

SUCCESSFUL LEARNERS' EXPERIENCE IN ENHANCING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS: VOICES UNVEILED USING A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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Abstract: English speaking skills encompass the ability to communicate effectively in English through spoken language, including understanding and responding to spoken language, and expressing oneself clearly and fluently. Effective English speaking skills are crucial for academic, professional, and social interactions, involving components like pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and intonation. Developing these skills requires practice, feedback, and strategic approaches. This qualitative study explores the experiences of three successful learners in enhancing their English speaking skills at a state junior high school in Malang. Using narrative inquiry and thematic analysis, the study highlights the importance of social-affective strategies (cooperation and self-evaluation), cognitive strategies (note-taking and self-monitoring), and metacognitive strategies (planning and self-reflection) in overcoming psychological barriers and improving speaking performance. These strategies help students manage their learning process effectively, addressing common difficulties such as pronunciation and fluency issues, and achieving better communication outcomes. Therefore, incorporating appropriate English-speaking strategies into the learning process is essential for students to develop their speaking skills and achieve their language learning goals.

Keywords: English-Speaking Strategies, Successful Learners, Narrative Inquiry

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia recognizes English as a foreign language. Proficiency in the English language is essential for effective communication with individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, spanning various settings. Since English is critical in today's world, we have to learn the English language. In a nation where English is instructed as a non-native language (EFL), the language serves various purposes such as education and business. Regarding its role in education, English was introduced in elementary schools, but according to Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 67 of 2013, English is not included as a major subject at the elementary school level (Faridatuunnisa, 2020).

Speaking takes a pivotal role in the realm of English Foreign Language (EFL) learners' qualifications, it connects individuals and cultures across borders. English speaking skills are a common condition that considerably impacts EFL learners' individual learning experiences. Speaking skills encompass the ability to communicate effectively in the English language context. The endeavor to master English as a foreign language (EFL) has garnered substantial academic attention in recent years, reflecting the global prominence of English as a lingua franca therefore understanding and addressing strategies in speaking skills is crucial for individuals to develop strong speaking skills and overcome barriers to be a success in English communication (Kehing & Yunus, 2021). It is also in line with Ismiatun et al., (2019) who stated that applying some strategies in learning a language tends to be essential due to its advantages. In addition, speaking has become crucial in job hunting, emphasizing the significant role of communication in the process (Ramamurthy et al., 2021). Therefore it is

very essential to explore and investigate language learners' strategies used by successful learners at the middle school level.

Several researchers have highlighted students' experiences in learning English speaking skills. The previous study by Wahyuni (2019) examined sixty-five EFL learners at Gajayana University of Malang, showing that advanced and elementary students used compensation strategies, while intermediate students employed meta-cognitive strategies. Advanced students preferred circumlocution or synonyms, intermediate students favored paying attention, and elementary students used resources for messages. The research demonstrated that effective strategies were significantly influenced by speaking skills.

Other works investigated high-performance students in Indonesia, showing that participants used memory-learning strategies with images and sound (Triyoga et al., 2022). A study on an eighth-semester English education student found she applied four strategies: explaining in English, doing a monolog, listening to music, and using Clubhouse (Melia et al., 2022).

Another study revealed the language learning strategies of eight lectures at the College of Health and Science in Indonesia, focusing on autonomous learning (Noprival et al., 2023). Fernández-García & Fonseca-Mora (2022) explored 120 EFL students in Spain, finding no direct correlation between musical experience and speaking proficiency, but heightened emotional understanding improved speaking skills.

Despite extensive research on university students, there is a lack of studies on middle school learners using narrative inquiry. This project aims to investigate middle school learners' experiences and strategies, providing insights for teachers to enhance their English speaking skills. By analyzing successful learners, unsuccessful learners can gain valuable knowledge on effective language learning strategies and support systems.

To delve into the problem, two research questions will be addressed in this study:

1. What English-speaking strategies are used by successful learners in English speaking?
2. How do English-speaking strategies benefit learners' English-speaking skills?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry design, concentrating on the personal narratives of three successful learners at a State Middle School in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. In narrative research designs, the researcher delineates the lives of individuals, gathers stories about their experiences, and creates narratives that encapsulate individual journeys (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This narrative inquiry design was adopted since it has the strength to discover a person's individual experiences and report the results (Ubaidillah et al., 2020).

