

LEARNING STRATEGIES AND ANXIETY ON GRAMMAR ACHIEVEMENT

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Abstract

Successful foreign or second language instruction involves individual learning differences as important variables observed among students. Out of many variables, learning strategies and anxiety are highlighted to be major concerns influencing grammar achievement. This paper sought to examine whether learning strategies and anxiety reported by EFL students influencing grammar scores. Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaires were administered to fifty-nine student samples. Path analysis was used to map the relationship model of the variables in this study. The statistical analysis revealed that the influence of learning strategies and anxiety on grammar score was 0.063 or 6.3%. This implied that 93.7% of students' grammar score was influenced by other variables. The statistical analysis also showed that there was a negative correlation between learning strategies and grammar scores ($r = -0.200$, $p < .05$). Similarly, a negative correlation was also seen in anxiety and grammar score ($r = -0.146$, $p < .05$). The findings contribute to improve the quality of teaching grammar and provide recommendation for future studies in the area of teaching and learning grammar in the EFL context.

Keywords: Learning Strategies, Anxiety, Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

A. BACKGROUND

Grammar is a necessary language system to be taught in the class of English for general purposes. It deals with the rules of language usage which contributes to sentence production (Chen, 2016). The role of grammar is crucial to the instruction of four English skills and vocabulary to establish communication tasks (Long and Richards in Widodo, 2006). This clearly indicates that

grammar instruction is required to shape accurate and fluent communication through grammatically correct sentence production. Widodo (2006) adds that without a good grammar mastery knowledge in both English as a foreign language (EFL) learning and English as a second language (ESL) learning, learners' language development will be severely constrained. Learning grammar aims at building comprehensible output of language production to improve the communicative competence among learners.

Nevertheless, there is an undeniable fact that grammar class consists of heterogeneous learners. Each individual learner shows different ability in learning grammar and his/her learning experiences are likely to be seen in his/her different level of grammar achievement. Some personal characteristics or ways identified by Ellis (2008) lying inside the individual learners and varying from a learner to another according to learners' personal characteristics (Dörnyei, 2005) are essential to determine the success of learning grammar, especially in the EFL context. Of many factors influence learners' success in learning grammar, learning strategies and anxiety gain most attention on the assumption that both are perceived to be essential either to encourage or to hinder English language learning.

In comparison to learning strategies' studies on language skills, the learning strategies that are employed in learning grammar have not been widely explored (Gurata, 2008 & Pawlak, 2009). In ESP class, Chen (2016) revealed four strategies that help facilitate grammar learning namely cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. Chen (2016) adds "the automatized strategic component helps to automatize the grammatical component, and consequently to increase language proficiency". The use of certain learning strategies in understanding grammar enhances learners' grammatical and communicative competence. In another investigation, Pawlak (2009) failed to find a strong positive relationship between the use of Grammar Learning Strategies (GLS) and achievement. Tilfalrioğlu and Yalçın (2005) also investigated the relationship between grammar learning strategies and overall achievement and found no significant difference between unsuccessful and successful students in using the overall use of

grammar learning strategies. Based on the findings of the previous studies, on the one hand, the application of learning strategies in grammar class varied from one student to another and was helpful to facilitate the understanding of grammar lesson, but on the other hand, there was no significant effect of applying these strategies for the improvement of grammar achievement.

There have been a number of studies that revealed a negative relationship between anxiety and language achievement (Aida, 1994; Cheng, 2005; Atef-vahid & Kashani, 2011). In relation to grammar, Sila (2010) reported that young adolescent students felt anxious about teachers' negative evaluation in grammar. Alidoost, Mirchenari, and Mehr (2013) found that anxiety and English achievement were negatively correlated in terms of test anxiety. The finding revealed that high school students experienced a feeling of anxiety because most of the class time only emphasized grammar instruction and gave little opportunities to practice speaking in English. With a low level of English proficiency, most teachers tend to avoid teaching speaking in class and focus their teaching on grammatical structures. They teach and familiarize students with tests. As a result, some students with poor English achievement were anxious about English classes and tests.

Most findings suggest that anxiety is a negative variable in L2 or FL learning and poses an obstacle to language learning. This type of anxiety is known as "debilitating anxiety" because it affects learners' performance in negative ways, "both indirectly through worry and self-doubt and directly by reducing participation and creating overt avoidance of the language" (Oxford, 1992, p.35). On the contrary, anxiety is actually "helpful" or "facilitating" in the language learning process (Piniel, 2006) and is one of the keys to success, closely related to competitiveness (Bailey, 1983 in Brown, 2000). Furthermore, facilitating anxiety is only helpful for very simple learning tasks, but not with more complicated processes such as language learning (Horwitz, 1990 in Oxford, 1992).

