To What Extend Are Learning Strategies related to Successful Learners in Writing IELTS in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Amongst four skills tested in IELTS, writing IELTS is considered to be one of the most challenging language skills to master. It is believed that writing for second language learners is arguably the strenuous skill to be used in attaining communicative competence. Therefore, discussing learning strategies and good language learners related to IELTS task 2 using four IELTS assessment criteria is still interesting. Considering the significances of all strategies classification, it can be justified those strategies could be very helpful in Writing IELTS Task 2. Particularly, writing IELTS would be significantly improved by using Cognitive, metacognitive, and affective strategies. The reason is that cognitive strategies relate to practicing as the main regular improvement in writing IELTS, Metacognitive strategies connect to planning and brainstorming, and Affective strategies relate to emotional control including anxiety. However, there are some aspects that have to be considered in order to overcome possible problems and strategic limitations. First, there should be explicit instruction and steps from teachers to apply for all of them. Second, Learner should have a capability to distinguish and choose appropriate strategies.

Keywords: IELTS writing, learning strategies, language learners.

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I. INTRODUCTION

International English Language Testing System (IELTS) has become a kind of desirable test of English language proficiency for Indonesian society. There are several reasons why this phenomenon can occur. The first reason is intense competition to find jobs as Indonesian society must compete with neighbor human recourses to survive in ASEAN Economic Community era. It forces Indonesian labor to master English to prepare for ASEAN free market competition. Secondly, the government of Indonesia provided full-funded scholarship in 2013 to enroll in the best 100 Universities in the World. This scholarship has a standard band for IELTS as one of its requirements. As a result, abundance state and private institution establish IELTS program to fulfil this market demand, and it is evidenced by the number of prospective student's desire to study IELTS.

Amongst four skills tested in IELTS, writing IELTS is considered to be one of the most challenging language skills to master. It relates to what Chamot (2005) has mentioned that Writing for second language learners is arguably the strenuous skill to be used in attaining communicative competence. Divsar and Heydari (2017) Claims that the frequent errors of EFL learners in IELTS essay writing relate to word choice and verb forms. These two errors will affect coherence and cohesion in essay text as well because the wrong word choice and verb formation lead to unclear ideas or illogical structure of writing. Therefore, coherence

and cohesion are justified as two common problems for EFL Learners in academic writing (Al Badi, 2015).

Given aforementioned obstacles, suitable learning strategies could be fruitful if they are implemented in teaching and learning of Writing IELTS. According to Oxford (1990, p.8), if strategies are suitable for learners, they would "make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations." A proper strategy implementation to accomplish learning task is also categorized as the characteristic of successful learners while limited or inappropriate use of strategies lies of unsuccessful learners (Gan *et al*., 2014). However, many factors that could possibly affect learning strategies influence (Griffiths, 2015). Therefore, the aim of this essay is to find out to what extend language strategies influence successful language learners.

This paper will begin by discussing learning strategies and good language learners in the literature review. Afterwards, briefly explain IELTS task 2 then elaborating the significance of learning six learning strategies (Oxford, 1990) towards four IELTS assessment criteria. Practical implementation in the form of the lesson plan and the feasible suggestion for IELTS teachers and learners are provided. Lastly, a conclusion after discussing the effect of strategies for writing tasks.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will elaborate the definition of learning strategies defined by some scholars and their classifications. Afterwards, there will be sections of learning strategies significance and criticism.

A. Learning Strategies

The word of strategy is derived from Greek term *strategía* which is utilized by their ancestors in order to win a war (Oxford 2000). In general usage, a strategy can be mentioned as a plan which has a focus on achieving a goal (Oxford 2003). In the same vein, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) describe that learning strategies are a particular thoughts or behavior in order to assist learners to comprehend, learn, and retain new information. For Cohen (2014, p. 7), strategies are thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalized by language learners, to assist them in carrying out a multiple of a task from the very onset of learning to the most advanced levels of target-language performance.

Throughout language strategies proliferation, three scholars who have a major contribution in developing language strategies classifications. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) describe three groups strategies which are cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective strategies. At the same year, Oxford (1990) comes with the most complex concept of strategy inventory, which was created as a holistic form supporting one another. There are six strategy types divided into two groups which are direct and indirect strategies. These terms come from the involvement of target language into strategies. Cohen (2014) sees the similarity of both classifications and explains that classification can be seen as a classification by function. Although all scholars above refer to similar strategies, they emphasize different aspects. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) relate to the type of processing, Oxford (1990) more focuses on holistic support amongst strategies, and Cohen (2014) conveys consciousness. All of these strategies mentioned above have key features claimed by Oxford (Oxford, 1990, p. 9).

