

## **Developing a Model of Learning Strategy of Speaking English at College**

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### **Abstract**

This research article is about the development of language learning strategy model of speaking English at college. The study is aimed at: 1) developing an appropriate model of learning strategy to improve students' speaking skills, and 2) finding out the effectiveness of the developed learning strategy model in improving the students' speaking skills. The study is categorized a *Research and Development*. In the study, a model of learning strategy of speaking English is developed by applying Borg and Gall's six main steps. The data are collected by using questionnaires, speaking test, interview, and documentary study. The finding of the study shows that: (1) the appropriate model of learning strategy of speaking English for the students is the one that can help them overcome their psychological, social, managerial, and linguistic problems before, while and after speaking English and (2) the developed learning strategy model is found effective in improving the students' speaking skills.

**Keywords:** Model, Learning strategy, Speaking, College.

### **Introduction**

English has been stipulated as the first foreign language for all Indonesian students from lower secondary schools up to universities since forty five years ago. At the university level, the English language learners are considered at advanced level since they have learned English for at least six years, and even more. The period of time spent for such quite a long time learning should make them master English very well. In other words, they should have the ability to communicate in English actively. They are expected to be able to participate, initiate, sustain, and bring to closure a wide variety of communicative tasks, including those that require an increased ability with diverse language strategies, satisfying the requirements of schools and work situations, and narrating and describing connected discourse with paragraph-length (Richards, 2001).

The ability as expected can be achieved if the English language learners encourage themselves to do self-directed learning. Dickinson (in Oxford, 1990: 10) states "language learning strategies encourages overall self-direction for learners". Moreover, "self-direction is

particularly important for language learners because they will not always have the teacher around to guide them as they use the language outside the classroom” (Oxford, 1990: 10).

Rubin and Thompson (1982), and Brown (2000: 114) emphasize the learner variables as the key to success. For Rubin and Thompson (1982: 4-11), among the factors influencing successful foreign language learning are age, positive traits and effective strategies. Rubin in (Wenden and Rubin, 1987: 19) support that the behavior and the thought processes of the learner is the key to successful language learning. However, they implicitly suggest the influence of other variables. They affirm that some variables can contribute to the success of learners: their behaviors and their thought processes in the process of learning. Unfortunately, the factors other than foreign language learners are often considered as more crucial factors than those of the language learners themselves, and are usually treated as the scapegoat for the students’ failures in English language learning.

Related to learner variables, good language learners have different characteristics from those unsuccessful ones (Stern, 1980; and Willing, 1988). The same is true for language learners at STAIN Batusangkar. In fact, some language learners are more successful in learning English, including in learning to speak English. Based on the interview with 2 *Speaking* lecturers at the college and documentary study about the learners’ *Speaking* grades, it was found that among 184 learners, only 69 of them are proficient English speakers even though they have spent almost the same length of time. Based on the researcher’s long observation about the learners’ learning to speak English, she finds that the more proficient learners seem to apply certain strategies in learning the foreign language. Among the intrinsic factors that they have, the students’ language learning strategies are regarded as importantly needed by the foreign language learners to maximize the effectiveness of the education at this level. Oxford (1990:1) suggests the importance of the use of learning strategies for language learning. Since “appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence”.

Several studies have been conducted related to learners’ learning strategies, especially those of speaking. Much of the research has been descriptive. (See, for instance, Tarone, 1980; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Abraham & Vann, 1987; Chamot, 1987; and Cohen and Olshtain, 1993). The number of learning strategies intervention studies in speaking is few (See, for example, Dadour & Robbins, 1996; Cohen, Weaver, and Li, 1998; O’Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo & Kupper, 1985b, O’Malley, 1987; and O’Malley Chamot, 1990). Different from the previous studies, this one is categorized as R & D in which a model of learning strategy of speaking English was developed based on the learning strategies applied by proficient English speakers among the language learners. This research article is aimed at 1) developing an appropriate model of learning strategy to improve students’ speaking skills, and 2) finding out the effectiveness of the developed learning strategy model in improving the students’ speaking skills.

