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# IDENTIFYING LEARNING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY SUCCESSFUL AND LESS SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS IN READING

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#### article info

#### abstract

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This study aims at identifying successful and less successful students' learning strategies in reading, and the way they overcome the difficulties in reading. The study uses survey research as the method and using mixed method as the research design. The instruments used are field notes, SILL (Strategy Inventory of Language Learning) questionnaire from Oxford (1990), interview, and document. The quantitative data are collected from the questionnaire for 320 students grade XII in SMA. Meanwhile, the qualitative data are field notes taken in class, interview of 10 selected students, and document from the students' transcript. The quantitative analysis is conducted by using mean, mode, and standard deviation in order to find the students tendency in using the strategies. The qualitative analysis is conducted by listening to the recorder to take note, summary, and choose the reliable data (Miles et al., 2014; Creswell, 2009). The study has 2 findings; first, there is no significant difference for both successful and less successful students in all learning strategies, starting with the data of metacognitive, then followed by cognitive, memory, compensation, affective, and social strategies. Second, the students have different motivation, use various platforms, and way in reading. In addition, this study provides information about successful and less successful students' learning strategies in reading, so the teacher can assist less successful students in the way the students prefer.

### INTRODUCTION

The students need to study English for their future and to enhance their knowledge and information needs through digital or printed media, where most of them are using English as the language, both in written or spoken. As the result, reading is the skill that the students have to be capable of. Reading is the process of making meaning through written text to receive the information provided on the text (Anderson et al., 1985 as cited in Pourhosein Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Therefore, EFL (English as Foreign Language) students face difficulties in reading as the results from several problems (Kavlu, 2015; Chen, 2014; Qrqez & Rashid, 2017). Their crucial problem is dealing with vocabulary knowledge. Researchers (as cited in Kavlu, 2015) found that EFL students have deficit reading ability due to insufficient vocabulary list since they do not have interest and motivation to learn English. Another problem that the students have is the unfamiliar script and writing system in English text (Mourtaga, 2006; Kavlu, 2015).

Research done by Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013 as cited in Qrqez & Rashid, 2017) investigated the challenges of ELT in Saudi Arabia. The problems that the teachers faced were the students' inadequate capability and lack of good materials. They needed active participation from the policy makers, textbook writers, teachers and students to address the challenge that came in the field teaching and learning. As the result, the teachers cannot offer

teaching and learning that is suitable for the students' needs and cannot deliver the material successfully.

In accordance with the problems in reading, understanding the students' learning strategies become important role to be deliberated as factor of how good the students in learning language. "Learning strategies are specific actions taken by learners to help their learning, to make the learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable" (Oxford, 1990 as cited in Fajrina, 2015 p. 19). Students' learning strategies maybe different from one to another. Teacher should consider the teaching and learning activities due to the differences of learning strategies in each student. It is necessary to help the students and teacher to identify the learning strategies to regulate how the teacher may support the students reading activities to increase their achievements in developing English.

Previous study conducted by Sari et al. (2019) found that successful students of English education study program tended to use some learning strategies. The dominant strategies used by the students were metacognitive. Metacognitive strategies helped the students to have a critical thinking. In line with the study, Mega et al. (2019) found that successful students in SMA N 2 Jember prefer to use six learning strategies. They had good technique to maintain their learning, although the score in each strategy did not reflect the same results. Meanwhile, the less successful students concern on memorizing and summarizing. Unlike the previous studies, there are two research gaps in this study. First is identifying the learning strategies in reading used by the successful and less successful students as well as their reading skill. Those are needed to be identified because reading is a crucial skill and activity that the students face every day. Second is how the students apply the strategies to overcome their reading difficulties. This study can be beneficial in order to make the teachers and students aware about the learning strategies used in the reading process, so they can work collaboratively to overcome the obstacles in reading and increase the academic results.