1) Contribute to main goal, communicative competence.
2) Allow learners to become more self-directed.
3) Expand the role of teachers.
4) Are problem oriented.
5) Are specific actions taken by the learners?
6) Involve many aspects of learners, not just the cognitive.
7) Support learning both directly and indirectly.
8) Are not always observable.
9) Are often conscious.
10) Can be taught.
11) Are flexible.
12) Are influenced by a variety of factors.

When it comes to practical implementation, it relates to the possibility of language strategies to be transferred to learners, and they can learn how to use them. It links to the key feature point (10) mentioned previously by Oxford (1990). According to Cohen (2014), students can be supported by language strategy through its implementation if there is systematic support from teachers and integration into target language syllabus which can be used in daily tasks. Furthermore, Griffiths (2015) argues that although the fruitful of learning strategies are agreed, there are no clear stages for teaching implementation. So, he proposed more detailed stages to implement strategies into the language teaching process: raising awareness, explicit instruction, practice, implicit instruction, and evaluation (Griffiths, 2015, p. 42).

The implementation of learning strategies brings significance in the change of learner's achievement. The significances mentioned by Cohen (2014) underline the terms of "choices" that relates to learners' consciousness are to enhance learning, to perform a particular task, to solve a specific problem, to compensate for a deficit in language proficiency, to make learning easier, faster, and more enjoyable.

Regarding the previous research studies that have conducted, although myriad publications regarding learning strategies have been published, the study, particularly in Writing IELTS strategies, is limited, even no previous study for Indonesian teaching context. There is a quasi-experimental study conducted by Sanavi & Nemati (2014) in Iran relating to language strategies and Writing IELTS. This research has a limitation to merely analyze Corrective Feedback Strategies to tackle candidate's problem in Writing Task 2. The Corrective Feedback in this research covers "six major categories, namely, direct, indirect, metalinguistic, focused/unfocused, electronic, and reformulation" (Sanavi & Nemati, 2014, p.2). Green (2007) has conducted a pilot study involving students, teachers, and IELTS course providers. The result shows some of the general strategies in learning English.

B. Good Language Learners

The final aim of the significances of learning strategies is to create successful language learners. Rubin (1975) reveals seven strategies used by good language learners: being an accurate guesser, communication passion, managing inhibitions, attending to form, practicing, monitoring one's speech of others, and attending to meaning. Naiman *et al.* (1978) also claim that personality characteristics, cognitive style, and attitudes are the most significant influence in successful learners. Personal characteristic refers to the learners' characteristic in dealing with language learning. For example, "intolerance of ambiguity" in language learning would possibly bring a difficulty to gain knowledge), whether cognitive style refers to "field independence" and attitudes relates to motivation (Naiman *et al,* 1978, pp. 145–147).

Oxford (1990) then claims that proliferation of language proficiency and confidence level are the results of language strategy when learners are appropriate or fit with it. It means that if the language strategy chosen by learners is inappropriate, the significance of utilizing strategy will not help learners to achieve a target language. Therefore, the element of relevance is emphasized by Rebecca Oxford. On the other hand, (Griffiths, 2015, p. 432) in his article entitled "What have we learnt from "good language learners?" concluded that:

"We have learnt that strategies are important and that successful learners have a large repertoire of different types of strategies that they use frequently. But strategies are not

the whole answer, and the strategies that are chosen and which are effective depend on the context, the learning goal, and the learner's unique set of individual characteristics."

It is implied that context, goals, and learner's characteristic have a significant correlation to successful learners. Thus, when talking about successful language learners, there is an abundance of variables that researchers and teachers have to pay attention to.

Achieving the phase of good language learners, however, faces some possible factors influencing the implementation of learning strategies to be less effective. Rees-miler (1993) found that guiding learners in order to utilize learning strategies seems has not been very effective to achieve learning goal and this issue has a significant correlation among the student's age, educational background, life experience, curriculum demands, varying cognitive styles, culture.

Specifically, for Writing IELTS these all variables could also influence the effectiveness of strategies. Focusing on learning goals has been proven to influence learners using more effective strategies (Ames & Archer, 1988). It is because emphasizing on learning goal would create a motivational effect that directs student to develop self-regulated learning by using their appropriate strategies. Khaldieh (2000) also reveals that anxiety and frustration result in a negative attitude toward writing where less successful writer shows an inadequate control of them. In contrast, a more successful writer has good control of their anxiety and frustration in writing. Context mentioned by Griffiths (2015) refers to the shape of environment needed for a teacher to ameliorate learners' skill. For example, "face-to-face classroom environment, one-to-one tuition, an online distance course, a study-abroad situation, or any of the other possible variations in the teaching/learning environment" (Griffiths, 2015, p. 431).