To sum up, this study is carried out as an attempt to address the significant roles of learning strategies and anxiety in influencing students' grammar achievement. It also aims at identifying the most frequent learning strategy applied by English literature students

when learning and using grammar. In addition, it purposefully highlights to examine the relationship between learning strategies, anxiety, and grammar achievement. Learning strategies and anxiety are required to continuously investigate in order to provide optimal learning instruction and appropriate language learning strategies training to learners.

B. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

All learners use certain strategies in order to promote their learning as well as to make improvements in developing their knowledge and understanding of L2 learning. A range of learning strategies is usually employed by more proficient learners (Ellis, 2008). Ellis (2003) defines learning strategies as particular approaches or techniques used by learners to learn an L2. Similarly, Ortega (2009) illustrates learning strategies as “behavioral procedures that people engage in with the aim to gain control over their learning process” (p. 208). Oxford (1990, 2003) develops two main classifications of learning strategies: direct strategies and indirect strategies. Direct strategies are subdivided into memory-related strategy (e.g. connecting word sounds with pictures), cognitive strategy (e.g. practicing structures and sounds formal), and compensation strategy (e.g. guessing meaning in context). Meanwhile, indirect strategies consist of metacognitive strategy (e.g. identifying learners’ own learning styles and needs), affective strategy (e.g. self-rewarding for good language performance) and social strategy (e.g. asking questions to other L2 learners).

Another individual difference variable that influences L2 learning is anxiety. Schovel (1978) in Brown (2000) describes *anxiety* as the feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry. These feelings lead learners to be less motivated and react negatively during the learning process which results in poorer performance (Oxford, 1992). Some individuals report experiencing intense feelings of apprehension, tension, and even fear when they think of foreign languages (Ortega, 2009). According to Horwitz and Young (1991), there are three different types of anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear

of negative evaluation. The communication apprehension refers to students' low ability to communicate with second or foreign language which further leads to uneasiness (Horwitz and Cope, 1986 in Zhao Na, 2007). Test anxiety deals with the fear of failure rather than to a medium of communication (Horwitz, 1986 in Mejía, 2014). Fear of negative evaluation deals with the situation where students are afraid of making mistakes and evaluated by those who consider themselves more knowledgeable (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991 in Mejía, 2014).

C. METHODOLOGY

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaires were administered to fifty-nine students. SILL is a 5-point Likert scale consisting of 50 items which rate the frequency of learning strategies used by students (Oxford, 1990). A criterion for measuring the frequency of learning according to Oxford (1990) consists of a mean of 1.0-2.4 indicating a low level of strategy use, a mean score of 2.5-3.4 for medium use of the strategy, and a mean of 3.5-5.0 for high frequency use of the strategy. The reliability of the SILL ranged from .93 to .98 (Green & Oxford, 1995). Meanwhile, FLCAS is a self-report questionnaire designed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) which made up of 33 items and used to capture the specific anxiety reaction of a learner to a foreign language setting (Horwitz, 1983 in Aida, 1994). It is a valid and reliable result as what considered by several researchers (Sila, 2010) with Cronbach's alpha coefficient .93 (Horwitz, 2001). The anxiety levels according to Horwitz (2008) cited in Elaldi (2016): students who average around 3 are slightly anxious, students who average below 3 are probably not very anxious, and students who average 4 and above are probably fairly anxious.

Path analysis was used to map the relationship model of the variables in this study. It is "a tool for evaluating the interrelationships among variables by analyzing their correlational structure" (Everitt, 2002, p.281).

All data collected in the questionnaire were input into SPSS 17.0. The variables of descriptive statistics such as the mean (M), the standard deviation (SD), maximum, minimum, and frequency distribution of the variables were computed as a preliminary analysis. The standard scores consisting of *z scores* and *T scores* which defined as a converted score (based on the raw score) with a set mean and standard deviation to be compared to other standard scores easily (Salkind, 2007) were calculated. Next, multiple regression was applied to make a prediction whether two independent variables (*i.e.* learning strategies and anxiety) influence a dependent variable (*i.e.* grammar score). A correlation analysis was then employed to investigate the relationship between learning strategies and grammar scores. Similarly, it was also used to find the relationship between anxiety and grammar score.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

1. The use of learning strategies among EFL students in learning grammar

In this study, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was administered to fifty-nine students to rate the frequency of the use of learning strategies which consists of 50 items. The following table reports the results of each strategy.

