
Language Learning Strategies Used by Indonesian Pharmacy Students Beyond the Classroom

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Abstract

Although many scholars have conducted studies on Language Learning Strategies (LLS) around the world, this issue is still new in the context of English for Medical Purposes (EMP), especially as used by Indonesian pharmacy students. Further, a majority of those previous studies have been conducted using exclusively quantitative research. In response to these empirical and methodological gaps, the current research adopts a qualitative case study to examine the LLS used by Indonesian pharmacy students, as guided by Oxford's (1990) LLS theory. This study utilized in-depth interviews to gather information from participants. The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews presented five major strategies used by learners: engaging in social interaction, enriching their vocabulary, using web-based language learning, practicing through online platforms, and employing fun learning. Findings demonstrate that most of their learning strategies involve employing online platforms.

Keywords: Beyond the classroom, LLS, pharmacy students.



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1. Introduction

To succeed in enhancing their English skills, learners cannot depend on instruction alone but must also foster their language skills beyond the classroom. Among the various factors affecting English learners' success in informal contexts, such as motivation, efforts, and learning resources, the learning strategies they utilize play an important role as well. Oxford (1990), for instance, stated that Language Learning Strategies (LLS) contribute to learning a new language as learners generate, select, and implement methods to reach their learning targets.

The importance of LLS in the field can obviously be seen from the various proponents of the concept, like Chamot and O'Malley (1994), Ellis (1994), Oxford (1990), and Rubin (1987). Although each of these experts has their own model of LLS, they are all in agreement regarding the ways in which LLS can be used by learners to enhance their learning of another language. Among numerous classifications of the LLS formulated by the experts, the taxonomy very frequently cited is the one proposed by Oxford (1990); her Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) has been used globally and translated into more than twenty languages, including Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, and many more. Oxford (1990) categorizes language strategies into two main classes: ones that contribute directly to language learning and those that contribute indirectly. Furthermore, Oxford (1990) subcategorizes the direct strategies into memory, cognitive and compensation strategies; and the indirect strategies into the metacognitive, affective and social strategies.

Furthermore, the significance and the popularity of the LLS concept have drawn much interest among researchers. Studies on language learning strategies have been prevalent these last couple of decades around the world (Alfian, 2018; Anam & Stracke, 2016; Galishnikova, 2014; Grainger, 2012; Grenfell & Harris, 2015; Habok & Magyar, 2018; Hajar, 2020; Huang, 2018; Lin et al., 2017; Ngoc & Samad, 2020; Park, 2005; Perea, 2019; Rao, 2016; Thomas & Rose, 2018; Wu, 2008; Yu & Wang, 2009). For example, Alfian (2018) explored the relation between language proficiency level and language learning strategy choice of EFL learners at an Islamic university in Indonesia. It was also found that higher proficiency level learners tended to choose metacognitive strategies. Another study by Park (2005) is about language learning strategies among Korean EFL students. The study found that Korean learners were in favor of compensation strategies. Additionally, Yang (2010) who conducted a study involving high, intermediate and beginning levels of three hundred participants in a university in Korea discovered that high proficiency level students tended to choose metacognitive strategies, intermediate level learners tended to choose compensation

strategies, and beginning level learners employed compensation strategies the most. The fact that most of the previous studies are quantitative in nature, with data collected through the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire, illustrates that there are still remaining gaps in the research. This current study is an attempt to fill that gap, in which a qualitative approach is utilized to focus on the relevance of the LLS in the case of pharmacy students. This study is beneficial for the classroom practice of teachers in improving their teaching method by knowing learners' learning strategies to make it easier for them to design the learning activities. Furthermore, this study is also valuable for English language learners in which the strategies in this study could be models for them.

2. Method

To gain a deep understanding of social processes in a natural setting, we adopted a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2007; Gay et al., 2012; Nunan, 2010). This study was trying to retrieve comprehensive information about LLS employed by Indonesian pharmacy students. Specifically, under the qualitative approach, a case study was used as the method for this study. Percy et al. (2015) defined the criteria of a case study as the inclusion of clearly recognizable boundaries that differentiate the case from any other collection of instances. In this case, participants are Indonesian pharmacy students, because such participants are easily differentiated from other kinds of learners.

