



# Exploring EFL Learning Strategies of International Class Students at Higher Education

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**Abstract**—This research aims to explore the frequent EFL learning strategies used by international class students considered successful learners, the effects of the learning strategies, and how the learners enjoyed learning non-English subjects. It employed a mix-method with a triangulation instrument including a close-ended questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and document. The results of the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively while the interview and document results were qualitatively analyzed. The respondents were the international class students' academic year 2020 in Tadulako University, (n=54) participating in the questionnaire and (n=5) participating in the interview and the records of English as a general subject (MKU) as document data, chosen by using a quota sampling technique. The results showed that the frequent strategies employed by the successful learners were metacognitive (Mean = 4.08) indicating as strategies *always or almost always used* followed by cognitive strategies (Mean = 3.27) as strategies *usually used* while the least ones, were social strategies (Mean = 2.53) as strategies *sometimes used*. Learners have positive improvements in their vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, speaking skills, and level of confidence. Unfortunately, the successful learners could not consider themselves to have enjoyed learning the non-English subjects since the material delivered by the lecturers was not presented bilingually.

**Keywords**—EFL learning strategies, higher education, international class.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the process of learning a foreign language, language learning strategies tend to play an important role. It has been mentioned earlier that learning strategy is a specific action taken by the students to make their learning easier, simpler, more interesting, more self-indirect, more efficient, and more transferable to new contexts [1]. All learning strategies can be applied in some learning situations, yet there are effective learning strategies considered essential in providing positive feedback to learners. To foster effective use of the self-access center in the university, it was decided to advise learners on the use of both cognitive and metacognitive strategies that have earlier been categorized as effective strategies in the

Indonesian tertiary education context [2]. Previous studies of language learning strategies in Indonesia have reported that cognitive and metacognitive strategies are the most effective strategies used by learners in learning a language [3], [4], [5], [6], [7], [8], [9]. While, metacognitive strategies can help students to develop good thinking management ability, create good academic achievement [4], with both strategies, cognitive and metacognitive, learners can reach good achievement in improving their speaking skills [3] and be significantly correlated to different language skills of English as a foreign language in Indonesian context [9].

Numerous studies of language learning strategies that are conducted outside of the Indonesian context provide evidence of how cognitive and metacognitive strategies affect students' language learning in positive ways. Cognitive, metacognitive, (and social) strategies have been mostly used by students in learning English [10]. It has already been proven that metacognitive strategies can influence foreign language marks on school achievement [11] and that it is beneficial for teachers to raise their students' awareness about narrowing the gap between their language learning strategies and their teachers' preferred teaching methodologies [12]. Regarding another effective language learning strategy, cognitive strategies have been indicated to give a significant positive correlation to learners' foreign language achievement [13] and promote learners' independent language learning competence to face their grammar learning difficulties [14].

However, the other findings also revealed that other strategies, including compensation and social strategies, have a positive relationship to learners' academic achievement since those strategies are used mostly by higher achievers [15], [16]. The references in those previous studies are enticing and led the present study to investigate language learning strategies used by successful learners of international class in higher education.

In the present study, we investigated and explored the language learning strategies used by successful international learner class from four different faculties, academic year of 2020 at Tadulako University Palu, Indonesia. To investigate and explore the language learning strategies used by the successful learners, we proposed three questions; first, what language learning strategies are mostly used by the international class students? Second, how do the language learning strategies affect the learning process of the learners? Third, how do the successful learners enjoy learning non-English subjects?

II. RESEARCH METHOD

The present study employed mixed-method research which used a sequential combination concerning the components of quantitative and qualitative research to get the data in detail. Primary and secondary data sources were collected through document, questionnaires, and interview. The participants who were appropriately chosen were those who were available, those who have participated in investigating and exploring the language learnings strategies used, which generally are international class students from four different faculties, academic 2020, totaling 54 learners, and picking the individuals considered successful learners from each faculty totaling 5 learners in this study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Academic Achievement of English as a general subject (MKU)

Five participants, considered successful learners, provided their academic achievement of English as a general subject (MKU) as an artifact document for this present study in order to support the results. There were three students learning English as an MKU in the first semester while the other two had it in the second and both first and second semester. Only a record from the first semester was required of a student who learned it over the course of two semesters. For that MKU, two students got A, while the remaining two received A- (A minus). However, there was one student getting a B+ for that subject.