## **METHOD**

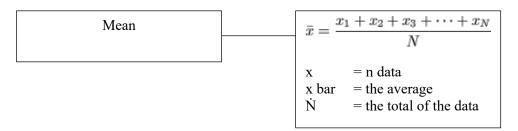
This study focused in identifying successful and less successful students' learning strategies in reading and describing how the students overcome their reading difficulties. To answer the research questions, the researcher used survey research. Through these reasons, this study chose ten classes in SMA to gather the data needed for this study. These classes were chosen after the researcher doing the analysis from their academic transcript from previous semester, the students with the score 80 to 100 could be categorized as successful and the score below 80 could be categorized as less successful. The students' interest to learn English was also one consideration to choose the subject of this study. The students' interest could be seen on their enthusiasm to follow the English course by carrying the book, doing the tasks, and raising question if they were not yet sure about the explanation or their own opinion. The purpose of survey research was to identify the students' learning strategies which also could be identified as their habit in learning or characteristics of interest in learning.

This study used mixed method as the strategies to collect the data from the participants. To secure privacy, all the participants name had been replaced with Student, S (Successful), and LS (Less Successful). Therefore, this study analysed the data both in numeric and written forms. The quantitative and qualitative methodologies administered to collect the data from the participants to answer the research questions of this study. There were four instruments to collect the data for this study: field notes, questionnaire, interview guide, and document which came from the students' academic transcript. In quantitative methodology, the

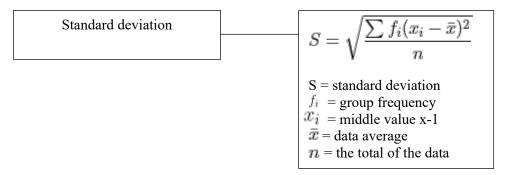
students filled the questionnaire which consisted of 50 statements. The students also interviewed for the qualitative methodologies, after they have done in answering the questionnaire. The other instruments for the qualitative methodologies were field notes that the researcher collected after teaching in the class. In short, the researcher was the teacher as well as the researcher in the same time. The last instrument was document, where the researcher collected from the teacher.

Qualitative data was used to support the validity of quantitative findings (Fetters et al., 2013). The interview was used in order to strengthen the questionnaire results and to help in constructing the validity as suggested by Park (2011). The interview was conducted to prove the quantitative results in this study, whereas it was held after the questionnaire returned. This study used in-depth interview to collect the students' opinion on how they applied the strategies to solve their reading problems. As the additional instruments, this study used observation that appeared in the form of field notes to identify what was needed to be explored related to the students' reading abilities and document analysis which took students' academic transcript to make the classification of successful and less successful students easier.

For the data analysis, the researcher did the data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification as proposed by Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014) to analyse the field notes. Therefore, to analyse the questionnaire results, the researcher applied descriptive statistics. For this study, the researcher analysed SILL questionnaire in numeric form, divided the results into mean, mode, and standard deviation.



The next step was to identify the mode of the questionnaire results. Mode was the most frequently value appear among set of data (Denscombe, 2007). After being measured, then the results could be perceived which strategies were most used by both successful and less successful students in reading. Then, classify the standard deviation of the data. The standard deviation measured after the mean and mode were counted and classified from the higher to the lower results from both successful and less successful students.



To support the questionnaire results and made the results valid, the researcher conducted interview. All the interview process were recorded and noted. The researcher listened to the recorder and noted, select quotation, and then comments as it was needed (Miles, Huberman & Saldana 2014). Hence, the last steps that the researcher did was

analysing the document. From the document analysis, the researcher identified which students were categorized as successful and less successful. Those identifications based on the students' academic transcript throughout the previous semester.

## FINDINGS AND DISSCUSSION

From the observation, grade XII in SMA was the suitable participant to conduct this research since they had various responses and interest in reading English text. Those differences could also be seen on the academic transcript. XII MIPA 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and XII IPS 1, 2, 3 had their own style of studying. In conclusion, not all the MIPA 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 had high grades, and not all IPS 1, 2, 3 had the low ones. Through those reasons, identifying successful and less successful students' learning strategies was important, because it could make the learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more effective, and more transferable (Oxford, 1990 as cited in Fajrina, 2015).