Setting and Participant

The researcher recruited three participants at the middle school level which is located in Malang, East Java, Indonesia through purposive sampling. The participants are three successful learners named Bunga, Rosa, and Jasmine (pseudonyms). To qualify as successful learners of English, they were recruited with several considerations: 1) The three learners were highly recommended by the English teacher at the school, 2) They

were students who actively participated during the English classes, and 3) They also took part in some English competitions representing the school. Bunga, Rosa, and Jasmine are learners in their final year of study but each of them has different classes. The researcher started recognizing all the participants since she held a teaching practicum for two months in their school. The researcher noticed their engagement and activeness during their English learning, so both the researcher and participants already have a good relationship to be involved in this study. Since the researcher delineated a good relationship with all the participants, it made the researcher feel at ease to comprehend their stories.

Data Collection

The researcher conducted individual in-depth interviews online via Zoom and WhatsApp, using Bahasa Indonesia to ensure mutual understanding. The interview questions were developed by the researcher and reviewed by an English lecturer. A checklist from Gay, Mills, & Airasian (2005) was used to guide the interviews, which allowed participants to provide detailed answers without limitations. The researcher ensured confidentiality and pseudonymity by sending a consent form before the interviews. The interviews were recorded using a Zoom recorder, and documentary materials such as class stories and English scores were provided by the English teacher.

Data Analysis

After conducting the interviews, the researcher transcribed the field text and then read the interview transcripts repetitively to comprehend all the experiences shared by the participants. Afterward, the researcher analyzes the data using a six-phase thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006), including 1) Getting acquainted with the data, 2) Creating preliminary codes, 3) Exploring potential themes, 4) Reviewing candidate themes, 5) Formulating and labeling themes, and 6) Compiling the report.

Trustworthiness

During the phases of data collection and analysis, it is essential to ensure the precision of your findings and interpretations. Validating findings involves the researcher assessing the accuracy and credibility of the results using various strategies. Therefore the researcher used member checking since one of the instruments applied in this study was an interview. Member checking is a method wherein the researcher invites one or more participants of the study to validate the precision of their narratives. This validation involves sharing the research findings with participants and seeking their feedback on the accuracy of the report. Various aspects of the study are discussed during member checking, including the completeness and realism of the description, the accuracy of included themes, and the fairness and representativeness of interpretations (Creswell, 2012).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

The successful learners used the English-speaking strategies to improve their English-speaking skills

The researcher conducted three online interviews through the Zoom application at different times to collect the data for the research. The analysis results of the interviews showed that all participants started learning English with these strategies:

a) Cognitive Strategy

Note-Taking

The participants started by listening to English songs and watching movies to become familiar with native-speaker pronunciation. Jasmine initially listened to songs and watched Disney movies with lyrics and subtitles to enhance her listening skills before communicating effectively in English:

Drawing upon my English learning experience, firstly I focused on improving my listening skills to understand English words and intonation spoken by native speakers. In my opinion, understanding what others say is essential for effective communication. Therefore I applied the easiest and most enjoyable way, such as listening to English music and watching Disney movies, to make my process interesting. I studied the lyrics of English music line by line and watched Disney movies paying close attention to the subtitles. If I found new words in songs and movies I took notes and searched for the meaning, if the actors spoke too fast, I would pause the video to ensure I understood what was being said

The participant's prior experience and strategic planning showed high cognitive strategies, with a focus on improving her listening skills before speaking.

Practice

After becoming accustomed to English input through songs, films, and videos, participants often create simple sentences and practice using the self-talking method. Jasmine mentioned in the interview that she explained:

After repeatedly listening to English conversations through films and songs, I typically start by imitating simple conversational phrases, such as a few sentences or even a single phrase. This method is commonly referred to as self-talking, as I practice it regularly when I am alone. For instance, I might practice speaking English while getting dressed in front of the mirror or while cleaning the house, as these moments provide opportunities for me to engage in self-directed speaking exercises

Hesitant learners can benefit from the self-talking method, which helps them practice English gradually. Consistent practice is crucial for learners to enhance their English speaking abilities. Rossa explained this in the interview:

The key to improving your English-speaking skills lies in consistently practicing the English language in daily communication. This strategy ensures continuous progress and mastery of the language. Consistency is paramount, as it involves consistently practicing English speaking skills to achieve fluency

The three participants involved in the study maintained their engagement with the learning environment, tasks, and objectives to progressively improve their proficiency levels.

