other hand, 2 items were applied frequently only by nearly half of the students and only 1 item was in fraction status, that was 22,2%. 1 statement was just applied sometimes by 66,7%, that was reading English books, news and magazine. It means the students who were frequently learn English by reading the text from the books, news and magazine were very limited, only 33,3%. In addition, the students who read the text aloud frequently was only 22,2%, the half of the students only read the text aloud for sometimes, that was 55,6%, while the rest never read the text aloud.

Table 2. The percentage of the students applied metacognitive strategies.

The following is the result of metacognitive strategies used by the students:

### **METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES**

NO	QUESTION	N (IN PERCENTAGE)		
		FREQUENT	SELDOM	NEVER
12	I correct my mistakes by rereading the text	66,7%	33,3%	0%
13	I choose a topic or certain materials for my practice	44,4%	33,3%	22,2%
14	I check and recheck my understanding after reading a passage	88,9%	11,1%	0%
15	If I can not understand a reading passage, I try to analyze what difficulty I actually have	66,7%	33,3%	0%
16	In reading, I pick out key words and repeat them to myself	66,7%	33,3%	0%
17	I try to be aware of which words or grammar rules give me the greatest trouble. In this way I can pay special attention to them while I read and practice.	66,7%	33,3%	0%

It could be seen in table 2 that none of the items applied frequently by 100% of the student. The highest percentage was 88,9%, it was only for 1 statement. While other 5 strategies applied frequently by lower than 70% of the students. 33,3% applied the strategies only for sometimes. 22,2% never applied choosing a topic or certain materials for practice.

Table 3. The percentage of applied social strategies used by the students

The following data presenting the percentage of used social strategies in enhancing reading skill.

NO	QUESTION	N (IN PERCENTAGE)		
		FREQUENT	SELDOM	NEVER
18	I discuss reading passages with my friends	22,2%	55,6%	22,2%
19	If I don't understand the content of a reading passage, I ask my friends or my teachers for help	33,3%	66,7%	0%
20	I improve my reading skill by reading letters or online messages from my friends	33,3%	55,6%	11,1%

The trend for social strategies is the lowest frequently used by the students compared to cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The highest percentage was only 33,3%. It means only 33,3% of the students used 2 from 3 social strategies.

Table 4. TOEFL score achieved by the students:

NAME	TOEFL SCORE (READING)
FS	36
FA	42
MR	40
MD	42
AS	45
TIS	60
TAR	38
MI	42
TMA	40

The average score achieved by the students was 42,77. The highest score achieved by the students was 60, which is almost excellent. The highest score of TOEFL PBT for reading section is 67. The student who achieved highest score used all strategies in learning language, tended to use cognitive

strategies but still sometime use other two, metacognitive strategies and social strategies. While the lowest score achieved by the students were 36 and 38, the rest of them got 40 and above. It means overall the score was somewhere still in pre intermediate level regarding to the range of reading score of PBT TOEFL is 31-67.

From the data it could be interpreted that the students of civil engineering of Lhokseumawe State Polytechnic applied the cognitive strategy more frequently, followed by metacognitive strategy and the last was social strategy. In enhancing their reading skill, they tended not to employ social strategy, even some students did not used social strategy at all in upgrading their reading comprehension. It may be somehow affects the score they achieved in TOEFL test. The strategy used by the students in language learning could be varied, but the task of the teacher is introducing all strategies that could be used by EFL learners which may be fit to the style and personal preferences of the students.

## **CONCLUSION**

It could be concluded that the students in this study used the cognitive strategies more frequently compared to metacognitive strategies and social strategies. The student who were successful in reading section applied all the strategy in enhancing the reading skill, but he employed cognitive strategy more frequently.

It could be summed up that the students of civil engineering of Lhokseumawe State Polytechnic mostly preferred the cognitive strategy, followed by metacognitive strategy and the last was social strategy. In enhancing their reading skill, they tended not to employ social strategy, even some students did not used social strategy at all in upgrading their reading comprehension.

However, the respondent in this study and the skill assessed were still very limited, therefore, it needs future research which assess all language skills in comparison to achieved score in international standardized test, with a big amount of respondent.

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