LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY AN EXCEPTIONAL EFL STUDENT IN FACING TEST OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (TOEFL): A Case Study of a Good English Learner with Dyslexia

Muhammad Rafi’i1, Haryanto2, Mansur Akil3

1,2,3 Faculty of Language and Art, State University of Makassar, St.Gunungsari Baru. Bonto Langkasa, Makassar, Indonesia

1[rafisony11@yahoo.com](mailto:rafisony11@yahoo.com)

2haryanto@unm.ac.id

3 mansur.akilqunm.ac.id

**Abstract**

The objectives of this research were to find out (1) the learning strategies used by an exceptional EFL student in facing test of English as a foreign language, and (2) the factors affecting learning strategies. The researcher employed descriptive qualitative method by using interview, observations, and documents. The participant of this research was a good English learner with dyslexia. The collected data were analyzed by using Mile’s and Huberman’s model consisting of three steps, namely data condensation, display and conclusion drawing and verification. The result of the research revealed that there were two subcategories are discussed, they were; learning strategies used and the factors affecting learning strategies by exceptional EFL student in facing test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL). (1) The learning strategies consist; the fundamental learning, the execution class and time management. The first was fundamental learning. It offered various strategies; planning and targeting, figuring the best information, focusing in English material, English noted and motivation, managing time, asking English problem, practicing, evaluating, reducing anxiety, learning action. The second was execution class. Execution class is divided into two skills; listening, reading and structure and written expression. In listening section the strategy found; focusing on recording, focusing on second line, choosing the answer with synonym, avoiding similar sound. In structure and written expression section; utilizing the technical pattern and good strategies, analyzing part of speech. In reading section; guessing, identifying main idea, utilizing skimming and scanning, enrich vocabulary. The third was time management. Time management is the new strategies that found in this research used by participant as problem solving of dyslexia, it offered time for learning, asking, and time for competition. (2) The factors affecting language learning strategies are coming from family, motivation, personality, intelligent, and learning action.

**Key word**: Learning strategies, Exceptional student, TOEFL, Good English learner, Dyslexia.

**1. Introduction**

Many cases occur that related to learning difficulties, among of them is the case of a student who could not read or more commonly known as dyslexia or learning difficulty reading. The difficulty of reading will result in the inability of a learner difficult to capture the messages written, letters, numbers, or other symbols. Dyslexia according to Tracy (2006) is a difficulty learning to read and write of someone throughout the ages. They are not like other learners who just need to be taught and mentored a few months, then understand by themselves but dyslexia takes more time than that.

Learners with dyslexia are generally categorized as having weaknesses in all things in learning. They have many symptoms as stated by Mc. Carthy (2012) one characteristic of a dyslexia is having a weakness in terms of spelling. Another case is what Bosse (2007, 2009) claimed that those with dyslexia are very weak in visual processing and attention. All of the things mentioned are very closely related to language skills. Comprehending the language means able to produce the language codes and able to translate back into a meaning in communication both oral and written.

The factors mentioned above are important factors for mastering the language, including English. In the world of education a learner is said to be able to speak English is if they have taken an international English test or often known as TOEFL.

Test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL) is international language testing that required to measure English capability of non-native English (ETS, 2014). International English Language Testing or other testing needs widely recognized as a language requirement for entering universities mainly in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. However, as the years passed more and more countries in Europe and the United States of America are now accepting such test scores as an acknowledged tool for measuring one’s English competence. The test of English consists of writing, speaking, reading, and listening practices.

Most of people think that getting English language test are probably complicated and difficult to fulfill the score, but if someone try harder it could be reach easily. Unfortunately, it is not appropriate statement for learner who have dyslexia considering the characteristics features that mentioned above.

In order to create a good score in testing a learner with dyslexia should implement good learning strategy. Learning strategy is a very crucial in learning language because an appropriate strategy helps learners to be more independent since teachers cannot always be around when students speak nor have questions about the target language. This is consistent with Chamot et al. (1999) who state that the goal of learning strategies is to assist learners in developing awareness of their own learning. He insists that learners who are aware of their own learning processes, strategies and preferences, are able to regulate their learning activities and become increasingly independent.

Related to be a good learner, he should be a competent one. Learner with dyslexia should apply broad, deep and integrated sets of knowledge and skills as they plan, implement, and instruction of performance in learning strategies.

From those explanations above, it shows us that learning strategies become very important in general area or study of education. It is probably because the performance of learning strategies plays important role in successful student. Based on the pre – observation and some positive comments from the Alumnus and colleagues show that there is a learner with exception at English Education Study Program who is competent and good in his performances. The alumni thought that he is a good learner; he joined in some organizations that related to disability students and also achieved a high TOEFL score. Considering the existing data, it showed that he got good level of learner in implemented English learning strategies.

Based on the background, this research is intended to be conducted entitled Learning Strategies of an Exceptional EFL Student in facing test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL): a Case Study of a good English learner with dyslexia.