Oxford (1990) said that learning strategies referred to the steps that the students adopt to enhance their learning. From the definition, the learning strategies could be different from successful to less successful students. There were six learning strategies used in this research which were proposed by Oxford (1990); memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social. Findings and discussion of the learning strategies used by successful and less successful students in reading were discussed below.

Table 1 Metacognitive, cognitive, compensation, and memory strategies with the highest results

Strategy	Mean		Mode		SD	
	S	LS	S	LS	S	LS
Memory		I	I			I
I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in the SL.	3.76	3.61	4	4	.844	.908
I connect the sound of a new SL word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.	3.77	3.71	4	4	.959	.731
I remember a new SL word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	3.71	3.55	4	4	1.005	.872
Cognitive		<u>I</u>	1	I	l	l
I try to talk like native SL.	3.77	3.68	4	4	.976	.789
I practice the sounds of SL.	4.09	3.93	3	4	.811	.828
I read for pleasure in the SL.	3.76	3.82	3	4	.906	.834
I first skim an SL passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.	3.74	3.91	4	4	.971	.920
Compensation		I	ı	I		I
To understand unfamiliar SL words, I make guesses.	3.84	3.52	4	4	.901	.491
When I can't think of a word during a conversation in the SL, I use gestures.	3.76	3.38	3	4	.950	.906
Metacognitive		I	<u> </u>			I

I try to find as many ways as I can to use my SL.	3.75	3.52	3	4	.895	.991.
I notice my SL mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	3.91	3.79	4	4	.888	.847.
I pay attention when someone is speaking SL.	4.20	3.75	4	4	.793	.919
I try to find out how to be a better learner of SL.	4.14	3.86	3	4	.856	.749
I have clear goals for improving my SL skills.	3.92	3.71	4	4	.933	.967
I think about my progress in learning SL.	3.70	3.33	4	4	.921	.989
Social						
If I do not understand something in SL, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	3.72	3.71	4	4	1.078	.847

Note: S: Successful, LS: Less Successful

Table 1 showed that the successful students preferred to use more learning strategies. The statements were taken from those which had average or mean above 3.70 and the comparison results with the same statements. The first statement was from memory strategies. There were three statements; 'I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in the SL' (S M= 3.76, Mo= 4, SD= .844, LS M= 3.61, Mo= 4, SD= .908), 'I connect the sound of a new SL word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word' (S M= 3.77, Mo= 4, SD= 1.005, LS M= 3.71, Mo= 4, SD= .731), 'I first skim an SL passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully' (S M= 3.71, Mo= 4, SD= .971, LS M= 3.91, Mo= 4, SD= .920).

EFL students needed memorization in reading English text for both successful and less successful. They had to remember the meaning of the vocabulary to understand the message. Therefore, reading also dealt with pronunciation. They said:

One of the strategies that I used in reading was listening to music or watching movies, and I usually tried to find the meaning of certain words that I did not know by translating or asking other people to help me interpret the word (Student 1).

I usually listened to music and played games, because the game I played was using English, so I could learn new vocabulary (Student 2).

The second statement of cognitive strategies was 'I try to talk like native SL' (S M= 3.7, Mo= 4, SD= .976, LS M= 3.68, Mo= 4, SD= .789), 'I practice the sound of SL' (S M= 4.09, Mo= 3 SD= .811, LS M= 3.79, Mo= 4, SD= .828), 'I read for pleasure in the SL' (S M= 3.76, Mo= 3, SD= .906, 'I first skim an SL passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully' (S M= 3.74, Mo= 4, SD= .971, LS M= 3.91, Mo= 4, SD= .920). Although the statement earned high mean, there were two statements where the mode was 3 which meant that the students were somewhat neutral, or they practiced it sometimes. The students could also practice pronouncing the word they found by reading loudly in the class. They could also reread the text if they need to comprehend it better. They said:

If I could speak English fluently, it would be easier to get a job in the future. And I thought, someone who could speak English was cool and I wanted to be a cool person (Student 3).

I told the story that I had read for my friends in English, and sometimes they understood and sometimes they did not. Most of my friends listened to my story (Student 4).

By reading carefully, understanding the content, and noting the important points of the text (Student 5).