## Method

This research is *Research and Development* of a learning strategy model of speaking English conducted at the English Department of STAIN Batusangkar, the model development of Borg & Gall (1989) consisting of six main steps was used as a guidance to develop the model of learning strategy of speaking English. The participants of the research were 102 sophomores and 82 juniors taking speaking subjects: *Speaking III* and *Speaking V* respectively.

The research instruments used to collect the data of the study were questionnaires, speaking test, interview, and documents. The questionnaire consisting of three types were constructed in the forms of closed- and open-ended questions. The three questionnaires were used to collect the data about the learner’ background, their learning strategies of speaking English,

and their learning strategy use. The speaking test was used to collect the data about the learners' speaking proficiency. The interview was done to collect the data about the students' need of learning strategy of speaking English. The documents were used to collect the data about the learners' grades in previous *Speaking* subjects.

The data of the research were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative data collected through the closed-ended questions of the questionnaires, the speaking test, and documents were analyzed statistically by applying Computer program SPSS 19 version. The results of the learners' responses to the closed-ended questions of the questionnaires were analyzed in the forms of numeric data and then transferred into percentages, matrices, and graphs. The results of the learners' speaking test and documents were analyzed statistically and quantitatively by putting them into numbers. The qualitatively data collected through the open-ended questions of the questionnaires, and the interview were analyzed by applying the technique of analysis as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). The qualitative data were the English teachers' and the learners' responses and opinions about the learners' need of language learning strategies of speaking English, the language learning strategies of speaking English applied by highly competent English speakers among the learners, and the application of the language learning strategies of speaking English by the learners.

To develop the model, the learning strategies of speaking English applied by the competent English speakers among the learners were found out through the open-ended questions of the second questionnaire. The questionnaire was inspired by the ideas of English teachers in Cohen, Weaver, and Li (1998). After the model was validated, the effectiveness of the model was field-tested through a *quasi-experimental research* (Richey and Klein, 2007: 4) by applying a *Pretest-Posttest Control Group Design* (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001: 335; Gall, Gall and Borg, 2003: 392, and Creswell, 2003: 170). The experiment was conducted for a month and a half. The field testing subjects were the third and the fifth semester students (the sophomores and the juniors) who were selected to become the sample by applying *Cluster Sampling technique*. The sampling technique was used "when it is more feasible to select groups of individuals rather than individuals from a defined population" (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003: 174) or "the researcher identifies convenient, naturally occurring group units, and then randomly selects some of these units for the study" (McMillan and Schumacher: 2001:173).

## **Finding**

The developed model consists of twenty four types of learning strategies of speaking English among of which just six types of them that were field-tested through the experiment, namely: (1) minimizing the feelings of stressed, anxious, afraid, worried, suppressed or other negative feelings before speaking English, (2) making particular preparations or plans before speaking English, (3) rehearsing or training one's speaking ability in performing a speech or conversing before the true performance or real conversation, (4) involving counterpart or other people to overcome the problems in speaking English, (5) imitating English sounds (pronunciation, intonation, stress, tone and others) as spoken or uttered by the native speakers or competent speakers of English, (6) overcoming the problems of limited vocabulary when speaking English.

To minimize the feelings of stressed, anxious, afraid, worried, suppressed or other negative feelings before speaking English, the learning strategies applied by the respondents (competent English speakers among the respondents) are: (1) praying, (2) being optimistic, (3) having good preparation before speaking (e.g. by writing down confusing words, pronouncing them loudly, preparing grammar to use etc.), (4) thinking positively that learning can take place despite any mistakes (e.g. by saying "I must try first. If there are mistakes, others will correct me), (5) motivating themselves to get good marks, (6) trying to speak