**2. Research Method**

This session covers the design, participant, procedure of collecting data, technique of data analysis.

In this research, the researcher used descriptive qualitative technique that is a kind of research without using any calculation or statistic procedure to explore the student’s learning strategies of an exceptional EFL student. The type of the research also categorized as case study, it means that this research conducting a study about certain case and exploring that case radically. This study refers to the definition of case study by Hamel (1993) he defined a case study as an in-depth study of particular case under consideration. Therefore, the researcher tried to figure out deep information about the case by doing interaction to the actor of the case intensively. Here, the researcher described about what kinds of learning strategies used and what factors were affecting of an exceptional EFL student in facing test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL). The participant of this research is an Exceptional EFL learner who has good performances in facing test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL) it could be proved based on English certificate and other English achievement.

In this research, the researcher observed and noticed the learner learning strategies and the kind of the method that is used by the learner. The researcher interviewed the learner with some developed questions that prepared by the researcher (semi-structure interview). Based on observations, interviews and documentation information gathered then the researcher examined the various types of those data. The data was collected through some combination of field notes and audio recordings.

In explored data collected, the researcher collected, arranged and presented the data by using three model procedures from Miles and Huberman (2014) that are data condensation, data display and verification.

1. **Participant**

In qualitative research, selecting the sample is a process of selecting the small number of individuals for a study. This individual is expected to be able to help the researcher understand the phenomena under the investigation. Before selecting the participant as the sample of this research, the researcher observed the participant who would be suitable with this research topic and setting.

The participant of this research is an Exceptional EFL learner who has good performances in facing test of English as a foreign language. The researcher only chose one subject by considering some reasons:

1. He has a good performance at English skill which is assessed through pre-interview, writing archival documents and objective English standardized test scores namely TOEFL and IELTS. TOEFL test is used to measured students’ English proficiency as one of prerequisite to study abroad. Meanwhile, IELTS is an international English proficiency test which examine four skills of English; listening, speaking, reading and writing. The participant of this research has passed at TOEFL with overall score of 570 and IELTS with overall band score of 6.
2. The participant also has reliable achievements in English environment since he was in university student, proved by his document analysis such as international student exchange, tourism ambassador contest and scholarship from Australia Award Scholarship in Master Degree.
3. The participant is persistent individual even thought he has exceptional mentally in learning (proved by the result of test attention deficit conducted by TOVA and ADD Jakarta). He is in good condition physically (proved by his active participation in daily activities) that enable to provide reliable information during the research.

**3. Result and Discussion**

The result of interviews, documents and observations were coded and categorized based on the research question. The findings of the research cover the learning strategies used and the factors were affecting learning strategies of an exceptional EFL student in facing test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL) in case study of a good English learner with dyslexia.

1. **The Learning Strategies used by Exceptional EFL Student**

The descriptions of the findings about the learning strategies of an exceptional EFL student in facing test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL) with dyslexia are divided two subcategories they are fundamental learning and execution class.

1. Fundamental Learning

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Participant | Specific strategies | Group strategies |
| Herul | Planning   * Planning the target in learning English   Figuring   * Finding out the references   Focusing   * Paying attention to the teacher and English material   Evaluating   * Testing the English capability | Metacognitive |
|  | Making notes   * Make a note related English material   Practicing   * Write down daily activity | Cognitive |
|  | Memorizing   * Memorizing English material | Memory |
|  | Asking someone   * Telling someone to remind him about English material | Compensation |
|  | Reducing   * Reducing anxiety feeling | Affective |
|  | Learning action   * Involving meeting club, listening recording, associating with friends and working | Social |
|  | *Managing time*   * *Studied English in university level spent approximately about four years* * *Studied English in English course spent approximately about 2 years* | *Time* |

Based on table above, the researcher found that the research found that the participant learnt English after realizing his weaknesses in other subjects he mentioned that he had had higher English score when he was senior high school. He was not really smart student in math and some other subjects so he planned and targeted his study to focus on only for English. He used planning and identifying learning English way in facing language elements as sub categories of meteacognitive strategies to prepare learning English as the result he entered university and took English course as his solution. According to Oxford (1990) that metacognitive strategies are actions which go beyond purely negative devices and which provide a way for learners to plan and target his learning. therefore, the participant had planned his ambition in study English and targeted his ambition to study abroad. One of the weaknesses of exceptional English learner with dyslexia is long and short term memory; he used memory strategy in memorizing the English material. Oxford (1990) stated that memory strategies are essential for entering information and retrieve it. The participant reported that sometimes he noted his notes on the wall in order that easy to see then directly memorize. Oxford (1990) stated that one sub categories of learning strategies is repeating to help learner easy in memorizing by repeating over and over, the participant reported that one of his trouble in applying good English was short and long term memory, seeing the international Dyslexia Association (1990) the core problem of dyslexia is brain and its function, so it’s logically what the participants felt difficult in memorizing the English material. So that, by repeating English material over and over, it could be problem solving for him. In understanding the English material the participant reported that he used again metacognitive strategies such as asking someone, telling his friend and practicing his skill more than other people did. The participant realized that studying English in classroom was not enough to learn the language; therefore he got some efforts to speed up his proficiency. He went the extra mile to support his success in learning English. He joined some good English environments to learn and practice his English by attending English meeting and English contest in order to learn from those activities.