It can be summarized that good language learners can be seen through their capability to use strategies appropriately by considering their characteristic, context, cognitive, attitudes, learning goal. On the other hand, student's age, educational background, life experience, curriculum demands, varying cognitive styles, culture also contribute to less effective implementation of learning strategies. These factors will elaborate in the discussion section to analyze the essay question.

III. DISCUSSION

In this section, the structure of this paper will begin by a brief overview regarding Task 2 in Writing IELTS. Afterwards, in order to analyze to what extend learning strategies related to successful learners, this will discuss learning strategies mentioned in the literature review to be implemented in achieving four assessment criteria in writing IELTS Band Descriptor. As there are no previous published research studies regarding the use of learning strategies in writing IELTS task 2, specifically in Indonesian teaching context, I will discuss according to my anecdotal experiences as a former IELTS learner and teacher in my country. Next, the effect of using strategies for writing task 2 will be analyzed before proposing practical

implementation and feasible suggestions for teachers.

A. Brief Overview Regarding Writing IELTS Task 2.

Two types of IELTS which are IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training have different writing test formats. However, this paper will merely focus on writing skill Task 2 in IELTS Academic. The instruction of Writing Task 2 requires test takers to formulate and develop a position in relation to a given promptly in the form of a question or statement. Ideas should be supported by evidence, and examples may be drawn from the test takers' experience. IELTS test takers must answer a point of view, argument or problem and they need to write 250 or more words in about 40 minutes. Four principal aspects of assessment are based on (1) task responses, (2) coherence and cohesion, (3) lexical resource, (4) grammatical range and accuracy.

B. The Significances of Learning Strategies Toward Writing IELTS

The first strategies are cognitive strategies. Cognitive strategies cover practicing, receiving, and sending messages, analyzing, and reasoning (Oxford, 1990). Practicing is pivotal strategies in writing IELTS as it can help learners to make tons of repetitions which is known to be useful in learning a language. Through repetition, not only writing fluency can be improved (Xiaoyue, 2009), but also the complexity of writing performance shows significant improvement (Azizzadeh & Dobakhti, 2015). Repetition would be advantageous to train test takers facing various types of essay questions. According to Pell (2015), there are five types of common essay question for Writing Task 2 such as Opinion (Agree or Disagree), Advantages and Disadvantages, Problem and Solution, Discussion (Discuss both views), Two-part Question. Each essay question needs different organization and approach to answer. Therefore, a great number of practices are required to sharpen their fluency. However, a lot of practicing will probably result in a lack of accuracy. For example, it can be seen through Azizzadeh and Dobakhtis' experiment (2015) that reveals students' accuracy did not show a significant impact. It means that excessive practicing would not usually bring a great result in accuracy.

Using resources in receiving and sending messages is beneficial for writing IELTS task 2. Test takers should read many resources in advance regarding familiar topics in task 2 so that they can be effortless to figure out related ideas and create branches of reasons, especially in the middle of IELTS test. As a result, test takers could anticipate a broad range of topics related to the problem regarding an unfamiliar topic or outside of their learners' educational backgrounds (Rees-miler, 1993), so that test takers will be more ready to face the test. However, reflecting on my personal experience in learning through IELTS sample writing, there are abundance writing samples with various writing styles. As good language learners, we have to be careful to choose an appropriate sample answer. There are many samples writing task 2 using fancy words, but it is not suitable for its collocations which result of poor accuracy.

Analyzing and reasoning in cognitive strategies would be advantageous for learners achieving task response. It can be used by students to support main ideas in writing task 2. Using deductive reasoning from (Oxford,1990), for

example, creates a list of reasons to support the main idea so as to achieve "fully address all part of the task" in order to write a well-developed paragraph. Creating structure input and output would also be useful in writing (Oxford, 1990). It leads to the function of taking notes, summarizing, and highlighting where they can be implemented to analyze real sample answers and follow pattern are required for the practicing session. However, imitating advanced phrases, fancy words, and structure without having a good understanding would have an impact on accuracy and coherence and cohesion.

The second strategy is metacognitive strategies. Many scholars believe that metacognitive strategies are essential in writing (O'Mally & Chamot, 1990: Oxford, 1990: Chamot, 2005: Cohen, 2014: Nosratinia & Adibifar, 2014). Moreover, high proficiency learners use metacognitive strategies frequently and more than other strategies (Cohen, 2014). Chamot (2005) also states that more successful students use more metacognitive than less successful learners.