The participants in the current study are all pharmacy students who have completed English for Medical Purposes (EMP) courses (English 1, 2, and 3) during three semesters at one college of health sciences in Indonesia. Participants were selected as interviewees based on purposive sampling. They are Andi, Amalia, Ayu, Desi, Dewi, Dini, Lala, Rina, Rini, and Tini. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were guaranteed confidentiality. To protect their rights and privacy, researchers concealed the names of participants through the use of pseudonyms. Following ethical research protocols, researchers could not insist on the participants' involvement. They had the right to stop any time they wanted for their own personal reasons. However, the participants were very helpful and cooperative during the process of data collection.

Researchers employed face-to-face interviews for data collection. After conducting several interviews with the participants, researchers needed to immerse in the data for analysis. To explore the strategies employed by Indonesian pharmacy students while learning English beyond the classroom, researchers analyzed and reanalysed the individual interviews line by line. After this stage, researchers created our coding categories, which came from words and phrases that represented the regularities, patterns and topics our data covered (Saldaña, 2009). Along with coding category development, researchers also employed a thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2008), there are six steps of thematic analysis, including familiarizing data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. During the coding

of the data, researchers followed the two cycles of coding described by Saldaña (2009). Researchers deployed first cycle methods during the initial coding of the data and then utilized second cycle methods that involved analytic skills, such as reorganizing and reanalyzing, before reaching a final list of themes.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the LLS use of Indonesian pharmacy students beyond the classroom. Based on data analysis, researchers discovered several overarching themes, including learners engaging in social interaction, enriching their vocabulary, using web-based language learning, practicing through online platforms, and employing fun learning.

3.1.1 Engaging in social interaction

In this study, participants stated that engaging in social interaction is one of the strategies they used for learning English. They aggressively interacted with people around them. For example, Ayu informed researchers that she practiced English with her family,

“...to evaluate my English, I try to practice with my family, especially with my sister, [who knows English well] ...she will let me know my progress...”

In addition, Rini reported that she was brave to interact with foreigners as an effort to practise English,

“...If I meet foreigners at public places, such as an airport, tourist spots... I approach them to practise my English. Sometimes I am stuck when they use words that I don't know, but I am confident in it...”

Additionally, Dini explained that she asked for help from her friend if having difficulty concerning English

“...When I have difficulty saying something in English, I ask for help from my friend...”

3.1.2 Enriching vocabulary

In this study, the participants shared with us, concerning the language learning strategies they used beyond the classroom, that they would engage with vocabulary. For example, Tini informed us that she reviewed her notebooks to enrich vocabulary,

“...I reviewed my English regularly through reading my notebooks, especially to enrich my vocabulary...I remember English vocabulary by grouping, for

example terms in pharmacy...I classified which ones included solid materials, liquid material... and so on.”

In addition, Ayu added how she remembered the English vocabulary,

“...I take notes of the vocabulary...I open the note before sleeping to memorize them. Let's say it is my pre-sleeping activity...”

Additionally, Dewi stated that she enriched her vocabulary concerning pharmacy terms through academic reading,

“...to enrich my use of technical words, I read international research articles. It is easily accessed [online]. Through reading the articles, I learned English and gained a knowledge of pharmacy terms...”

Also, Lala said that she tries to use a compensation strategy in case she was stuck in particular vocabulary,

“...when speaking, if I do not know a word that I want to say, I just use words that have close meaning. For example, I use a cupboard instead of shelf...”

3.1.3 Using web based language learning

In this study, the participants shared that they were also assisted in learning English beyond the classroom through Web-Based Language Learning (WBLL). For example, Dini reflected that she utilized WBLL to learn English,

“... after learning English, I use Duolingo [application] to evaluate my progress. This platform can show my level...”

Moreover, Desi also employed WBLL, especially for evaluating what she has learned before ,

“... I use an application to learn English. The name is Cake, I don't feel like it's traditional learning but it is more like playing a game on my mobile phone. I enjoy it a lot...”