English as much as possible, (7) trying to get self-confidence by trying to do their best after getting comments and suggestions before conversing /performing a speech, (8) trying to focus their feeling on what they are going to say, (9) smiling at others, (10) taking a deep breath and saying that everything is going to be okay, (11) trying to keep calm by thinking of what they are going to perform or converse before they get turn (in a classroom), (12) trying to relax by understanding the context or conditions they are going to face, (13) listening to their favorite music, (14), switching their attention, (15) pretending as if there is nobody is around, (16) trying to think logically that everybody has ever experienced the same feelings and if she or he succeeds to overcome the feelings, they will succeed, too, (17) holding a pen or any other objects, (18) inviting their friends to talk and share their feelings, (19) making it a habit to speak in front of the crowd ( e.g. in front of the classroom), (20) thinking about interesting things, (21) moving their fingers or holding hands together, (22) being aware that a learning process needs an effort to actualize it, (23) considering that others might not be better, (24) not focusing on grammar but on what to be expressed, (25) thinking about things or people who can generate their spirit, (26) imagining that the situation will end soon, and (27) doing self-talk that the other party or audiences are all their friends, and (28) going to the toilet (Urinating).

To make particular preparations or plans before speaking English, there were eighteen types of learning strategies applied by them: (1) trying to find out a topic to be performed or conversed beforehand, (2) anticipating or mastering vocabulary to be used, (3) checking pronunciation of the words they are going to use, (4) writing the big pictures/the concept or important points of what they are going to say, (5) thinking of the speaking objective, (6) finding an interesting topic, (7) combining words to become sentences using correct grammar, (8) thinking the prepared sentences aloud, (9) pronouncing words/sentences they are going to use many times, (10) practicing speaking English in front of a mirror many times, (11) practicing speaking English with friends in the classroom, (12) understanding what they are going to say, (13) reading text books containing conversations or speech scripts, (14) finding related sources and making the summary by using their own words, (15) preparing the key-words of what they are going to say or perform, (16) preparing a script and practice it, (17) understanding some principles of performing a speech or having a conversation, and (18) combining words to become sentences in their heart before uttering them.

The learning strategy of rehearsing or training speaking ability includes that of performing a speech and that of having a conversation. The learning strategies that they use in performing a speech include: (1) practicing speech script loudly again and again in front of a mirror, (2) pronouncing new English words to be used loudly many times, (3) arranging sentences then reading the sentences loudly many times, (4) practicing the application of speech principles, such as, keeping eye-contact with audience, monitoring their voice quality, using gesture, getting attention of the audience etc., (5) practicing performing a speech by using an outline, key words or main points, and (6) before the real speech, performing it in front of friends to get comments, suggestions, and criticisms. To prepare for a conversation, several strategies that they use: (1) practicing the prepared or the ready-made English dialogues alone, (2) practicing conversations with friends and asking them to give comments, criticism, or suggestions, (3) discussing interesting topics with their friends by using English, (4) pronouncing every new word loudly many times until getting accurate pronunciation, (5) practicing dialogues with their friends loudly again and again, (6) arranging English sentences and reading them loudly over and over again before having real conversations, (7) speaking much English, (8) increasing their vocabulary, and (9) asking competent English speakers (among their friends) to practice their conversation scripts, paying attention to how they do the conversation, and then practicing the scripts by themselves loudly many times.

To involve a counterpart or other people in overcoming problems while speaking or having a conversation in English, the learning strategies that they apply are: (1) asking their counterpart or others to help, (2) asking their counterpart or others to repeat, give more explanation, give synonyms and/or antonyms etc., (3) asking their counterpart or others to correct their mistakes in choosing or pronouncing words, grammar and others, (4) giving clues or gestures to help their counterpart or others to guess or understand what they mean, (5) asking their counterpart or others to speak more slowly, (6) asking their counterpart or others not to mock or laugh at their mistakes in speaking English, (7) asking for comments, criticisms, suggestions, and the like from their counterpart or others after speaking English, and (8) asking their counterpart's understanding of what they mean. The learning strategies that they apply in performing a speech are: (1) asking the audience or others intentionally to correct their mistakes e.g. in their choice of words or vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, etc., (2) asking for comments, criticisms, suggestions, and the like from the audience about their speech performance, (3) asking the audience to help them overcome their difficulties while they perform a speech e.g. by asking questions, giving clues or gestures, (4) using the corrections given by the audience such as their lecturers, friends and/or others for their next speech performance.