1. The Execution Class

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Participant | Strategy groups | Specific strategies |
| Herul | Focusing   * Paying attention to the recording * Avoid the missing number   Listening   * Paying attention to the second line * Choose the answer with synonym * Avoided similar sound | Listening Task  Metacognitive  Cognitive |
|  | Using pattern and strategies   * Apply the pattern * Using the technique   Analyzing   * Analyzing part of speech * Analyzing inversion and reduction | Writing Task  Metacognitive  Cognitive |
|  | * Guessing * Identifying main idea * Used skimming and scanning * Enrich vocabulary | Reading Task  Cognitive  Memory |
|  | *Additional time*   * *Add the time in writing section* * *Add the time in reading section* | *Time* |

From the table above, it showed that in listening session, he mainly *focused on* the recording then when he missed the number directly *avoided and moved* to the next number. The ways of learning familiarize him related to the skill and technique. These categories are included in sub categories of metacognitive strategies that purposed in paying attention in one thing. He also used these strategies to answer the other session. For writing session, the participant had also metacognitive strategies such as *overview and already known material* to specify the test then answering. Overview was required to cluster the test and to prepare the best answer and already known material was acquired to apply the pattern and technique in order to the appropriate answer. in addition, the participant in this session had weaknesses in analyzing the word, so, he was allowed to had *additional time*; thirty minutes for writing test. This strategy (additional time) is a new category that found in this research that not mentioned in oxford. To perform reading session, the participant used cognitive strategies in doing the task. This session destructed the participant. He was felt sickening of reading task but he realized some strategies should be good for him. *Getting idea quickly* is a sub category of cognitive strategy in which helps the participant read quickly. The participant acquired this strategy in order that he would not spend much time to read the text. In another time, he also used additional strategies to help the participant more focused on the reading text without any distraction according to his weaknesses.

1. Time Management

Dyslexia is a kind of learning difficulties that make the learner unable to hard thinking. The learner who have dyslexia should struggle in learning something especially language because the brain could not operate its function as well such as analyzing the word, processing the information. According to international Dyslexia Association (1990) dyslexia is a weakness of person in learning language related to phonological side. In this research the researcher found that the strategies the participant used in his learning namely cognitive, memory, affective, metacognitive, social and compensation strategy (Oxford, 1990). The researcher also has found a new strategy that does not mention in theory. It is called time management. According to one motto that is mention in one article “**Beri mereka (Dyslexic) waktu maka mereka akan memenuhi semua impiannya**” In analyzing time management in his learning the participant reported that there are three categories of time management that he conducted for everyday activities, they are time for learning, asking, and competition.

1. **The Factors Affecting Learning Strategies**

The factors affecting learning strategies of an exceptional EFL student are coming from family as the main factor, according to Gardner (1991) he stated that parental encouragement have a positive influence on motivation. It was proved by Herul educational attainment. The second was motivation. Motivation is the key factor in second language learning processes; the participant has high motivation in learning English. The next factor was personality, the findings in this research indicated that English learner with dyslexia has diverse personality the participant felt that he was very afraid to perform English in front of people but It could be solved by consistent in communicating and socializing to the others. Rubin (1975) stated that motivation as one of three factors that account for differential success in learning. The participant in this research was identified as intellectually bright. It was proven by his good English achievements since he was in elementary school. The next factor was learning action, from the interviews, it was found that the participant actively search for opportunity to learn and practice the language. The findings also support Yanto’s (2011) research that good language learner take charge of their own learning.

**4. Conclusion**

Based on the data analysis, the researcher found that learning strategies used by exceptional EFL student in facing test of English as a foreign language (TOEFL) are divided into three categories; the strategy in fundamental learning, strategy on execution class and time management. The fundamental learning offered various strategies; planning and targeting, figuring the best information, focusing in English material, English noted and motivation, managing time, asking English problem, practicing, evaluating, reducing anxiety, learning action. The second was execution class. They are divided into three skills; listening, structure and written expression, and reading. In listening section the strategy found; focusing on recording, focusing on second line, choosing the answer with synonym, avoiding similar sound. In writing section it consists two strategies; utilizing the technical pattern and good strategies, analyzing part of speech. In reading section; guessing, identifying main idea, utilizing skimming and scanning, enrich vocabulary. The third is time management. Time management offer three strategies, they are time for learning, asking, and competition. The findings also found the factors affecting learning strategies, they are family, personality, intelligence, motivation and learning action.

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