TABLE I.

Student	Semester	Score	
		Figure	Description
Student A	Semester 1	3.75	A-
Student B	Semester 1	3.50	B+
Student C	Semester 1	3.75	A-
Student D	Semester 2	4.0	A
Student E	Semester 1	4.0	A

Fig. 1. Students' records of English as a general subject (MKU)

As it is shown in the result of the document in Figure 1, two participants, students D and E, are regarded as superiors since the scores or records they got for that subject were the highest compared to others. However, student B only got 3.50 which was the lowest score of all participants while the other two achieved 3.75 as the final results for the subject. The results of the document might

be influenced by the participants' learning strategies. Each participant uses various learning strategies, as shown in their questionnaire responses. With the exception of student E, who employs compensations as the considerable ones, the other four individuals often deploy metacognitive strategies in the highest rank. The superiors apply different highest-level learning strategies, yet both give the lowest rank for social strategies, which are still considered a medium-level. Nevertheless, these two participants apply the learning strategies more frequently than the others. Student E gave a high rank ranging from 3.64 to 3.38 for four different categories of the strategies and the same medium category ranging 3.33 for the other two; affective and social strategies respectively. Student D only gave the highest level for metacognitive, while the other five different categories of the strategies ranged from 2.50 to 3.35 as the medium level of the frequency. A student who got the lowest score also applies social strategies as the lowest. However, the frequency level of the strategies used by this student is on a medium that only has a range over 2.50 to 2.88 for four different strategies except for metacognitive and compensation strategies. Bizarrely, the two participants who achieved 3.75 for the English subject gave low as the category of frequency level for three categories of the strategies. Student A revealed a high rank for metacognitive and memory strategies and medium for cognitive while student C gave a medium rank for compensation strategies and cognitive became the second-highest strategies he used. The students who had the highest scores tended to use learning strategies more frequently than the other participants, according to a comparison between the document's results and the learning strategies used by the participants.

B. Language Learning Strategies Employed by Learners

To investigate the language learning strategies used by the learners, we implicitly proposed the following question: *What language learning strategies are mostly used by the international class students?*

a) Overall strategy use

Strategy	Number of students	Total	Mean	Frequency	Rank
Metacognitive	54 students	33.42	3,71	High	1
Social		20.40	3,40	Medium	2
Cognitive		46.74	3,33	Medium	3
Memory		27.85	3,09	Medium	5
Compensation		18.72	3,12	Medium	4
Affective		17.83	2,97	Medium	6

TABLE II.

Fig. 2. Mean scores and frequency of Language learning strategies usage of all International Class students academic year 2020.

As shown in figure 2, the highest mean score of the strategies used is metacognitive strategies. The other 5 types of strategies are at the medium scale with different mean scores for each. Social strategies, the other indirect

strategies, are the second most popular strategies used by all international class students. While the two types of strategies are chosen as the highest by all students, affective which is also categorized as indirect strategies, are the least strategies used by the students. They tend to use all three direct strategies more than the effective one.

TABLE III.

Strategy	Number of students	Total	Mean	Frequency	Rank
Metacognitive	5 students	20.42	4,08	High	1
Cognitive		16.33	3,27	Medium	2
Memory		14.61	2,92	Medium	3
Compensation		14.48	2,90	Medium	4
Affective		12.82	2,56	Medium	5
Social		12.66	2,53	Medium	6

Fig. 3. Mean scores and frequency of language learning strategies usage of the five participants.

TABLE IV.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Frequency Level
I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word	3	5	15	25	6	4,12	High
	5,60%	9,30%	27,80%	46,30%	11,10%		
I use flashcards to remember new English words	17	15	16	4	2	2,24	Low
	31,50%	27,80%	29,60%	7,40%	3,70%		

Fig. 4. Mean scores and percentage of memory strategy.