The fifth type of learning strategy of speaking English proposed is imitating English sounds (pronunciation, intonation, stress, tone and others) as spoken or uttered by the native speakers or competent speakers of English. Based on the research finding, the strategies that they use are: (1) watching English movies or televisions or listening to English programs then uttering the new words or sentences, (2) listening to native speakers or competent English speakers when speaking English, imitating or repeating their pronunciation, (3) listening to English songs, singing the songs or repeating the songs loudly, (4) listening to the audio of their notebook or laptop or mobile phone and repeating them loudly many times, (5) speaking to native speakers or competent speakers of English, imitating the ways they speak again and again, (6) having conversations with their friends and pronouncing the confusing words, and then, asking them to correct their pronunciation, (7) recording the voice of native speakers or competent speakers of English, then listening to it and repeating it many times, (8) reading English novels, stories, or texts loudly and recording their voice, then, listening to it and checking their pronunciation by looking up dictionary or asking others to correct it, (9) reading speech or dialogue scripts loudly using the stress, tone, intonation of the native speakers or competent speakers of English, and listening to it to check their pronunciation by looking up dictionary or ask others to correct it, (10) pronouncing every new word that they have just read or listened silently or loudly, (11) practicing English dialogues with their friends and asking them to check or correct their pronunciation.

To overcome the problems of limited vocabulary when speaking English, the learning strategies they apply include: (1) asking their counterpart to use other words or sentences that have the same meanings (synonyms), (2) trying to guess the unknown words based on the context of the conversation, (3) asking the counterpart to use gestures, objects existing around, or clues, to help them understand, (4) asking their counterpart directly the things they do not understand, (5) asking their counterpart to repeat statements, to explain them using other words, to give examples, definition, or descriptions and so on, (6) asking their counterpart to use cognates, (7) using "not" in front of the known words to mean the antonym of the words to replace the words that they do not know (e.g. to mean "sad" they say "not happy"), (8) using other expressions that will help them to express their ideas, (9) using their native language to replace the unknown words, (10) using the already known words to construct phrases or sentences that can give them an idea about what is meant, (11) using gestures, examples, explanations and/or descriptions to express their feelings or ideas, (12) writing every new word in a "dictionary" (vocabulary notebook), checking its pronunciation, meaning and writing the symbol down, (15) listening to, reading, speaking, and writing much English, (16) getting new vocabulary every day and use it in speaking and writing, e.g. in doing assignments or in real life situations.

After the model was field-tested, it was found that the developed model was effective for both the third and the fifth semester students learning to have a conversation and perform a speech, respectively. The R squared for the third semester was 0.14 and for the fifth semester was 0.32. The tests (pre- and post-tests) were valid since the test required “the test takers to perform the behavior that was measured or to test performance directly” and they were tested based on the objectives of the speaking subjects (Brown, 2004: 22-24). Since the objective of *Speaking III* being followed by third semester students was the skills to have a conversation, the test, therefore, were conducted by administering Interviews/*question and answer* or *free interview* (Weir, 1990: 75). The fifth semester students were tested through *Oral presentation* in which they were asked to perform a speech in line with the course objective, as well.

The evaluation of the students’ speaking proficiency was performed by two independent raters, the lecturer of *Speaking III* and the researcher (for the third semester students) and the lecturer of *Speaking V* and the researcher (for the fifth semester students). The scores got were correlated and it was found that the two sets of scores given by the two scorers were highly correlated in which coefficient correlations or “an estimate of reliability”-- as Bachman (1990: 181) called it-- between two sets of scores in the pre- test from the two raters were 0.903 and 0.878, for the third and the fifth semesters, respectively. In the post-test, the correlation coefficient between the two sets of scores by the raters was 0.894 and 0.793 respectively. Hughes (1988: 32) states for “Oral production test maybe in the 0.70 to 0.79 range”.

## Discussion

The learning strategies of speaking English instructed to the experimental groups were proved effective in improving the learners’ speaking proficiency. The data of the application of learning strategies of speaking English by the respondents also show the same direction in which the experimental groups exceeded the control groups in the application of the strategies. It was proven by the quantitative data collected through a questionnaire and an interview in which the percentage of the application of learning strategies by the respondents of the experimental groups exceeded those of control groups. Moreover, the qualitative data also showed the same indication in which the respondents of the experimental groups applied more varied and more number of learning strategies of speaking English.

