LANGUANGE LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY THE SUCCESSFUL TOEFL TEST TAKERS OF ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT UIN ALAUDDIN MAKASSAR

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to know the language learning strategies that used by the successful TOEFL test-takers of English Education Department UIN Alauddin Makassar. The research design of this study is descriptive qualitative. The subject of this research consisted of 5 students of English Education Department academic year 2015. In determining the subject of this research, the researcher used criteria that the students must achieve TOEFL score 500 that undertaken TOEFL once or twice. This research used interview instrument with supporting data from document. The result showed that the successful test-takers applied several learning strategies in TOEFL. The learning strategies that the successful test-takers used are compensation strategies by guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words, metacognitive strategies by setting goals, Affective strategies by giving self-encouragement, memory strategies by grouping some new words in a certain group to make easy at remembering the words and using keyword and imagery to help remember new words, cognitive strategies by make summary about TOEFL materials and watch and read books about TOEFL, and social strategies by practice TOEFL with friends and do peer correction.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies, TOEFL, Successful Test-Takers

INTRODUCTION

TOEFL stands for " Test of English as a Foreign Language". This test has been respected internationally (Warfield, Laribee, & Geyer, 2013). In other words, TOEFL is highly recognized as a standardized test to measure the English proficiency of non-native speakers of English throughout the world.

A number of universities in Indonesia require TOEFL score as a graduation requirement. They believe that TOEFL score can be used to predict the students' ability and skills to

understand English in academic tasks (Aliponga, 2013). Besides , TOEFL is also used as a requirement to continue the study to the higher level and to apply job in several big enterprises.

Generally, TOEFL has three sections; Listening Comprehension, Structure & Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension. Each section has different limited and separated time where each time cannot be integrated with others (Shape, 2007).

Passing TOEFL is not easy, most of the students face difficulties in answering the test. Difficulties in TOEFL are different in each section. According to Brown (2004) there are eight difficulties that usually faced by the students in listening section. They are clustering, redundancy, reduce form, performance variable, colloquial language, rate of delivery, stress, rhyme, intonation, and interaction. Besides, students also commonly face difficulties dealing with speakers when a speaker speak too fast, and different accent as well as use high level of vocabularies. In reading section, the students face difficulties in reading long passage with many new words. Meanwhile in structure and written expression section, most of students face difficulties because lack of grammar skills, lack of vocabulary mastery and less of practice.

One of the general factor caused students faced difficulties in answering TOEFL was because they are lack of learning strategies (Antoni, 2014). Learning strategies are plans designed for a particular purpose. Learning strategies in answering TOEFL test are really important in helping students to pass the test. The best learning strategies would lead the students to answer the question in TOEFL and to get the high score of TOEFL itself.

At UIN Alauddin Makassar University, all students from English Education Department are obliged to pass TOEFL with the minimum score 500. However, it is not easy to get that score. According to observation that conducted by the researcher, among 20 students of English Education Department UIN Alauddin Makassar Academic year 2015 that took TOEFL, only 1 student able to pass the test with minimum score 500. Besides, some of students also need to take TOEFL several times until they able to get score 500.

This is such an important issue because even students from English major facing difficulties in TOEFL. However, even most of the students facing difficulties, there are also several students who easy to pass the test or succeful test-takers that able to got the minimum score 500 or even more with only followed TOEFL once or twice.

Therefore, in order to provide information that can help to minimize difficulties in TOEFL, the researcher has analyzed what language learning strategies used by the succeful test-takers who can easily passing the test, so that, the other students also can get information

regarding to the best learning strategies that they can apply in their learning procces in order to help them passing the test.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Concept of TOEFL

TOEFL is designed to measure the English Language proficiency of people whose native language is not English. TOEFL is the most widely respect English language test in the world because its recognized in 130 countries and more than 10,000 universities, collagues and agencies. TOEFL has four forms of test that currently administered around the world (Abboud et al, 2011). They are Paper-Based Test, Computer-Based Test and Internet Based Test and Testing Program. However, among four forms of test, Students of UIN Alauddin Makassar only use Paper-Based Test.