The third was compensation strategies with two statements and earned high results. 'To understand unfamiliar SL words, I make guesses' (S M= 3.84, Mo= 4, SD= .901, LS M= 3.52, Mo= 4, SD= .491), 'When I can't think of a word during a conversation in the SL, I use gesture' (S M= 3.76, Mo= 4, SD= .950, LS M= 3.38, Mo= 4, SD= .906). Guessing in reading was important to help the ESL students understood the meaning of the text. They said:

There were several words that were difficult to understand or read, but I translated it even though the translation was not always correct. So, I had to guess the meaning in order to understand (Student 6).

The fourth was metacognitive strategies which earned a score higher than the other strategies. 'I try to find as many ways as I can to use my SL' (S M= 3.75, Mo= 3, SD= .895, LS M= 3.52, Mo= 4, SD= .991), 'I notice my SL mistakes and use that information to help me do better' (S M= 3.91, Mo= 4, SD= .888, LS M= 3.79, Mo= 4, SD= .847, 'I pay attention when someone is speaking SL' (S M= 4.20, Mo= 4, SD= .793, LS M= 3.75, Mo= 4, SD= .919), 'I try to find out how to be a better learner of SL (S M= 4.14, Mo= 3, SD= .856, LS M= 3.86, Mo= 4, SD= .749), 'I have clear goals for improving my SL skills' (S M= 3.92, M)= 4, SD= .933, LS M= 3.71, Mo= 4, SD= .967, and 'I think about my progress in learning SL' (S M= 3.70, Mo= 4, SD= .921, LS M= 3.33, Mo= 4, SD= .989).

It could be concluded that metacognitive strategies were the most used strategies. They were more aware of their mistakes, evaluated their learning, and developed their skills, not only for reading but also speaking, listening, and writing. It could be seen on the statement where most of the students answered it with 4 and 3 scale. The mode was 4, it meant that the students usually implemented strategies in their learning. The student said:

I started to make reading as habit by reading novels or captions in English (Student 7).

I had to be able to speak in English since I wanted to continue my study in the Communication Science Department, so I had to keep learning English (Student 8).

I was curious about the English language, and I wanted to learn it, because I was not yet good at it (Student 9).

My motivation in reading was to develop my insight and knowledge, and to fill spare time that helped or inspired me through reading (Student 10).

My motivation was to be able to improve my interest in reading. Starting from myself, I realized the importance of reading not only from students and also set the goal for reading, so I had more interested in reading (Student 11).

The successful students had high motivation to learn English so that they had the responsibility, consistency, and effort to learn English as well as develop the knowledge through reading (Sanjay & Narayana, 2020). The successful students knew that English is important, so they spent more time enhancing their interest in reading. They also had better responsibility and effort to keep learning through reading.

The last strategy was social with only one statement which gained high score in both successful and less successful students. 'If I do not understand something in SL, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again' (S M=3.72, Mo= 4, SD= 1.078, LS M= 3.71. Mo=

4, SD= .847). That was because the strategy facilitates interaction with others in certain situations (Oxford, 1990). The students said:

Sometimes, I used Google Translate as the media to translate the text, asked people who understood English more, and I rarely used printed dictionaries (12).

Asking the right people was clearer than using Google or a dictionary. Nevertheless, I was too lazy to open the dictionary, and Google was not accurate. These were the reasons why asking the right people was the right option (13).

I usually used Google Translate or asked the people who understood more (14).

What I did when I found difficulties in reading, I always tried to ask someone who was able to help me overcome the difficulties while reading. And I used the internet to help me solved the problem also (Student 15).

Based on the description above, there were two findings found. First, there was no significant difference for both successful and less successful students in reading. It could be seen from figure 1 that metacognitive was the highest (S M= 3.72, Mo= 4, SD= 1.000, LS M= 3.52, Mo= 4, SD= .960), but the differences in average or mean for both successful and less successful students in reading were not significant, followed by cognitive (S M= 3.51, Mo= 4, SD= 1.031, LS M= 3.47, Mo= 4, SD= .979), memory (S M= 3.46, Mo= 4, SD= 1.024, LS M= 3.38, Mo= 4, SD= .970), compensation (S M= 3.45, Mo= 4, SD= 1.006, LS M= 3.32, Mo= 4, SD= .985), affective (S M=3.38, Mo= 4, SD= 1.207, LS M= 3.36, Mo= 4, SD= 1.103), and social (S M= 3.28, Mo= 4, SD= 1.138, LS M= 3.21, Mo= 4, SD= 1.119). The mean or average successful students were higher, compared to the less successful students in metacognitive strategies. However, the higher results were for successful students.