According to Nosratinia and Adibifar (2014) conclude that it is useful to use metacognitive strategies after utilizing two metacognitive classifications from Rebecca Oxford (1990), O'Malley and Chamot (1990) in their experiment. However, this study merely focused on writing in general which had pre-test and post-test topics relating to "The Role of Television in Our Daily Live" and "The Role of Internet in Our Daily Live." This study is different from IETLS writing which has various genres containing advantages and drawbacks, cause and effect, problem, and solution, agree and disagree and both views.

Metacognitive strategies such arranging, and planning are a pivotal technique in writing. These strategies could be applied for Writing IELTS task 2. Making a planning and arranging ideas are essential steps in writing essay task 2. It has an impact on achieving task responses and coherence and cohesion in assessment. Moreover, the problem regarding out of topic could also be avoided by test takers as they have already figured out in advance regarding their relevance ideas. However, planning has a significant influence on personal background and experience (Rees-miler, 1993). Based on my experience in writing IELTS, although I have already learned how to brainstorm and to develop ideas, I still had difficulties in facing unfamiliar topics. At the time, I dealt with veterinarian topic and my writing was totally messed up. I never encounter by this topic. As a result, I could not achieve writing 250 words as it was time consuming. Therefore, having previous knowledge could influence the effectiveness of learning strategies in writing IELTS task 2.

Self-monitoring and self-evaluating will be used to ensure grammatical range, accuracy, and errors for task 2 after writing 250 words. Test takers must allocate their time to minimize errors in order to achieve a higher score. However, test takers should be aware that if they want to have enough time to monitor their writing errors, it would be important to arrange a particular time. As a consequence, time-consuming to write task 2 in 40 minutes will be reduced to make planning and monitoring. Hence, there must be fair practices due to time management and quick writing.

Cognitive and metacognitive strategies mentioned above

fortify each other as Oxford (1990, p.14) that "six strategies groups (three direct and three indirect) interact with help each other and the relationship are positioned like performer and director." For example, while planning a list of ideas using brainstorming technique, learners also activate their sense of analyzing to some extent. In the same case, practicing as cognitive strategies needs monitoring to find out errors of mistakes.

The third strategy is memories strategies. The application of memory strategies in Writing IELTS would bring advantages and drawbacks. It can be beneficial to improve lexical resources by remembering words classification like using imagination relating to similar sounds can be implemented. This technique results in improving lexical resources. Moreover, remembering how to use linking words brings benefits to improve coherence and cohesion elements. On the other hand, remembering sentences and patterns in writing IELTS can be analyzed by an examiner and result in decreasing their score. Based on my experience in learning IELTS, some of my friends, some of my friends, some of my friends, some of my friends tried to remember someone's pattern. Thus, test takers should be aware of which part memory strategies bring a good effect and which one does not.

The fourth strategy is compensation strategies. The role of compensation strategies is not as significant as cognitive and metacognitive in Writing IELTS. However, guessing and overcoming elements of writing could have a correlation with test takers' understanding about task questions in writing task 2. Sometimes test takers have to face uncommon words in essay questions. Unable to make smart guessing could lead to careless development of an idea which results in out of topic. It means the task question has not been answered yet. Therefore, guessing contributes to achieving task response through analyzing essay questions.

The fifth strategy is Affective Strategies. Affective strategies relate to lowering anxiety, encouraging, and controlling emotional temperature (Oxford,1990). These techniques can be used to overcome some possible issues besides lack of grammatical control, coherent and cohesion that can be solved by aforementioned strategies (Cognitive and Metacognitive) are bad emotional control that can increase the level of anxiety. It could diminish the maximum result of test takers performances in writing. This issue often happens in some test takers where their level of anxiety will dramatically increase due to test pressure. Therefore, self-encouraging and self-motivating are important to maintain positive movement (Green, 2007) in supplying a trigger for successful writing output. This solution can be implemented throughout IELTS preparation, and it needs students' awareness to activate it.

Social strategies as the last strategies can improve writing IELTS by using advanced technology such as the internet nowadays. Creating direct communication virtually with native speakers is easy to access. Test takers can prepare themselves by making friends on such essay forum websites and collaborate in essay correction. Based on my experience on essay forum, it was a helpful condition when native speaker as a contributor on the website (https://essayforum.com/) helped me to improve my writing skill. Chuang *et.al*. (2014) conducted a study to investigate

the significance of Social and Affective strategies in a virtual learning context, and it reveals that social strategies have a positive impact on engaging learners.

