IDEAS

A Narrative Research

of an EFL Student's Speaking Learning Strategy

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Abstract

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information or expressing one's thoughts and feelings in spoken language. For most people, mastering speaking skills is the most critical aspect of learning a foreign language. Success is measured by the ability to converse in that language. Some students are successful in learning to speak, and others find challenges. This study aims to explain experiences of the student's speaking learning strategies employed by a high-performance student using narrative study. This study employed Narrative research by interviewing a seventh-semester student who is considered a successful learner because he has a high English Proficiency Score and an advanced speaking skill level. To check the data's trustworthiness, the researcher did member checking. As a result, the participant employed a memory learning strategy by using images and sound.
Keywords: narrative study, speaking learning strategies

Introduction

Speaking is considered a complicated process in learning English and is not an easy skill to master. Learners feel speaking is the most challenging skill since it needs great courage and preparation to speak well in the new language. They must simultaneously learn grammar, pronunciation, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary (Brown, 2001). Moreover, speaking a foreign language can be assumed to be a communicative process in constructing meaning using another native language. Because using a non-native language, the speaker needs more effort to achieve a certain level of competence (Abrar, 2019).

In the process of learning, the learners meet some problems and challenges. According to Scarsella & Oxford (1994) and Florez (1998), there are three learner problems in speaking. The first problems are the conflict between fluency and

accuracy, lack of confidence, and pronunciation. Students unconsciously have a problem with the conflict between fluency and accuracy. For example, when a learner speaks ungrammatically and less fluently of English, their English will continue to be inaccurate.

The second problem is a lack of confidence when learners are inconvenient to speak English differently from their mother tongue. The last is pronunciation. Learners get phonetic confusion, interference from the written form, interference from the mother language, and failure to use the weak forms.

The challenges in mastering speaking do not always come from external factors but also the learners themselves. One of the internal factors is the learner's learning strategies, especially in speaking. White in Lewis (1997) states that learning strategies are generally described as practices or processes that the learner selects and employs consciously (or unconsciously) to learn the target language or to promote a language assignment. Aside from that, Macaro (2001) defines learning strategies, methods, tactics, or international behavior taken by students to facilitate learning and recall knowledge from both linguistic and content areas.

In addition, Stern (1983) defines a language learning strategy as various general purposes or all kinds of approaches that language learners use, which refers to technical terms and the results of observable learning behaviors. Language learning strategies have several types; direct and indirect strategies. The direct strategy involves the mental process acquisition of language, supported by three groups of strategies, memory, cognitive, and compensation. The indirect strategy consists of three strategies: metacognitive, affective, and social (Oxford, 1990).

The language learning process will progress significantly using the proper techniques. In addition, appropriate strategies for language learning contribute to better and faster language proficiency and contribute to the development of the language system used by the learner (Rubin and Wenden, 1987). There is a positive correlation between language learning strategies with good language learners (Kayaoğlu, 2013; Radovan, 2011). Due to its essential, speaking learning strategies has been widely discussed in previous studies. Successful students use more metacognitive, cognitive, and social learning strategies (Setiyadi, Sukirlan, Mahpul & Rahman, 2016), compensation, and effective strategy (Gani, Fajrina, Hanifa, 2015). They also were more aware and creative in employing strategies that made the students successful in finishing language tasks. At the same time, Mistar & Umamah (2014) stated that cognitive interaction maintenance, self-improvement, and compensation strategies strongly contribute to improving students' speaking skills. From those previous studies, it can be seen that learning strategies play an essential role in the students' speaking competence. Past research explained the use of certain strategies used by teacher in China studied narratively (Fang, 2006; Zhang, 2020). However, studies about learning strategies especially focusing on strategies in learning speaking employing narrative study are still rare; because of this, getting to know the student's speaking learning strategies deeper and more personally is crucial to be conducted. The research question of this study is how is a high-

performance student's experience in learning speaking? and this study aims to explain experiences of the student's speaking learning strategies employed by a high-performance student using narrative study.