Second, the successful and less successful students said that they had several ways to overcome their reading difficulties. First, they used various platforms both online or offline. Second, they had ideas to learn in a meaningful and fun ways. Third, they had different motivations in acquiring English. Fourth, they tended to ask other people to ask in order to clarify the thing that they did not know in order to solve their reading problems.

### **DISCUSSION**

Answering the research question in identifying successful and less successful students' learning strategies in reading, the result of this study identified that there was no significant difference for both successful and less successful students' learning strategies. Although it was insignificant, the most used strategy was metacognitive strategies for both categories of students, followed by cognitive; reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summary and practicing (Oxford, 1990), memory; apply and review the materials, and did the action (Oxford, 1990), compensation; guessing, using synonym and pausing to overcome the missing information in their listening and speaking (Oxford, 1990), affective; reduced the anxiety and created positive attitude (Memiş, 2018), and social strategies; asked to verify the unclear information (Oxford, 1990).

The finding is in line with the research of Afdaleni (2013) which identified that the most used strategies by the successful and unsuccessful students in reading comprehension were metacognitive strategies, since most of the students were using metacognitive in doing the reading activity. Therefore, the least was the affective strategies. In line with it, Bria & Mbato (2019) found that metacognitive strategies had a significant effect on the students' achievements in reading. Metacognitive was the strategy that included managing and

arranging the learning and evaluating the mistakes (Oxford, 1990). Metacognitive also provided guidelines in planning the additional thoughts or behaviour, where it was important for mastering a second language (Barnwell et al., 1991).

The second finding was that there were other strategies in which the students in each category implemented to solve the problems in reading. It could be identified from the interview. First, they preferred to use Google Translate rather than a printed dictionary since it was easier to use. Second, they learned English by watching movies, listening to a song, and playing games that they could do every day. Reading was the process of joining the word meaning, combining, and articulating it into well-organized information (Choi & Zhang, 2021). Third, the students had high and various motivations in learning English. Students with high motivation tended to use more learning strategies since they thought they needed to explore the information more (Oxford & Crookall, 1989 as cited in Khokhar & Sangi, 2018). Fourth, they did not hesitate to ask their teacher, friends, parents, or someone who was more fluent in learning English. These were in line with the social strategies which said whenever the students needed to verify something, practice, and understand the target culture, they asked the person who understands English better (Oxford, 1990).

The second finding was in line with the research of Stern (1975 as cited in Nguyen & Terry, 2017) which stated that learning strategies leaned on the student's initiative and activeness in overcoming their problems in learning. Rubin (1975 as cited in Nguyen & Terry, 2017) stated that learning strategies dealt with the ability to guess, communicate, tolerate error, and practice in learning. Amir (1998) also identified that students preferred to use more strategies in reading rather than learning other skills.

In conclusion, there was no significant difference between successful and less successful students in using the strategies for their reading. Both successful and less successful students used almost the same strategies in reading. The students also had several techniques to overcome their reading problems either to pursue their dream or to develop their knowledge and abilities.

There were several limitations of this research: (1) the students were not divided into successful, intermediate, and less successful students, so the results were not different enough from one to another; (2) only ten students were interviewed which made the data less valid compared to the total of the students available; and (3) there were only two findings of this research which only focused on answering the research questions.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study was aimed at identifying the successful and less successful students' learning strategies in reading and how they overcome the reading difficulties. According to the results of the study, it could be established that the students' learning strategies were not different for successful and less successful students. Successful and less successful students more or less have the same learning strategies in reading due to they had no significant difference. The way they solved the reading difficulty was also the same for successful and less successful students.

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