No	Strategy	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank Order of Usage
1	Memory	3.15	.97	6
2	Cognitive	3.49	.98	3
3	Compensation	3.44	.94	4
4	Metacognitive	3.72	.87	1
5	Affective	3.16	.98	5
6	Social	3.58	.93	2
	Overall SILL	3.43	.95	

Table 1. Frequency of the Use of Language Learning Strategy among EFL Students

As illustrated in Table 1, the mean scores ranged between 3.15 and 3.72 with the overall mean score 3.43 which indicates a medium frequency of the learning strategy use. Most of the students used metacognitive learning strategy in their learning ($M = 3.72, SD = .87$). The second learning strategy frequently used by the students was a social strategy ($M = 3.58, SD = .93$). Cognitive ($M = 3.49, SD = .98$), compensation ($M = 3.44, SD = .94$) and affective ($M = 3.16, SD = 0.93$) placed as the third, fourth and fifth frequent learning strategies used by the students respectively. Meanwhile, the least frequent strategy applied in learning grammar was memory strategy ($M = 3.15, SD = .97$).

2. *Anxiety among Indonesian EFL students in learning grammar*

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was employed to measure the level of student's anxiety in learning grammar. Table 2 shows the anxiety levels of fifty-nine EFL students when learning grammar.

No	Anxiety Component	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Communication apprehension	3.11	0.87
2	Test anxiety	3.02	0.86
3	Fear of negative evaluation	3.50	0.88
	Overall FLCAS	3.15	0.87

Table 2. Levels of anxiety among Indonesian EFL students in learning grammar

According to the table above, the overall anxiety score was 3.15 ($SD = 0.87$). This indicated that students were slightly anxious when learning grammar. In grammar class, the students felt mostly anxious about negative evaluation ($M = 3.50, SD =$

0,88), followed by communication apprehension (M = 3,11, SD = 0,87). On the contrary, they felt least anxious about completing the test (M = 3,02, SD = 0,86).

3. *Learning strategies, anxiety and grammar achievement*

Applying multiple regression analysis, the following table shows the prediction of the influence of learning strategies and anxiety on grammar achievement.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.252 ^a	.063	.030	7.60007	.063	1.897	2	56	.159	2.074

a. Predictors: (Constant), SILL, Anxiety

b. Dependent Variable: Grammar

Table 3. The influence of learning strategies and anxiety on grammar achievement

Based on the above table, the influence of learning strategies and anxiety on grammar score was 0.063 or 6.3%. This implied that 93.7% of students' grammar score was influenced by other variables.

4. *Correlation of learning strategies and anxiety with grammar achievement*

To test the relationship among these three variables, a correlational study was conducted. The following table shows the relationship between learning strategies and grammar achievement as well as the relationship between anxiety and grammar achievement.

Correlations

		Grammar	Anxiety	SILL
Pearson Correlation	Grammar	1.000	-.146	-.200
	Anxiety	-.146	1.000	-.035
	SILL	-.200	-.035	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Grammar	.	.135	.064
	Anxiety	.135	.	.397
	SILL	.064	.397	.
N	Grammar	59	59	59
	Anxiety	59	59	59
	SILL	59	59	59

Table 4. Correlation of learning strategies and anxiety with grammar achievement

Based on the statistical analysis above, it was found that there was a negative correlation between learning strategies and grammar score ($r = -.200, p < .05$). Similarly, a negative correlation was also seen in anxiety and grammar score ($r = -.146, p < .05$).

Discussion

Various factors affecting foreign language learning have potentially resulted in different achievements towards different students. These factors could significantly encourage and motivate students to learn a foreign language, however, they may also hinder students' performance in learning a foreign language. Out of many factors influencing second or foreign language learning, learning strategies and anxiety became the main focuses of this study.

Learning strategies are defined as particular approaches or techniques used by learners to learn an L2 (Ellis, 2003) and a number of learning strategies used by learners to make improvements in their own L2 learning. In addition, a range of learning strategies is usually employed by more proficient learners (Ellis, 2008). The SILL scores of the participants in this study were calculated and found that the overall mean score was 3.43. According to Oxford (1990), a mean score of 2.5-3.4 indicates medium use of the strategy. It means that

students sometimes applied certain strategies in learning grammar. Comparing the means of each subset of learning strategies, metacognitive strategy ranked first as the most frequent learning strategy used by students ($M = 3.72$, $SD = .87$).