Method

This research employed narrative research, and to gather the data, this research used a Narrative Inquiry Design. Narrative inquiry combines storytelling and research by using stories as research data or as a tool for data analysis or presentation of findings (Barkhuizen, Benson & Chik, 2014). According to Polkinghorne (1995), narrative inquiry is not new to qualitative researchers. It is defined as a subset of qualitative research designs in which stories are used to describe human actions. Creswell (2007) added that narrative research studies the life experiences of individuals over time. Narrative research is a type of research that consists of obtaining and then reflecting on people's lived experiences (Josselson, 2007).

According to Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014), Adult Language Learners recruited from formal learning contexts are interviewed to elicit their learning experiences. The research participant was a seventh-semester student, Jack (pseudonym). Jack is a high-performance student, as proven by his English Proficiency Test score. In 2021 he took the TOEFL test and got a score of 580, which is equivalent to "a 6.5" IELTS test score. Moreover, he also got a 115 score on his Duolingo test in 2022. Based on CEFR Level categorization, he is at the C1 level and categorized as an advanced proficient level or user of the language. The last reason is that the participant becomes an awardee of a student exchange program from the Indonesian government to a university in Malaysia in one semester.

Table 1. Participants' Profile

Pseudonym	Age Group	Total Years of Learning English	EPT Score	IELTS Conversion	CEFR
Jack	20-25	Ten years	580 (Paper-Based TOEFL)	6.5	C1 (Advanced)
			115 (Duolingo)	7	

The qualitative data were gathered from interviews based on the questions

listed in the interview guidelines. According to Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik (2014), the interviewer is expected to have a set of core questions to anchor individual interviews. The interview guidelines have several questions based on six strategies (Oxford, 1990) to capture long-term language learning experiences (Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik 2014). The questions are related to the participants' experience in learning to speak in their life.

The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, unfold the meaning of their experiences, and uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The data collecting technique was semi-structured interviews because semi-structured interviews are resources to direct the interviews. However, at the same time, the questions are usually open-ended to allow participants to elaborate and researchers to pursue developing themes. It allows the participant to choose the interview language that important for researchers, especially if they have similar linguistic origins (Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik, 2014).

For the data trustworthiness, the researcher used the audio recorder and a photograph of the audio recorder to verify data reliability for this investigation. Moreover, member checking is also used to keep the data valid. The degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and procedures employed to ensure the quality of a study is referred to as the study's trustworthiness or rigor (Pilot & Beck, 2014). The second level of trustworthiness is the relationship between the researcher and the participant who provides data for story studies (Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik, 2014).

The data analysis technique in this study is a qualitative narrative inquiry method. Narrative Inquiry is a research method that involves the use of stories as data or as a means of presenting findings based on the sociological and psychological literature. Still, it is grounded in published empirical research within the field of language teaching and learning. A narrative inquiry study uses students' narratives of study experiences as data, and the writing of case study narratives was a crucial stage in the data analysis (Barkhuizen, Benson and Chik, 2014). This technique attempts to illuminate the meanings of personal stories and events. The researcher uses the six steps for analyzing and interpreting qualitative data proposed by (Creswell, 2012); preparing and organizing the data, exploring and coding the data, coding to generate the descriptions and themes, representing and reporting qualitative findings, interpreting the findings, and validating the finding accuracy.

Results

Speaking Learning Strategy Employed by the Student

Jack (pseudonym) is a seven-semester student at a private university. He is categorized as a high achiever or successful student due to his performance. His experiences in learning English contribute to his achievement at the University. He

has been learning English for almost ten years. He told the complete story about his speaking learning strategy from Junior High School until his third year at the University.

Jack's English learning journey began in Junior High School. At thirteen, he entered a Junior High School in Borneo. His school was considered the favorite school, where every elementary school graduate competed to be a student in that school. One most popular program in his school was an international class that made the school famous for its international standard.

This standard became the main reason the students needed to speak and converse in English, and "*all subjects, including Math, and science, were delivered in English" [J1].* Jack felt he knew nothing about English because it was the first time he had learned it. He found constraints in learning English then and did not have the English skills to fulfill the school's demands. He thought his English skill was still zero when he was in Junior High School *[J40].* He was not confident with his English skill. Moreover, he also tried to remember his challenge in English during his study and said, " *My weakness when I was in junior high school was that I had limited vocabulary. [J41]*

Even though he thought he had no English skills and difficulties with English words, he started to fall in love with English. He expressed his feeling:

> *Probably from junior high school, I started to fall in love with English (...) [J2]*

Even if he started to have the awareness to learn English, he did not have specific goals in learning English but to be fluent in English and could read English texts. He learned English only in school, and he did not want to have extra time to learn English outside the class. He never joined any English course when he was in Junior High School.