Repetition

The process of employing English as a daily communication tool inherently involves errors in intonation, pronunciation, and other linguistic aspects. Bunga possessed the necessary tools to address and rectify errors. Jasmine added the information of using Google Translate to fix the errors in the following interview results:

When I encounter new vocabulary that I infrequently employ, I frequently struggle to accurately pronounce it. Consequently, I frequently utilize the Google Translate website to aid in my pronunciation. I record the new vocabulary and repeatedly practice pronouncing it based on the guidance provided by Google Translate

The presence of online media and other websites plays a crucial role in facilitating learners' continuous refinement and enhancement of their English language skills, thereby enabling them to effectively utilize English as a communication tool in today's era.

b) Affective Strategy

All participants started learning English when they were at a very young age, especially primary stage of school. From a relatively early age, Bunga demonstrated a positive perception of learning English, recognizing its potential benefits and relevance to their future endeavors. She stated her response in the following interview results:

I want to learn English because it's widely spoken and can make me sound cool. Additionally, it's an international language that offers new experiences and opportunities for my future

Affective strategies focus on the emotional and motivational aspects of learning. Bunga's desire to learn English to sound cool and gain new experiences indicates she used affective strategies to motivate herself. Her positive perception of English and its benefits showed she was emotionally invested, enhancing her learning experience and persistence.

c) Metacognitive Strategy

Metacognitive strategies help individuals monitor their understanding, plan their learning, and regulate their cognitive processes. By using metacognitive strategies, learners can identify their strengths and weaknesses, set realistic goals, and adjust their learning approaches accordingly. Rossa elaborated on the factors that underpin her desire to learn English. She revealed the reason related to the interview:

I find English enjoyable, despite many friends considering it challenging. In my view, learning English is more engaging than studying subjects like mathematics. This is because I have a long-term aspiration to study abroad, and mastering English will be crucial in achieving that dream

Rossa's enjoyment of English despite her friends finding it challenging suggested she used metacognitive strategies, such as monitoring progress, setting goals, and adjusting her approach. Her long-term aspiration to study abroad and her focus on mastering English for that goal showed she had clear learning objectives and was actively working towards them.

d) Social Strategy

Global Communication

English is crucial for global communication and remains relevant. Jasmine showed a positive response to this, stating in her response:

English is a universal language that allows me to connect with people from diverse backgrounds. By mastering it, I can effortlessly communicate with individuals abroad, regardless of my location. This

skill is particularly valuable when traveling to foreign countries where I may not be familiar with the local language. Having English as a backup ensures that I can still convey my thoughts and needs effectively, making it an indispensable tool for global communication

Social strategies focus on interpersonal and collaborative learning. Jasmine's statement about using English to connect with diverse individuals and communicate abroad illustrated her application of social strategies. She enhanced her linguistic proficiency and cultural competence through social interactions and relationship-building in English.

Communicate with Peer

Language learners need a conducive and supportive environment to optimize their acquisition. Bunga mentioned in the interview that having English-speaking friends or relatives significantly facilitates practice.

In my daily life, I frequently use English to communicate with my parents at home. Additionally, I also engage in English conversations with my online friends who share the same passion for the language through online meetings or calling

In line with Bunga's explanation, Rossa also confirmed the same response as follows:

Typically, I engage in English language practice with my school friends who are also proficient in the language. Whenever opportunities arise to interact with them, I make a concerted effort to utilize these interactions to improve my English skills to the fullest extent possible

Friends can support language learners by providing authentic communication, feedback, and encouragement. They can engage in casual conversations, watch movies, or participate in group activities, helping learners improve listening, speaking, and comprehension skills. Friends also offer emotional support, motivation, and accountability, enhancing learners' confidence and persistence.

Interact with English Teacher

Interacting with English instructors helps learners acquire proficient English-speaking skills. Participants consistently used English in class, fostering linguistic proficiency. This interaction enhances students' confidence and provides valuable feedback, facilitating corrective learning. Bunga explained in her response.