In fact, the learning process of speaking skills at STAIN Batusangkar where the research was conducted did not introduce learning strategy of speaking English to the students of the control groups. Brown (1994: 43-44) suggests that language learners need to develop autonomy and the English teacher needs to help them to take charge of their own learning through setting some goals and utilizing learning strategies. Crookes and Chaudron (in Celce-Murcia, 2001: 28) suggest that a number of major steps are taken when a second language is taught, one of which is the introduction of learning strategies. Oxford (1990: 10) suggests that a teacher identify the students’ learning strategies, conduct training on learning strategies, and help learners become more independent. Therefore, the students’ language learning strategies need to be identified and learning strategy instruction needs to be held since Chamot, et al., (1999: 35) state that strategies are not innate and can be learned. Brown (2000: 124) affirms the mounting evidence of the usefulness of learners’ incorporating strategies into their acquisition process.

Considering the vital role that learning strategies play, Chamot, et al., (1999: 35) suggest that a good way for teachers to do this is to offer personal examples of how they have used strategies for similar language tasks or in everyday life. Savignon (in Celce-Murcia, 2001: 13) mentions “Teachers have always been expected to set a good example for learners, to provide a model of behavior.” To set a good example for learners could possibly be done through

providing a model of learning strategies of speaking English practiced by more competent speakers among the language learners themselves.

An appropriate learning strategy model of speaking English was the one which could improve the students speaking skills so that they became more independent or more autonomous in learning to speak English. Benson (2001: 8) states “autonomy is the capacity to take charge of one’s own learning”. Chamot, et al., (1999: 35) state that students are more effective when they take control of their own learning. The twenty types of learning strategy of speaking English developed in the study can be considered appropriate for the purpose of improving the language learners’ speaking skills/proficiency.

The field-testing results showed that the proposed learning strategy model of speaking English was found effective for both the third and the fifth semester students, with different effects of the treatment given. For the third semester students learning how to converse or to have a dialogue, the effect of the treatment given was 14.1 %. For the fifth semester students learning how to offer a speech, the effect of the treatment was 31.9 % at the level of significance 0.05.

Based on the data above, it can be concluded that the proposed model of learning strategy of speaking English was more effective for the fifth than for the third semester students since the effect of the treatment given was higher for the fifth semester than for the third fifth semester. It might be caused by the discourse the students were engaged in. The third semester students tested by using interview technique were engaged in the activities whose discourses patterns were less predictable than those of the fifth semester students tested by asking them to offer a speech. In the case of different results for the third and the fifth semester students, the students of the fifth semester were asked to perform a speech whose patterns were already known and prepared by them, and therefore, were more predictable, while the third semester students were asked to converse based on the topic given just before the conversation, and therefore, they found more unpredictable patterns. These would surely influence the results. According to Nunan (1998: 42), “predictability will depend on whether the discourse or text type contains predictable patterns, and also the extent to which we are familiar with these patterns”. Performing a speech helped the fifth semester students identify typical patterns of use better than those of the third semester students. Performing a speech with previously prepared materials are easier to handle than conversing spontaneously since the patterns the counterpart will use are difficult to identify. Harmer (2001: 26) points out “the more the students can identify typical patterns of use, the better they will be able to read, listen, write and speak”.

Brown (1994: 255) states that the greatest difficulty that learners have is the interactive nature of most communication. Since communication is collaborative, participants are engaged in a process of negotiation of meaning. To negotiate meaning in a conversation presents greater difficulty than to negotiate it in a speech since conversation is far more interactive than a speech. Moreover, Harmer (2001: 25) points out “spoken language is not all the same: it is affected by the situation one is in, whether one is speaking face to face, on the telephone, through a microphone to an unseen audience or in front of a crowd”.

## Conclusion

1. The appropriate model of learning strategy of speaking English for the students is the one that can help them overcome their psychological, social, managerial, and linguistic problems before, while and after speaking English. The model consists of 24 types learning strategies of speaking English.

2. The model of learning strategy of speaking English was proven effective in improving the students' speaking skills and better enhances their speaking proficiency.

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