Jack did not tell a detailed story about learning English when he was in Junior High School. He finished his study there and continued his degree in a boarding school. His school was a boarding school where the students needed to use English every time they were in their bedroom, and it was known as *Kamar Inggris*. Every night there was a ceremony where everyone needed to speak English, including Jack. It was very challenging. Moreover, he argued that his English was not improved enough, especially in the first year, as he said:

> *When I was in X grade, I only had rudimentary skills and did not have bravery (...) [J41]*

However, he had a new dream that was more encouraging. He explained enthusiastically about his goal to learn English when he was in Senior High School. He wanted to have advanced English. Jack's eyes turned so bright with a small smile

when he told his goal. *When I was in senior high school, my goal in learning English was to improve my speaking skill because my speaking was not fluent. [J3]*

He realized that his verbal English was not good enough, so he wanted to improve his English. This phase became Jack's critical incident when he decided to have a different mindset in English. The demand for using English in the room motivated Jack to develop his English skill. The *Kamar Inggris* contributed to Jack's motivation.

> *(…) Since then, I have started to improve my English. In Senior High School, I learned English seriously, (…) [J1]*

To be able to speak in English every day in *Kamar Inggris* and actively participate in every agenda held by his seniors in *Kamar Inggris*, he was diligent in advancing his English. He also had so much emotion in English.

> *I love English because I have fallen in love with English since Senior High School. (…) but in senior high school, I fell in love every day because I began to speak English. (…) and then I fell in love with English, especially speaking. [J2]*

Jack's inner motivation to learn English appeared due to his school's rules. In addition, his environment supported him. However, his learning process did not run well. He got many challenges in learning English. Speaking, vocabulary and idioms were Jack's main constraints at that time. In the interview session, he was trying to remember it.

> *I guess the weakness was I did not know the vocabulary and used it in the sentence precisely in idiom. (…) I am still confused about the idiom used in daily phrases, which is strange to me. [J9]*

and also …

> *(…) I met a problem in speaking in senior high school. (…) [J10]*

But then, he never stopped learning. Jack was very lucky because the rule in *Kamar Inggris* encouraged him to improve his English. Constant effort, even if it is small, will make significant progress.

To improve his speaking, he *experienced writing vocabulary daily [J7].* He needed to list at least three words in his book every day. He did not only write it, but he also wrote some sentences using those words. He then composed the sentences into a paragraph or more. In addition, he also obeyed the rules of his school. The students got a fine if they uttered Indonesian words; 500 rupiahs for one Indonesian word. If the students did want to pay the fine, they needed to be careful in speaking English and avoid using Indonesian words. As a consequence:

> *(…) Since then, I have been afraid to speak Indonesian or even ask questions in Bahasa Indonesia. [J10]*

This strategy took part in Jack's progress in composing a paragraph. It was not the only progress; he could understand the context of the paragraph, and it was easier to memorize the words. He tended to use the definition of a difficult English term instead of uttering Indonesian words. He did want to be fined. He did not know the English word *Rak Sepatu [J19]* and he chose to tell the description of it in English instead of using *Rak Sepatu* in his sentences. So, whenever he was unsure about a certain English word, he looked up his vocabularies journal. He did not stop fulfilling the rule. He also maintained good communication with his seniors by listening and their seniors' advice:

> *(…) if we did not have friends to talk with in English, we could self-talk in front of the mirror or maybe in the restroom, which is ok. [J7]*

Every time he faced constraints, Jack asked his seniors because his seniors spoke better and more fluently than him. He regularly asked his senior, especially those with good American English accents. Jack adored his seniors, and he wanted to be like them.