The mean scores for these strategies ranged from 3.50 to 4.10, indicating that two things are occurring at a high frequency. The response to the question, "I connect the sound of a new English word with an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word," revealed the item with the highest mean score. In contrast, the statement "I use flashcards to memorize new English

Cognitive strategies are the second most popular ones when they come from the five participants, while metacognitive strategies are likewise the most common ones and have the highest mean scores when compared to the ones disclosed by all students. In fact, despite having the lowest mean score of all the strategies, these successful learners do not commonly employ social strategies. It demonstrates that they prefer to employ the direct strategies over the other two indirect ones.

b) Individual strategy use

The total means and descriptions of each item's frequency of use were reported based on their categories. In general, the statistics showed that a total of 19 out of 50 strategies were recorded as being in the high level of use category (Mean=3.50 to 5.00), 28 items were significantly utilized to be medium, and the 3 remaining items were recorded as being low frequency of use.

words" had the lowest mean score. A study indicated that making homemade flashcards was a time-consuming task and that using flashcards had little impact on students' ability to absorb language [17]. Additionally, it was previously discovered that employing flashcards seemed to have no impact on vocabulary growth.

TABLE V.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Frequency Level
I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English	0	1	7	26	20	4,2	High
		1,90%	13%	48,10%	37%		
I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English	7	13	19	14	1	2,79	Medium
	13%	24,10%	35,20%	25,90%	1,90%		

Fig. 5. Mean scores and percentage of cognitive strategy.

The mean scores showed that five items are at a high scale of frequency with mean scores ranging from 3.50 to 4.20 for cognitive strategies. The item that indicated the highest mean score is "I watch English-language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English" while the item that has the lowest mean score is "I read for pleasure in English." Major studies have proven that watching

English movies is effective for learning a language since it gives benefits to students as they can be open to linguistic, cultural, and intercultural learning or simply motivation at whatever levels they are or become [21] and enhance new vocabulary [22]. On the contrary, reading for pleasure became the least-used strategy because it might not be students' habit.

TABLE VI.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Frequency Level
If I cannot think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing	1	6	16	21	10	3,61	High
	1,90%	11,10%	29,60%	38,90%	18,50%		
I read English without looking up every new word	8	18	17	8	3	2,62	Medium
	14,80%	33,30%	31,50%	14,80%	5,60%		

Fig. 6. Mean scores and percentage of compensatory strategy.

The mean scores pointed out that two items are at a high scale of frequency with mean scores ranging from 3.50 to 3.60. The item that showed the highest mean score was "If I cannot think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing." The item used mostly

by the students showed that they made attempts to keep the interaction running well. On the other hand, the lowest mean score was "I read English without looking up every new word."

TABLE VII.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Frequency Level
I have clear goals for improving my English skills	0	0	5	22	27	4,40	High
			9,30%	40,70%	50%		
I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English	7	14	17	11	5	2,87	Medium
	13%	25,90%	31,50%	20,40%	9,30%		

Fig. 7. Mean scores and percentage of metacognitive strategy.

Most international class students who employ metacognitive strategies have mean scores between 3.70 and 4.40, which indicates that six items are at a high scale of frequency. The item that gave out the highest mean score was "I pay attention when someone is speaking English". Unlike that strategy, the lowest mean score was "I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study

English" which was still made up as positive by 33 respondents while it is not used by the other 21 respondents. These strategies are dominated by high scales of frequency and do not give any low for the scale as presented which is considered to be the most popular strategies used.

TABLE VIII.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Frequency Level
I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake	3	2	21	16	12	3,59	High
	5,60%	3,70%	38,90%	29,60%	22,20%		
I write down my feelings in a language learning diary	19	11	15	6	3	2,31	Low
	35,20%	20,40%	27,80%	11,10%	5,60%		

Fig. 8. Mean scores and percentage of affective strategy.

TABLE IX.

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Frequency Level
If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again	1	4	15	14	20	3,88	High
	1,90%	7,40%	27,80%	25,90%	37%		
I try to learn about the culture of English speakers	6	9	22	11	6	3	Medium
	11,10%	16,70%	40,70%	20,40%	11,10%		

Fig. 9. Mean scores and percentage of social strategy.