Successful Test-Takers in TOEFL

Successful means achieving the results wanted or hoped for (Cambridge Dictionary). Meanwhile, test taker or learner is a person who is finding out about a subject or how to do something (Oxford dictionary). Thus, successful test-takers can be defined as the learners who able to achieve their goals or achieve above average grades. Succesful test-takers in TOEFL are the learners who able to pass the test by reaching the predetermined score easily. Successful test-taker is the one who has a plan or strategy in learning process. In line with this, Mohamed Amin Embi et al. (2001) and Javid, C. et. al (2013) also advocated that successful test-takers demonstrate better application of language learning strategies as compared to the less proficient learners and that the partctipants with high English language proficiency adopt language learning strategies more frequently. This evidence is supported by Samah et. al (2016) who claim that the outstanding learners possess their own methods in language learning and build their own situations in acquiring concepts.

Factors Influencing TOEFL Process

In taking TOEFL, students need well preparation. Many students face difficulty in TOEFL. One of the factors why students face difficulties in TOEFL is the lack of learning strategies. In line with this, research conducted by Antoni(2014) showed that most of the students facing difficulties because they are have no good preparation and lack of Learning strategies that can employed in their learning process. In order to make the students able to overcome the difficulty in TOEFL, using an appropriate learning strategy is the best option for the students. In order to maximize TOEFL score, the students need to know the learning strategies that can be used in answering the test. Implementing learning strategies is really

important to improve students language abilities and their TOEFL score. According to Griffiths (2008), he mentioned that learning strategies are influential and powerful tools that can help and support students' achievement.

Language Learning Strategies

Oxford (1990) defines learning strategies as steps taken by learners to enhance their own learning. Strategies are important for language learning because they are the tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence.

Oxford (1990) identified twelve key features of language learning strategies as follows: Contribute to the main goal, communicative competence, allow learners to become more self-directed, expand the role of the teachers, problem-oriented, specific actions taken by the learners, involve many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive, support learning both directly and indirectly, not always observable, often conscious, can be taught, flexible, influenced by a variety of factors.

Oxford as cited in Cheng (2015) has been classified Language learning strategies into two major terms. They were direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies refer to memory, cognitive and compensation strategy, meanwhile indirect strategies refer to metacognitive, affective and social strategy. Direct strategies will involve the target language directly, meanwhile indirect strategies support language learning without directly involving the target language.

METHOD

In this research, the researcher applied descriptive qualitative as the reasearch method. Gay, R.et.al, (2005) stated that descriptive research is determining and describing the way of things from an event. According to Creswell, (2008) qualitative is a research process which aims to analyze social issues based on the observation and presented in details description formed by words. Therefore, the researcher applied descriptive qualitative as the research method since the researcher aimed to decribe and explain the students' learning strategies in answering TOEFL.

Instruments

To get the data for this research, the researcher took data from document of TOEFL score from TOEFL organizer of English Education Department UIN Alauddin Makassar and did an interview. The data was gathered using both of these instruments by online via WhatsApp chat, since there was a circular letter from the rector of UIN Alauddin Makassar that emphasized the online use on each academic activity, including the process of

conducting research for the final year students due to the spread of Corona virus Disease (Covid-19).

Data Analysis

To Analyze the data, this research used data analysis technique theory from Sugiyono (2008), the following steps are ; Data reduction means the process of selecting, identifying, classifying and coding the data that are considered important. In this step, the researcher focused on selecting, identifying, classifying the subject of the research or the successful test-takers based on the data that took from document. Then, the researcher used voice recorder to record the conversation in the interview section and coding the important data from the document and interview section with the subject of the research. Data Display means the process of the researcher to display the data into good sentence. This step help the researcher in understanding the data. In this step, the researcher arranged the data from the document and interview in a good sequence of narrative text in order to be easier to understand. Conclusion and verification is the last step in data analysis. In conclusion, we have to look the result of data reduction and analyzed continously and verified the validity to get the perfect conclusion. In this step, the researcher analyzed continously the result of data reduction in order to answer the problem statement and give the perfect conclusion.

Procedure

In collecting the data, the researcher did documentation and interview in order to answer the research problem. For more explanation, the procedures are discussed as follow; First, the researcher took data from document about TOEFL score of students intake year 2015 who have followed TOEFL as graduation requirement. Then, based on the data, the researcher found that there were five students who categorized as successful test-takers or the students who able to achieve the minimum score 500 with only took TOEFL once or twice. Finally, after getting the data from document, the researcher did an interview via WhatsApp to the students who categorized as successful test-takers. The researcher used interview guidelines that consist of 10 questions regarding to language learning strategies in TOEFL that adapted from Rebecca Oxford theory.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The researcher had conducted interview about the language learning strategies that used by five successful TOEFL test-takers of English Education Department UIN Alauddin Makassar intake year 2015.