Jack also joined a regular class where the students and the teacher's discussions were delivered in English. MTI stands for *Media Teaching Islam*, was a course in his school. The teachers explained *Hadits* and *Qur'an* to the students in English. If the students had questions, they also delivered them in English. In short, the instruction activities were delivered in English. It gave more exposure to the students and encouraged them to participate in the discussion actively. Doing a preview before debating has also become Jack's strategy in learning to speak. He joined a debate competition several times, and the first time he joined the debate competition, he experienced anxiety. He learned from this experience and made a preview to prepare for a better performance in the debate competition. As a result, when he was in grade XI and XII, he felt more fluent in speaking English because he had big self-confidence in speaking in front of the public.

After graduating from Senior High School, Jack found his passion, English. He decided to choose English Education Department as the place where he learned English more. Jack's speaking learning experience continued at the University, improving his English on an advanced level to help him achieve high scores in TOEFL, IELTS, and Duolingo tests. He had a broader view of English, and he saw that learning English did not only to be able to speak. Demand in globalization for an employee is high and will be higher in the future. People will interact more with foreigners and international-level companies and need people with fluent English. Jack considered *having good relationships with people abroad crucial in this globalization era [J6].*

To be part of this globalization era, Jack maintained his speaking learning strategy in a better way:

> *Every day, I listen to English on YouTube or the news. Besides, I read English*

> *articles discussing history, which can improve my vocabulary. To make my speaking more fluent, I speak a lot. My lectures and also my friends support me in using English more often. [J7]*

He performed self-directed learning to improve his speaking skill. He also enjoyed speaking and performing speech every time he was in the bathroom. His lecturers and friend also contributed to his English advancement, especially in his first year at the University, precisely in semesters one and two. He got an encouraging lecturer who inspired him much in learning English and *made him talk in English smoothly [J8].* This lecturer gave big energy Jack to always speak in English and helped the students every time the students faced hindrances. Moreover, when he met and typed in particular lecturers and friends, he talked and chatted in English. For him, it contributed to his vocabulary mastery.

In semesters three and four, Jack practiced speaking English more because his lecturer gave the students more practice. He did not take a note or even write in the speaking class, and he only actively participated. The only challenges in the speaking class in semesters three and four were that the instruction was conducted online, and the internet connection sometimes interrupted the learning. Even though he continued learning to speak at home, he got some exposure from watching YouTube daily. Historical videos and news became his best choices in learning English. He keeps updated on news *about Ukraine and Russia [J26].* Besides watching the news on YouTube, he also watched English channels like BBC and also Fox News. Those channels gave him more English words, especially the terms used most recently. If he was in a good mood, he also watched movies and west series for input on his daily conversation.

He applied the strategies mentioned above due to several reasons. The channel was effortless to access. He only needed to have an internet connection. Another reason was that the channel provided videos he could pick as he wants. To make him consistent in improving his speaking skill, he:

> *(…) I seldom watched Indonesian videos. I watched English videos. [J27]*

Nevertheless, he felt he spoke less lately, in the pandemic era. He considered his speaking ability was less advanced. Still, he got a good ITP TOEFL score of 580 in 2021 and was categorized at the advanced level. To maintain his speaking skill, he always tries to speak in English in the speaking class and in other classes, not only in conversation with his lecturers but also with others.

Jack seldom reviewed the materials after class, especially in speaking class. In semester six, he taught his juniors through a study club called Peer Assisted Learning Program (PALP). He made a review the speaking materials, including the pronunciation. Besides teaching in PALP, he:

> *(…) I also teach Junior high School students whose materials are more complicated, so I do a review on them. [J32]*

The material review was needed to make the students understand English well. He also could handle the difficulties sooner and wanted his students to speak English well.

Jack continuously performs similarly in learning to speak. Even he is in semester seven right now. He told us excitedly that he probably wanted to use the game to learn English terms because he wanted to enrich his English glossary to pursue his dream of becoming a good lecturer. At the closing, he suggested that other students learn to speak. First, the students need to have a dream and big motivation to develop their selves. In addition, always speaking and typing in English will also improve the vocabulary and affect the students' English skills. Lastly is consistency.