I quite often practice the English language with teachers. When teachers communicate in English, I reciprocate by speaking in English as well

Rossa also revealed the same response as Bunga, she said:

When I participate in English competitions, I usually study on my own, but I also often contact my English teacher to teach me

Bunga and Rossa's responses showed their active engagement with English instructors, supporting the effectiveness of this pedagogical strategy. This interaction fostered linguistic proficiency, enhanced confidence, and provided valuable feedback for corrective learning and overall improvement.

English-Speaking Strategies' Benefit to Learners' English-Speaking Skills

The analysis of interview data revealed a significant positive impact resulting from the effective and consistent implementation of English-speaking strategies by the three recruited participants, here are the following positive impacts:

a) Being Active Students during English Class

Jasmine, Bunga, and Rossa were encouraged to take an active role in English class. They were motivated to learn English, as it was their favorite subject. Bunga revealed her proof in the following sentence:

The cognitive and social strategies I employ have a profound impact on my academic performance and proficiency in class. Up to now I rarely found a problem with the English material I learnt in class. My peers recognized my proficiency in English, and I used to answer several questions delivered by the English teacher as well as I could

Bunga's statement reflected her confidence and proficiency in English, supported by her peers' recognition of her skills. This suggested that her cognitive and social strategies effectively enhanced her academic performance. Furthermore, her rare difficulties with class material indicated a strong understanding and mastery of the subject.

b) Having a Good English Score

The three participants used a combination of cognitive, affective, metacognitive, and social strategies to enhance their English-speaking abilities. Rossa noted that these effective strategies improved her language skills:

In class, I can confidently assert that I am proficient in English. As for my grades, I am consistently pleased with them. I am grateful that I have consistently received good grades in English throughout my academic journey

Rossa's statement showed that her use of cognitive, affective, metacognitive, and social strategies significantly improved her English-speaking abilities. Her confidence in her proficiency and consistent good grades further supported the effectiveness of these strategies.

c) Participating in English Competitions

Not only having good scores, Rossa, Bunga, and Jasmine achieved commendable non-academic results by demonstrating exceptional storytelling skills, which led to their selection for a prestigious competition organized by the Malang City English Language MGMP, representing their school. Jasmine said:

I participated in a city-level storytelling competition organized by the Malang City English Language MGMP, although I did not achieve the desired outcome. Nevertheless, I continued to hone my skills by participating in another storytelling competition at the Language Festival held at SMPN 17, where I was fortunate enough to secure the 1st place prize

Jasmine's statement highlighted her achievement in the storytelling competition and her commitment to improving her skills despite not reaching her initial goal. Her dedication was evident in her participation in another competition at the Language Festival at SMPN 17, where she won 1st place, demonstrating her exceptional storytelling proficiency and ability to learn from experiences.

Discussions

The research highlights key strategies—cognitive, affective, metacognitive, and social—that significantly enhance English-speaking skills. Participants demonstrated high engagement with these strategies, leading to notable improvements.

One primary strategy was cognitive strategies, involving active learning like note-taking, listening to English songs, and watching movies. Jasmine improved her listening skills by listening to English music and watching Disney movies with subtitles, essential for effective communication (Hidayanti & Azami, 2022). Her

strategic planning and prior language experience demonstrated high cognitive strategy use, crucial for language acquisition (Irwandi et al., 2022). This aligns with research showing successful learners rely on cognitive strategies like practicing, analyzing, and reasoning (Mulyani, 2020).

Another significant strategy used by the participants was affective strategies, which focus on the emotional and motivational aspects of learning. Bunga demonstrated a positive view of learning English, recognizing its benefits for her future. She expressed a desire to learn English because it was widely spoken and could enhance her image, offering new experiences and opportunities. This positive attitude was crucial for her engagement and motivation to learn English (Waluyo & Bakoko, 2022).

Participants also employed metacognitive strategies, which involved monitoring understanding, planning learning, and regulating cognitive processes. These strategies help learners reflect on their progress, set realistic goals, and adjust their approaches (Arif, 2022). Rossa, for example, enjoyed English despite her friends finding it challenging. She aspired to study abroad and recognized the importance of mastering English to achieve that goal. This understanding of her objectives and her active efforts indicated her use of metacognitive strategies to manage her learning (Panggabean & Triassanti, 2020).