Metacognitive strategy connects with the activities like identifying learners' own learning styles and needs (Oxford, 1990, 2003) as reflected in item 31 "I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better" ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .57$). The same result of using metacognitive strategy most frequently was found in previous research of Philips (1990,1991), Tajjeddin (2001), Salehi (2002), Gurata (2008), Noormohamadi (2009), and Shabani (2015). Social strategy ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .93$) ranked second as the other most frequent strategy used by students. Philips (1990,1991) and Oxford and Ehrman (1995) also found a similar result that social strategy placed as the second most frequent strategy used by students. Social strategies involve other people in the language learning process through questioning, cooperating with peers and developing empathy (Oxford & Crookal, 1989). For example, in the scale, questioning appears in item 49 "*I ask questions in English*" while "*I practice English with other students*" (item 47) can indicate the cooperation with peers in learning grammar.

The other strategies such as cognitive ($M = 3.49$, $SD = .98$), compensation ($M = 3.44$, $SD = .94$) and affective ($M = 3.16$, $SD = 0.93$) placed as the third, fourth and fifth frequent learning strategies used by the students respectively. Last but not least, the least frequent strategy applied in learning grammar was memory strategy ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .97$). Similarly, Philips' research (1990,1991) also discovered memory strategy as the lowest rank in the classification. Memory strategies are defined as techniques specifically tailored to help learners store new information in memory and retrieve it later (Oxford & Crookal, 1989). To help remember new words, for example, students use *rhymes* (item 5), *flashcards* (item 6) and *acting out new English words* (item 7).

Anxiety is often reported to have adverse effects on second or foreign language learning. It is described as the feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry (Schovel, 1978 in Brown, 2000). In this present study, it was found that the

overall mean score was 3.15. According to Horwitz (2008) cited in Elaldi (2016), students who average around 3 are slightly anxious. Therefore, the mean score of FLCAS ($M=3.15$, $SD = 0.87$) indicates that students dealing with moderate anxiety that sometimes impacts their learning are still able to get through it.

Horwitz and Young (1991) mention three different types of anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Students felt mostly anxious about negative evaluation ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.88$). In the FLCAS items such as “*I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.*” (item 7) or “*I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.*” (item 33), students value themselves as being inferior to those whom they consider more intelligent and most of the time feel discomfort due to their teacher's remarks. Anxious language learners feel uncomfortable with their abilities (Horwitz, 2011) and this certain belief about language learning also contributes to the students' tension and frustration in the class (Horwitz et.al, 1986: 127 in Li, 2010).

Learning strategies and anxiety gave a small contribution to grammar achievement. It was found that the influence of learning strategies and anxiety on grammar score was 0.063 or 6.3%. This result implied that the other factors (93.7%) were assumed to have an impact on grammar achievement. Although learning strategies are procedures used by learners to facilitate learning (Wu, 2010), it correlated negatively with grammar achievement ($r = -0.200$, $p < .05$). This result could be interpreted that a number of learning strategies used in learning grammar did not give much help students to receive better grades. In line with learning strategies, a negative correlation was also seen in anxiety and grammar achievement ($r = -0.146$, $p < .05$). A number of previous researchers have also found a negative correlation between anxiety and achievement (Philips 1992; Aida, 1994; Cheng, 2005; and Atef-Vahid & Kashani, 2011). This indicated that the more anxious the students are, the lower their score in grammar subject and vice versa.

E. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The results of this study reveal that the participants use certain learning strategies with the frequency of use is at a medium level ($M=3.43$) although the application of learning strategies provides no guarantee of better grammar score ($r = -.200$, $p<.05$). Metacognitive strategy ranks the highest of six strategies in learning grammar ($M = 3.72$, $SD = .87$). In addition, a significant negative correlation is shown between anxiety and grammar score ($r = -.146$, $p<.05$). Students are reported to feel slightly anxious in learning grammar ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.87$). Fear of negative evaluation is considered to be the most potent source of anxiety ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.88$). Both learning strategies and anxiety are not the strongest predictors of students' achievement when learning grammar ($r^2 = .063$).

It is recommended that teachers provide assistance to train students to use more strategies in learning a second or foreign language. Future researchers are suggested to qualitatively investigate the subcomponents of learning strategies which could best reduce anxiety in learning English and conduct study on the correlation between learning strategies and anxiety.

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