3.1.4 Practicing through online platforms

As the world becomes smaller as a result of digital technology, nowadays, being able to practice English from anywhere is a huge advantage. One type of online platform used as an interactive learning resource is social media, though it is not specifically designed for

language learning purposes. For instance, Dini reported that she employed Facebook to practice English,

“...I have a WhatsApp group consisting of people from all over the world, like from India, Turkey, Brunei, this group gives me a chance of practicing [English]...”

Similarly, Amalia stated that she integrated the use of Facebook and Google Translate to practise English,

“...one of the ways to learn English is through chatting with many friends all over the world on Facebook. If I don’t understand their English, I just open Google Translate to help me...”

Another of the participants, Andi, participated in an online seminar to practice English,

“...to practice my English, I joined a webinar [online seminar]...”

3.1.5 Employing fun learning

The participants shared with us that entertainment was also a possible medium they would use to help learn English. For instance, Rina stated that one way to learn English is through movies and music,

“...I like watching movies [in English]. I can easily understand English through movies, including learning pronunciation...”

Then she added that music is a fun medium of learning English,

“...I learn English through listening to music. It makes me enjoy [releasing the stress]...”

In addition, Amalia told us that she learns English by listening to music,

“...learning through music, I do not only listen to it but also memorize the lyrics. If I get confused, I use Google...”

3.2 Discussion

Five overarching themes were identified after having meticulously applied the research method, interviewed the participants, and transcribed the dialogues: (1) engaging in social interactions, (2) enriching vocabulary, (3) using web-based language learning, (4) practicing through online platforms, (5) and employing fun learning. In this section of the paper, those themes will be discussed further based on the results of the interview which was conducted by the researchers some time ago.

Firstly, engaging in social interaction was a LLS employed by the pharmacy students identified in this study, with results indicating that the pharmacy students immersed themselves in conversation with the people around them who could use English, such as friends, family, teachers, native speakers, and neighbors. These findings are in line with previous work (Nhem, 2019) in which social interaction, such as asking for help and initiating conversation with native speakers or other competent English users was the strategy used by the language learners. The choice of these strategies, which include the social strategies category (Oxford, 1990), confirmed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory proposed by Vygotsky in which the social aspect plays an important role in the learning process (Sari, 2018). Furthermore, interaction with more knowledgeable interlocutors will motivate the pharmacy students to learn more and have more courage to sharpen their ability in learning foreign languages.

Secondly, it was found that enriching their vocabulary is another strategy employed by pharmacy students in their language learning. The students employ several strategies in enriching their vocabularies. For example, students use memorization techniques, such as grouping and using context clues, which concur with the memory strategy proposed by Oxford (1990). Therefore, it could be inferred that the pharmacy students seem to seek strategies to enrich their vocabularies through memorization and employing several techniques. The findings of this study support the findings of others studies (i.e. Goundar, 2019) which revealed that memory strategies are very important for enriching students' vocabulary because a certain amount of vocabulary must be available for learners to facilitate fluent communication in the target language (Bai, 2018). Goundar (2019) conducted a study exploring vocabulary learning strategies among adult EFL learners. The results of his study demonstrated that memory/repetition, guessing, using context clues, and dictionaries were employed by the learners in learning the language. The similarity of this finding with other findings confirms that pharmacy students are aware of vocabulary learning strategies, as well as their ability to improve their learning.

Third, using web-based language learning is another strategy used by pharmacy students in learning English. A variety of websites and applications were used by the pharmacy students in learning English, such as WBLL and Duolingo. This indicates that the learners can take advantage of media and technology, especially internet sources, for their language learning and use that technology to enhance their language learning strategies (Zhou & Wei, 2018). The finding of this study has confirmed other studies about the importance of web-based language learning as the source of learning (i.e Huang et al., 2020; Korkmaz & Öz, 2021; Nor, 2018). For example, Nor (2018) conducted a study investigating the technology used in teaching and learning, especially essay writing. The findings indicated that the utilization of modern technologies in classrooms, such as web-based learning, gives learners the opportunity to learn faster and with more satisfaction. Similarly, Huang et al. (2020)

explored the factors influencing Chinese students' use of Internet-based technology for language learning. They found that Internet-based technology influences the students' attitude toward language learning. The use of internet-based technology has an impact on student's attitudes toward language learning. Additionally, attitude, perceived utility, and the subjective norm all had a big impact on students' intent to use Internet-based technology with a learning focus. Thus, using web-based language learning is one of the best strategies applied by language learners nowadays.