C. Practical Implementation for IELTS Teacher in Relation to Learning Strategies

This paper will exemplify the integration of some strategies into lesson plan by considering Griffins stages (2015). The aim of this lesson plan is to improve learner coherence and cohesion. The material used is good and bad sample answers and a list of linking words. However, some students could achieve their learning goals by using learning strategies such as the study conducted by Cohen (2014) at the University of Minnesota which proved

There are three strategies provided here and it will be taught in a systematic procedure as Cohen (2014) mention that strategies are beneficial if they are used in a systematic way. It starts from metacognitive strategies in the form of monitoring sample answer of writing task 2. It will be utilized to improve student's awareness so that learners are able to write linking words correctly to improve coherence and cohesion. The teacher will guide students to monitor the sample answer and compare the way of using linking words in good and bad sample answers. The teacher should state explicitly the way of using linking words to writing and the significance of monitoring linking words towards coherence and cohesion because learners must know their learning goal to achieve good language learners characteristic mention by Griffins (2005).

After students are aware of distinguishing ways of implementing linking words, Memory strategies can be used to memorize all of the monitored linking words. As I mentioned before, it is suggested that students not only memorize the words but also analyze how to use them appropriately. Afterwards, the teacher guides them to use one of the cognitive strategies which are practicing. However, due to time limitation in one session, the students are only instructed to write two paragraphs using those linking words which have been monitored and analyzed previously. What teachers have to emphasize here is to encourage students to have many repetitions out of the class.

The last stage is an evaluation of students' ability. The teacher can analyze through monitoring students writing, but in this session, it is possible to use pair evaluation. So, students will investigate their writing with one another helped by the teacher in the class. Feedback concerning the way of using linking words in their writings is needed to improve students' s awareness regarding their errors. It is hoped that they will use metacognitive, memory, and cognitive strategies gradually.

Talking about my previous experiences, numerous IELTS candidates in my country fail to achieve their target score whereas they had been studied intensively for three months or six months as test preparation. There are many obstacles because it could happen. IELTS candidates maybe do not know what the best strategies that they can implement or lack emotional control which leads to high level of anxiety. There should be further research to investigate these issues.

D. Feasible Suggestion for IELTS Teacher and Test Takers.

There are some suggestions for IELTS teacher and Test Takers as follows:

1) IELTS teachers should pay attention to the advantages of limitation of strategies. Therefore, the student must know that strategies have advantages and disadvantages in writing IELTS Task 2, for example, memories strategies.

2) Especially in Indonesia, there must be special attention regarding the mental readiness of students before applying for IELTS test.

3) It is suggested to create a similar atmosphere between practicing and real IELTS tests to guarantee test takers would not be very shocked and could adjust their self under tension of IELTS assessment.

4) The teacher should pay attention to five steps of implementing strategies by Griffiths (2015) involving raising awareness, explicit and implicit instructions, practicing and evaluation.

5) Learners should be aware of limitations and strengths of learning strategies in Writing IELTS so that they can easily opt out what types of learning strategies that would be suitable to be implemented.

6) In writing, test takers should pay attention to indirect strategies. Metacognitive and Affective are two important strategies which can improve task achievement.

7) Test takers should consider the relevance between excessive practice and what strategies are used to create their effective learning process.

IV. CONCLUSION

Ultimately, considering the significances of all strategies classification discussed earlier. It can be justified that strategies could be very helpful in Writing IELTS Task 2. Particularly, writing IELTS would be significantly improved by using Cognitive, metacognitive, and affective strategies. The reason is that cognitive strategies relate to practicing as the main regular improvement in writing IELTS, Metacognitive strategies connect to planning and brainstorming, and Affective strategies relate to emotional control including anxiety. However, there are some aspects that have to be considered in order to overcome possible problems and strategic limitations. First, there should be explicit instruction and steps from teachers to apply for all of them. Second, Learner should have a capability to distinguish and choose appropriate strategies.

Although there are some scholars finds significant limitations regarding strategies in language learning as this field is too broad which involves psychology and other interdisciplinary approaches to investigate, Griffiths and Oxford (2014) are optimistic for the significance for language learners, teachers, and researchers. However, continuity of investigation on language strategies is needed in order to find out more pedagogical practice (Griffiths, 2015). Hence, the relationship of strategies to successful learning and individual, contextual, and target variables is required to provide effective strategy instruction (Griffiths and Oxford, 2014; Griffiths, 2015). Taking Indonesian Context as an example, there is no published literature regarding the use of learning strategies in IELTS Writing Task 2.

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