The mean scores, which range from 3.50 to 3.80, indicate that two items are at a high scale of frequency for social strategies. The statement "If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again" had the highest mean score. ESL learners who are immersed in a welcoming environment have many chances to converse and use the language. By using strategies for language learning such as repeating words and asking for clarifications, students experienced meaningful learning. The statement "I strive to learn about the culture of English speakers" had the lowest mean score, yet 39 respondents still used it confidently. Even though the scale of frequency is medium, as seen in the table, this strategy is still the one that students choose the most.

c) *Effects of the Language Learning Strategies*

Learning strategies have helped students learn the target language. To investigate the benefits the students experienced after utilizing the language learning strategies, we posed the following question: How do the

language learning strategies affect the learning process of the learners? Increased vocabulary, proper grammar and pronunciation, improved speaking skill, and a higher level of confidence are some advantages that the participants experience as a result of using the learning strategies they employ. The perspectives and responses provided by the five participants regarding each affect their experience also tend to be similar. A strong vocabulary base has aided the students in exploring and comprehending English from their individual perspectives.

*I have learned a slew of new English words that I can employ in sentences. I now enjoy listening to English music because of my broad vocabulary. Although I can emotionally identify with the songs, my limited vocabulary made even simple lines difficult for me. However, now that I am familiar with many new words, I can compose new phrases. In this way, I recall the words; I enjoy watching humorous shows on the internet because I understand what they are saying, though not always. They do, however, occasionally crack some elite jokes; I come across some English terms in public places or on the packaging of various products, such as imported goods, that I can understand.*

All participants stated that one cognitive strategy they all commonly use has been vital to building a wide vocabulary: watching English-language TV episodes or seeing to English-speaking movies.

Pronouncing some English words properly was an effect received by two participants after applying the learning strategies. This effect has given them positive outcomes that they have linked to their experiences as perceived by students A and C.

*I have been trying to say some English terms in a British accent since it is cool, and I have really enjoyed it. It's not as great as they claim, and it felt strange at first, but sure... Now I'm more secure in doing it, and I've even attempted it with my friends. So far, they seem to grasp what I stated, and the topic came up naturally; I kept looking for better ways to learn how to pronounce English words and began practicing myself. That was worthwhile since I discovered that I was excellent at presenting a task from a non-English subject in a class using English. People understood what I said, and we had a great talk in class.*

Having good pronunciation is an effect that implies that those students are aware of their pronunciation to carry out good communication between them to others as people will understand easier and know where the conversation goes.

Using proper grammar when communicating is another strategies to be more understandable. While some native speakers may not be concerned with grammar as long as they concentrate on the meaning, grammar proficiency is crucial. As a result of the benefit they perceive from learning strategies, three participants (students C, D, and E) tend to prioritize grammar over other skills.

*I found myself becoming better at grammar. Using grammar properly in sentences helps people understand the meaning better. Grammar was not easy for me. The English tenses looked so much tricky. But I learned more by getting accustomed to the language till I get the result; I realized that I have become better at using grammar correctly which was not easy for me at first; I have been better in grammar. I use some English tenses correctly.*

Those statements define that this effect they got by implementing particular strategies has also overcome students' problems in grammar as they can use it correctly.

The learning strategies have also given an effective result to the successful learners as their speaking skill has improved way better. Generally, four participants (student A, C, D, and E) confirmed that they use English orally to get immersed in that language. However, two participants are using English verbally daily since they have a supportive environment as each of them apprehended.

*I speak English more with my friends who are willing to improve their English and I enjoy practicing with them as much as possible. I did that too in class but other classmates used English scarcely as they were too anxious to make mistakes; I speak English more fluently since I am used to communicating with my family especially with my mom and my sister in English; My parents always encourage me to learn English more. I was really happy that I could meet some native speakers at that time I joined the English course. We were trained to use English orally more often. Since then, I speak English frequently and as a result, my speaking skill has improved well; my speaking skill has improved since I talked to*

*native speakers more often when I joined the English course. It was challenging at first but I tried very hard.*

The participants' remarks indicated that their strategy of using English in everyday situations had improved their ability to speak fluently. Additionally, it has been noted that the students can still communicate in English outside of class, but they may still learn more due to the encouraging environment they are in.

The participants' increased level of confidence is another advantageous outcome. They have become more comfortable communicating with others in English. This effect influenced how all individuals assessed their learning processes.