The Learning Strategies used by Successful TOEFL Test-takers

The researcher conducted an interview to the selected students for getting deeper information about the students' learning strategies. The interview questions was generated following the six categories of learning strategies taken from Oxford (1990). They are: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies.

Based on the interview, there are several learning strategies that used by the successful test-takers in TOEFL. The researcher sorts the strategies based on the most used and the least used by the successful TOEFL test-takers.

Table 1. The Learning Strategies used by the Successful TOEFL Test-takers

No.	Kinds of Strategies	Percentages (%)
1.	Compensation Strategies	100 %
2.	Metacognitive Strategies	80%
3.	Affective Strategies	60%
4.	Memory Strategies	60%
5.	Cognitive Strategies	60%
6.	Social Strategies	40%

Discussions

In this part, the disscussion for the findings that had been mention in the previous part would be presented. This discussion part is intended to describe the successful test-takers' learning strategy in TOEFL. Here, the researcher will present a discussion of the research results from the interview.

As has been presented in findings, the result of interview showed that the successful test-takers used various kinds of learning strategies. The most applied strategy is practice to guess meaning of the unfamiliar words (applied by 5 students). Guessing intelligently is the representation of compensation strategy (Oxford, 1990). Claimed by Oxford (1990), there are two kinds of guessing intelligently. Those are guessing using linguistic clues and using other clues. Based on the result of the interview, student 2 guess words using linguistic clues,

as she stated:

"There some strategies to guess the meaning of vocabulary in a reading passage. For example by looking at the context. I did that. I try to analyze the root of the word in the context of the sentence to get the meaning of vocabulary" (Interviewed:2021).

Furthermore, the other student guessing words using other clues, as student 3 said:

"When there is words that I don't know, I prefer to guess it first. I look for the context of the words, the whole sentences. After that, when I found my own meaning. I will look for the dictionary and match them" (Interviewed:2021).

The next most used strategies by the successful test-takers is setting goals which is applied by 4 students. This strategy is the representation of metacognitive strategies. Chamot at all (1987) stated that metacognitive strategies give students an opportunity to plan their learning process, monitor their learning and plan their future learning experiences. Furthermore, for the reason that 4 of the successful test-takers applied this strategy, it means that the successful test-takers set their goals and make plan about the materials that they should learn in order to reach the goals that already set, as student 2 stated:

"Yes, I do set my own goal. I must reach above 500. In addition, about how do I set my goals? So I learn and try to mastering at least 45 skills in Longman book to get above 500" (Interviewed:2021).

The learning strategies that also applied by 4 students is self encouragement. Self encouragement is the representation of affective strategies. Most of the successful test-takers gave themselves self encouragement when doing well in practicing TOEFL. Self encouragement here includes making a positive statement and providing rewards. Related to making positive statement, the students always saying supportive things to themselves, as student 1 stated *"I talk to myself in positive way such "You are doing great", "Yok bisa yok" and many positive affirmation" (Interviewed:2021).*

Moreover, regarding to providing rewards, student 5 gave himself a reward when doing well in practicing TOEFL, as he said *"When I pass the practice test with good result, I usually go to KFC as a reward for myself" (Interviewed:2021).*

Another strategies that applied by the successful test-takers are grouping some new words and using keyword as well as imagery to help remember new words. The number of students who applied these strategies are 3 students. Grouping, using keywords and using imagery are the representation of memory strategies. Oxford (1990) stated that memory strategies combines sounds and images so that learners can more easily remember what they hear or read in the new language. Based on the interview, the successful test-takers grouping

some new words to help them easier at remembering new words, as student 4 said:

"I do group. Like when I found new words, I tried to wrote it down and arranged them based on their classification to make me easier remember the new words" (Interviewed:2021)

Related to using keywords, student 1 stated:

"I do used keywords. For example, when there is a new word, I will looking at the root of the word, like in morphology. So, i tried to understand new word by identifying the root of the word" (Interviewed:2021).