Discussion
Direct Strategy

Jack applied some strategies during his speaking learning process from Junior High School to his third year in University. He made a list of unfamiliar English words and put them in a paragraph. Based on Oxford (1990), this strategy belongs to the memory strategy creating a workable mental creation relationship. Moreover, he also applied images and sounds like watching videos on the YouTube channel, which is also part of the memory strategy. Mohammed (2021) supports this finding, revealing that the memory strategy is the most used strategy applied by EFL learners at the University of Bisha in speaking.

Based on Jack's story, it can be analyzed that Jack also implemented a cognitive strategy in learning to speak. It can be identified from texting using English showing his thinking power (Oxford, 1990). He also practices even though he has no partner to evaluate his speaking, and he often has speaking practices in the bathroom or self-talk. A similar strategy is also applied by university students in Indonesia (Wael, Asnur, Ibrahim, 2018; Prabawa, 2016).

Jack experienced speaking anxiety due to a lack of vocabulary and less preparation in speech and debate. He successfully overcame this challenge by avoiding using Indonesian words. Turning to state the English description of *Rak Sepatu* instead of saying it is one strategy Jack applied in improving his speaking skill. This strategy is known as the compensatory strategy. With compensatory learning strategies, second language learners can use word guessing or grammar strategies and can also use the help of body language, avoiding the topic that is not mastered and using word equations (Oxford, 1990). The compensatory strategy is effective and can increase the students' speaking fluency (Namaziandos & Imani, 2019).

Indirect Strategy

Jack also implemented a metacognitive strategy. Metacognitive strategy (Oxford: 1990) includes learning focus, learning plan, organization, and study evaluation. Jack paid attention and focused on learning English since junior high school, and in every stage of school, he knew his goals, including short-term and long-term goals. He knew he could pursue his goals by learning English seriously. By watching videos, for example, he realized that he wanted to learn specific topics to improve his speaking skill. He could manage his will and join in some activities to support his speaking ability. Besides, he evaluated and scored his speaking skill at the University and leveled himself in the medium-advanced level or pre-advanced level. According to Karim (2019), high-achiever students employed metacognitive strategies because they wanted to get the best resources to improve their abilities. This is because they lack language exposure before attending University. This is similar to Jack mentioning that in the University, he has a conversation and sends texts to his friend and his lecturer using English. He also found a lecturer who encouraged him to improve his speaking skills, and he did not mention that he met the typical teacher in junior and senior high school.

Jack experienced anxiety in senior high school, especially when he had speech and debate. He experienced it several times until he realized it and could manage it. He tried to find the source of his anxiety and tried to find the solution. The cause of his anxiety was a lack of vocabulary and preparation before the competition, and he could overcome it by being well-prepared to join a competition. According to Oxford (1990), this strategy is effective. Rossiter in Zakaria, Hashim, and Yunus (2019) states that by applying an effective strategy, the learner will be able to overcome language learning problems in the future, which supports the learners' improvement in their speaking skills. Efriyandi & Syafri (2017) added that an effective strategy effectively controls language learners' emotions during speaking. Jack shows that he can control his anxiety after he can identify the cause of his anxiety in public speaking.

In addition, Jack applied social strategy in speaking. He revealed that when he was in Senior High School, he often asked his senior whenever he found difficulties. In the University, he sometimes requested his friends to speak or text in English. Some of his lecturers also helped him by encouraging him to always speak in English. Based on the theory from Oxford (1990), social strategy is all learner behaviors that relate to learners' collaboration with their peers in achieving learning goals. Social strategy is also essential for students to interact with others to facilitate acquiring a new language. A similar strategy was also employed by high-speaking students in Banda Aceh (Gani, Fajrina, Rizaldy Hanifa, 2015). Based on the explanation above, it is believed that the more variety of language learning strategies used can increase a great chance of success in learning the language (Oxford, 1990).

Conclusion

Jack is categorized as a high achiever student and speaks English fluently. He started to learn English when she was in junior high school. He loves speaking, and in improving his speaking skill, he applied all strategies proposed by Oxford (1990). Memory strategy, cognitive strategy, compensatory strategy, metacognitive strategy, effective strategy, and social strategy.

This research is only focused on the speaking strategy discussed in narrative research. It will be more beneficial if other researchers conduct the successful students' learning trajectory using narrative studies.

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