Fourth, the other strategy employed by the pharmacy students is practicing English through online platforms or social media such as Whatsapp, Facebook, Telegram, among others. These findings indicated that pharmacy students are aware of the function of social media in language learning, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. They realize that social media is not only used for communication in the same language but also for improving and motivating them to learn another language. The practising on the online platforms employed by the pharmacy students in this study has also been discussed in several studies (Altam, 2020; Slim & Hafedh, 2019; Susilo, 2014). For example, Altam (2020) explores the use of social media on EFL Yemeni learners during the COVID-19 outbreak. He analysed four social media platforms, namely Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp. Results indicate that social media has helped the students acquire and practice new vocabularies as well as decrease their spelling errors. In another study, Slim and Hafedh (2019) explore the effects of Facebook-assisted teaching on learning English for specific purposes. The findings indicated that a high proportion of students used Facebook platforms for language learning. They also conclude that Facebook could be an effective platform for language learning. Thus, the strategy used by pharmacy learners has been supported by the previous research and indicates that practising through online platforms can stimulate the learners to communicate with others through social interaction (Derakhshan & Hasanabbasi, 2015).

Fifth, the last strategy that the learners used is employing fun learning, such as listening through watching TV, listening to the song, among others. This finding has affirmed the affective strategies which address the learner's emotional needs, such as confidence, through emotions, attitudes, motives, and values of language learning (Oxford, 1990). This means that the pharmacy learners invoke their emotions to motivate their learning by lowering anxiety using music. The use of songs has been identified in several studies (Mailawati & Anita, 2022; Murad et al., 2018; Zamin, et. al. 2020). For example, Mailawati and Anita (2022) conducted a study examining the impact of songs on language learning, especially in improving listening skills. The data were collected through questionnaires. The results indicated that songs have significantly impacted language learning and it is likely to improve students' listening skills. Similarly, Zamin et al. (2020) investigated the use of songs in English language classrooms in increasing their vocabulary. The result indicated that songs can increase vocabulary acquisition among English language learners. They conclude that

such fun ways of enriching vocabulary can be an effective way to promote language learning. In addition, singing songs can be an engaging and effective activity when learning a foreign language. In line with Zamin et al. (2020), Murad et al. (2018) also argues the use of songs in language learning improves students' pronunciation and vocabulary. In addition, song applications, such as Singing and Listening to Improve Our Natural Speaking (SLIONS), are fun applications that can motivate students to further practice their speaking. Thus, fun learning, such as songs and other mediums, can improve and motivate language learning.

4. Conclusion

There are thus a variety of strategies that students can employ in learning other languages or improving their learning. This study was intended to explore the language learning strategies employed by Indonesian Pharmacy students in learning English beyond the classroom. This present study revealed that there are several strategies employed by pharmacy students in learning English. It was found that engaging in social interaction, enriching their vocabulary, using web-based language learning, practicing through online platforms, and employing fun learning were the strategies employed by the students. In light of the findings, which are well supported by the current related literature, this study recommends those five overarching themes as effective LLS which may possibly help pharmacy students, those who come from other academic areas, or even for common people who intend to learn English just for fun: engaging in social interactions, enriching their vocabulary, using web-based language learning, practicing through online platforms, and employing fun learning. These strategies can be used for learners to learn a foreign language, in this case, English, in a more enjoyable way. The findings of this study could also provide insight to other language learners and encourage them to use these strategies in learning another language. The findings also provide further insight for English teachers to encourage students to find possible strategies in learning. It is better for future researchers to conduct further research that deals with language learning strategies in other medical areas such as public health science, health analysis, and midwifery majors to find out the similarities and differences of language learning strategies within and beyond the classroom. Moreover, the next researchers may conduct research on what kind of language learning strategies are employed for each language skill, for instance: listening, speaking, writing, reading, or speaking used by students of other medical majors.

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