Regarding to used imagery to help the students easier at remembering new words, student 3 said:

"I personally used the imagery because having the vision of the words or the phrase or the expression that I want to remember is very helpful for me in order to memorize word in my head" (Interviewed:2021).

The next strategies that also applied by 3 students is make summary about TOEFL materials. This strategy is the representation of cognitive strategies. Summarizing makes the learners able to understand more about the materials, as student 3 said:

"Summarizing is one of my favorite parts when I learn the grammar and the structure. Somehow, I write down several notes of certain words that only appears in certain context. I did make summary especially in structure and I also do it with my own handwriting" (Interviewed:2021).

Regarding to cognitive strategies, the successful test-takers also watch videos as well as read books about TOEFL. Watch videos and read books also the part of cognitive strategies. There were significant different among the successful test-takers. Based on the interview, there are 2 successful test-takers who prefer to watch videos about TOEFL, as student 1 stated *"I used to watch videos when I join TOEFL class" (Interviewed:2021).*

Moreover, student 5 also prefer to watch videos rather that books, as he said:

"I often watch videos about TOEFL rather than books. I feel like I understand easily when I listen to someone explaining more than reading a book, so I prefer watching videos" (Interviewed:2021).

The other two successful test-takers used to do both watch videos as well as read books about TOEFL, as student 3 said:

"I frequently watch. And I also read books. Because only read sometimes can not really help me because I could not get some points. Therefore, it will be very helpful when I watch

because the videos show me different framework and it also give me different perspective and point of view so its help me a lot" (Interviewed:2021).

Moreover, student 5 also applied both of watch videos and read books, as he said *"I do watched videos about TOEFL as well as read book, however for book I only read one book which is Longman book" (Interviewed:2021).*

Another successful test-takers only prefer read books rather than watch videos about TOEFL, as student 2 stated *"Read books about TOEFL, yes of course. It is my primary resource of learning TOEFL and its Longman TOEFL book" (Interviewed:2021).*

The least learning strategies that applied by the successful test-takers is practice TOEFL with friends and do peer correction. The number of students who applied this strategy are 2 students. This strategy is the representation of social strategy. Oxford (1990) stated that cooperating with peers inviolves a concerted effort to work together with other learners on an activity with a common goal or rewards. Based on the interview, the students stated that peer correction is a must because they able to share each other knowledge, as student 3 said:

"Peer correction is also a must. Because sometimes If I have no clue whether my answer is correct or incorrect, we will do sharing like sometimes my friends know the answer so we were sharing. And when we couldn't find the answer by ourselves, we will ask our senior or friend who is better than us in TOEFL" (Interviewed:2021).

To sum up, compensation strategy become the most applied strategy by the successful test-takers and social strategy become the least used. In line with this, Balci and Uguten (2018) also found that the strategies that highly used by the students of English preparatory class program at Necmettin Erbakan University in Turkey were compensation and metacognitive strategies. In addition, Demirel (2012) found that compensation strategies were the most frequent strategies while memory strategies were the least frequently used strategies among students.

Moreover, the things that should be highlighted regarding to the result of the interview, all of the successful test-takers used various kinds of additional activities that help them in learning TOEFL. The thing is, most of the activities that applied by the successful test-takers are not directly related to learning process. Those are watching movies, watching videos on Youtube, listen to podcast on Spotify as well as read entertain articles written in English. Based on those activities, the successful test-takers used authentic materials in learning TOEFL. Overall, besides applying learning strategies in TOEFL, the successful test-takers also utilize authentic materials as one of their resources in learning TOEFL.

CONCLUSION

There are several learning strategies that applied by the successful test-takers in learning TOEFL. First, Compensation strategies by guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words become the most used strategy that applied by all of 5 students. The second, metacognitive strategies by setting goals become the next most used strategy that applied by almost all of the students. The third, Affective strategies by giving self-encouragement become the third most used strategy that applied by 3 out of 5 students. The next, memory strategies by grouping some new words in a certain group to make easy at remembering the words and using keyword and imagery to help remember new words become the next most used strategies that also applied by 3 out 5 students. The next strategies that also applied by 3 out of 5 successful test-takers is cognitive strategies by make summary about TOEFL materials and watch and read books about TOEFL. Finally, the least used strategies are social strategies by practice TOEFL with friends and do peer correction.

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