Social strategies, emphasizing interpersonal and collaborative learning, were crucial for the participants' language acquisition (Ismiatun & Suhartoyo, 2022). Jasmine highlighted English as a universal language for connecting with diverse people and communicating effectively abroad. This skill is valuable for global communication, especially when traveling to foreign countries (Mulyani, 2020; Sari et al., 2019). The participants used social strategies by interacting with peers and teachers. Bunga communicated with her parents and online friends in English, while Rossa practiced with school friends. These interactions improved their listening, speaking, and comprehension skills. Interacting with English instructors also fostered linguistic proficiency, enhanced confidence, and provided valuable feedback for corrective learning (Ismiatun & Suhartoyo, 2022).

The participants' consistent use of cognitive, affective, metacognitive, and social strategies significantly improved their English-speaking skills. Jasmine demonstrated exceptional storytelling proficiency by participating in competitions, securing the first-place prize at the Language Festival. Rossa's statement highlighted the effectiveness of these strategies, as evident from her confident proficiency and consistent good grades. Bunga's active participation in class, using cognitive and social strategies, also contributed to her academic success and peers' recognition of her English proficiency.

The study's findings have significant implications for language teaching and learning. Educators should focus on developing cognitive and social strategies through activities that foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. This comprehensive approach, emphasizing cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies, encourages learners to engage dynamically with the language through activities like role-playing, debates, and group discussions, thereby improving their English proficiency skills.

In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of combining cognitive, affective, metacognitive, and social strategies to enhance English-speaking skills. Participants' high engagement with these strategies led to notable improvements, significantly impacting their proficiency and making them more effective communicators (Firharmawan et al., 2023; Novita Sari et al., 2021; Syafryadin, 2020).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

The study's findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of cognitive, affective, metacognitive, and social strategies in the learning processes of successful learners. The emphasis on cognitive strategies aligns with previous research, highlighting the importance of practicing, analyzing, and reasoning to enhance language skills. This suggests that successful learners employ a range of behaviors to gather, process, and integrate information essential for language acquisition.

The study demonstrates the significance of social strategies, such as asking questions, seeking teacher guidance, and collaborating with peers to improve language skills. This underscores the importance of social interactions and feedback in the language learning process.

The findings highlight the crucial role of consistency in language learning, emphasizing the need for regular and sustained efforts to achieve fluency. The participants' utilization of prior language learning experience and strategic planning demonstrated a high level of cognitive strategies, indicating an intentional approach to language acquisition. The study also underscores the importance of online media and other websites in facilitating learners' continuous refinement and enhancement of their English language skills. The participants utilized online resources such as Google Translate to overcome the challenge of mispronunciation and improve their language proficiency.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the value of having good interaction with English teachers, highlighting the importance of engaging with teachers not only to enhance students' confidence in using English but also to provide valuable input and feedback when mistakes occur.

The analysis of interview data uncovered a substantial positive impact attributed to the effective and consistent implementation of English-speaking strategies by the three recruited participants, Jasmine, Bunga, and Rossa. These strategies influenced various aspects of their language learning journey, resulting in notable developments in their academic performance and language proficiency. The specific positive impacts observed encompassed their increased engagement and motivation in English class, marked improvements in their language skills, and noteworthy successes in non-academic endeavors such as participating in prestigious storytelling competitions. These outcomes serve as compelling evidence of the efficacy of the strategies employed by the participants in enhancing their English-speaking abilities across multiple domains.

In conclusion, the study's findings confirm that cognitive, affective, metacognitive, and social strategies are essential components of successful language learning. By understanding the strategies used by successful learners, educators can better support their students and help them achieve their language learning goals.

Suggestions

The researcher aims to provide practical suggestions based on the English-speaking strategies of successful learners to enhance effective communication. Educators should focus on developing cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies through activities that promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration, such as role-playing and group discussions. Learners should engage with the language dynamically, moving beyond just grammar rules. Future research should explore the impact of these strategies on language learning outcomes and the effectiveness of various instructional methods. By understanding

successful learners' strategies, educators can better support students in achieving their language goals, adopting a comprehensive approach that incorporates cognitive and social strategies into teaching practices.

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