*I feel more confident now to speak English with my friends. I have lots of vocabulary and I can use the English tenses correctly; the level of my confidence has increased well. I can use many new English words when I talk to others and I do not really care about the situation where people will think that I am showing off by using English in public. You know...many people would judge us when we speak English. But I do not care anymore as I did; this is funny...Actually, that thing that makes me feel more confident is the compliments I get from people who realize that I get a significant improvement in English; never have I found myself to be more confident to use English verbally till some friends gave compliments to me regarding the English I use sounds like native speakers. Besides, I often use some English words that my friends do not know before. That is how they noticed that my English has improved well; I never care what the situation could put me through, I keep using English to talk with others. I do not have any doubt to use it orally in public.*

Varied comments from the participants define that they have increased their level of confidence since they know what to say and how to use the language properly in terms of grammatical correctness. Strategies they used have influenced their level of confidence for using the language in a huge amount of intensity.

#### d) Learning non-English subjects

We posed the question as follows to investigate the learning situation of learning non-English subjects: *How do the successful learners enjoy learning non-English subjects?* International class students are supposed to learn other subjects by using English since it is a bilingual class. The lecturers who teach other subjects which are non-English subjects need to use English as a medium of instruction to trigger students to be motivated in using that language and provide sustained interaction in the classroom through the language. Unfortunately, all participants confirmed that they could not consider themselves to be enjoying learning the other subjects by using English since almost all lecturers did not use that language when teaching. The following are the responses regarding the learning of the non-English subjects.

*I cannot consider whether I enjoyed learning the other subjects (non-English subjects) or not since the teaching and learning process was not in English. I think all students in my class would be motivated to use English more if the lecturers also provided a learning situation where we could explore English more; I am not sure if I can enjoy it since only one lecturer who taught General Chemistry used English as a medium of instruction in PowerPoint presentation. For this subject yes, I enjoyed it. But not sure about other subjects. It is funny, we are international class students, but...yeah, we do not speak English more for other subjects; Other lecturers never taught us by using English since all international class students in my class chose to learn other subjects by using Bahasa Indonesia.*

*So, the very first time, we were asked by each lecturer, we said that we would not understand it if they used English and surprisingly, heheh.... they did as our request. I, to be honest, ehh...preferred to learn the other subjects by using Bahasa Indonesia. Hheh...I am so embarrassed....but I guess I was not ready enough. Hmm...not sure actually what it would be if they had taught us in English. But, maybe... maybe... it would motivate me and even my friends to study English more if they used that language. I don't know; I enjoyed it a lot since we were accustomed to using English in doing presentations. Unfortunately, not all lecturers use it. I thought we would use English more often since we are prioritized to join international events but yeah...I do not know why they barely used English. Even the lecturers who taught us are those who pursued degrees overseas; I enjoy it so far but unfortunately, not all lecturers use English as the medium of instruction. I expected it to be more often used since it is an international class. I don't know, it seems like the regular and international classes do not make a difference. What I had in mind was I would communicate more in English with my classmates but sadly, it was out of my expectation. That is why I speak English only to my family.*

Since the COVID-19 pandemic's emergence, PowerPoint presentations have been used more frequently to teach students. To communicate with their students, lecturers use a variety of platforms. Several lecturers instructed material bilingually while some others did not. Some students, however, stated that the lecturers who taught English as a general subject did not apply suitable teaching methods or strategies that were appropriate for the materials being taught. They expected the lecturers to use such motivational videos in class to encourage them to explore the target language, which was one of the most often used strategies by the participants. A superior student, student E, stated that she was able to learn English by using the learning strategies she finds successful in exploring the target language during the learning process, despite the fact that the lecturer did not give acceptable teaching techniques, as she stated, "the teaching methods or strategies employed by the lecturer somehow did not match appropriately to the subject being taught, I believe, but I was able to learn using the learning strategies." It would have been more effective if the speaker had demonstrated appropriate techniques in class. The other three participants (students A, C, and D) also made reference to the speculative assertion in varied ways. The four participants' shared perspectives suggest that they can learn independently by applying the successful learning techniques they have already mastered when learning English.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Language learning strategies have been shown to enhance and improve students' success in learning English. Cognitive and metacognitive strategies have also been the most commonly used by EFL learners to learn the language. However, this study implies that it is crucial to provide a different curriculum or syllabus that requires the attention of university decision-makers because students in this class are prioritized to participate in international events. Before introducing the curriculum and instructional materials to the foreign class, the university should also provide training for the lecturers; this will, ostensibly, enable them to create the teaching and learning process abroad. Additionally, it is thought to

be very important for the lecturers to offer the subject matter utilizing excellent teaching methods, as this can encourage the international students to be enthusiastic to compete worldwide as expected.

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