

## Grammar Learning Strategies Practice: An Investigation of Strategies-Based Instruction Effect on Grammatical Competence

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### ABSTRACT

*Grammar competence as an essential part in learning language has to be mastered by every language learner. Students, especially in higher level of education, need to possess the knowledge of grammar rules to produce academic products which maintain the grammatical aspects in every task. A new notion in learning grammar by employing grammar learning strategies becomes an alternative way for students in mastering grammar. Since many students are not aware of grammar learning strategies, the need to conduct strategies training in classroom context is an idea of solution. Empowered by styles and strategies-based instruction, this study aimed to find out the effect of grammar learning strategies on grammatical competence of second semester students of Universitas Muslim Indonesia. Quasi-experimental design under quantitative research which consisting of pre-test, eight meetings of treatment, and post-test was employed to compare the groups' performance in grammar test. The data were obtained by using two kinds of research instruments: grammar test and questionnaire. In analyzing the data, this study employed the independent sample t-test and frequency of questionnaire. The result of statistical analysis showed that independent t-test which compared the students' score on post-test revealed a value of  $p > 0.05$ . It means that there was no significant difference between students taught with and without grammar learning strategies. The result yields some implications of having grammar learning strategies in classroom context. The students' personal traits and experiences put some influences on the effect of strategies training. The duration of training also put contribution toward the students' skills in employing the appropriate strategies in solving grammar problems*

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### 1. Introduction

Grammar as an essential part of any language becomes a crucial aspect to be understood in order to comprehend the language well. Since it employs the basic rule of language, grammar can make a language easier to be learned. Richards and Renandya (2002), argued the importance of learning grammar that without a good knowledge of grammar, the development of learners' language competence will be severely constrained. The learners can use the language to communicate with other even with little knowledge of grammar, but they will get trouble in comprehending the complex form of the language both in written and spoken without comprehending the grammar. Thus, learning a grammar is the key to understand the language and how to use it properly, especially in academic context.

Despite the importance of learning grammar, there are many problems frequently arise in teaching grammar. One of the problems is the students' ability to comprehend the rule of the grammar. The students sometimes are difficult to apply the rules which have been taught intensively in the classroom. It seems that they have difficulty in internalizing the grammar rules (Al-Mekhlafi & Nagaratnam, 2011; Farisatma, et.al, 2017). Thus, the teachers should provide the powerful way in order to make the students using the grammar rule frequently and correctly.

Moreover, another problem dealing with grammar instruction is the objectives of teaching grammar in the language classroom. Some teachers are still confused in deciding the objectives in teaching grammar, whether the objective of teaching grammar is to improve achievement in grammatical competence or in communicative competence (Mishra, 2010).

Generally, the main objective to learn English is to make students to be able to use the language to communicate with others, in this case, the communicative competence becomes the focus of learning objectives. Nevertheless, in the context of learning English at university level particularly the students registered in English Language Department, the main objective of teaching grammar is to make students understand the concepts and rules of grammar well. As the result, the students are deserved to be able to use English grammatically in every task or assignment given by the lecturers.

One of the alternative ways to reach the goal of learning grammar effectively is having strategies in learning. As Chamot (2004), explained that learning strategies is the conscious thoughts and actions that learners take in order to achieve a learning goal. Furthermore, Brown (2013), made the useful analogy of toolbox for describing the function of strategies to improve students' performance in learning. Inside the toolbox, there are many tools that we can use to solve our daily problems. Before using the tools, we need to know the function of the tools and how to use them in order to solve the problem. Brown (2013) argued that students' learning skills are analogous to tools in toolbox, and the abilities to use them properly to resolve problems are learning strategies. It means that when the learners have the ability to use the skill properly, they can reach success in learning process.

Similarly, in terms of grammar learning strategies, Pawlak (2009), identified definition of grammar learning strategies as the learners' actions and thoughts that employ consciously to make language learning and/or language use become easier, more effective, more efficient and more fun. The field of Grammar Learning Strategies is the recent focus of research in learning strategies and still need further exploration to determine its contribution in teaching and learning language.

Furthermore, teaching learning strategies will be more effective if it is integrated with learning process. Styles and Strategies-Based Instruction is one model of teaching learning strategies to the students in which the strategies are integrated into everyday classroom materials and are both explicitly and implicitly embedded into the language tasks to provide contextualized strategy practice (Cohen and Weaver, 2005). By applying the Styles and Strategies-Based Instruction, teaching and learning process will benefit the students by giving chances to learn and apply various grammar learning strategies in learning grammar. Based on this assumption, this study aimed to find out the effect of grammar learning strategies on students' grammatical competence.

## **2. Method**

This study employed quasi-experimental design. The group was divided into two groups, namely experimental group and control group. The experimental group was treated by applying Grammar Learning Strategies in learning grammar and the control group was treated through conventional way that is PPP technique in treatment process.

The population of the study was English Department students of University of Muslim Indonesia. The method of taking the sample of this study was random sampling. The class that acted as the experimental group was decided randomly by lottery taking, the researcher randomly took two classes out of five classes. This study used 36 students as experimental group and 36 students as control group.

This study used two kinds of instruments to collect the data. They were grammar test and questionnaire. The grammar test used to assess students learning achievement before and after receiving some treatments. After giving the pre-test, the students were taught by using grammar learning strategies in experimental group and using conventional way in control group. The treatment was carried out in 8 meetings. After having the treatment for eight meetings, the researcher administered a post-test to experimental group and control group. In this pretest and the posttest, the researcher used grammar test which consisted of 40 questions, 5 questions for every material which had been discussed in 8 meetings of treatments.

After administering the posttest, the researcher distributed questionnaire to the experimental group. There were two questionnaires, the first was the grammar learning strategies questionnaire which adopted from the Gurata's research which encompassed eight strategies; e.g. practicing, note taking, analyzing expression, advanced organizing, selective attention, self-monitoring, question for clarification, and overcoming limitation. This questionnaire was used for identifying the grammar learning strategies which frequently used by the students. The second questionnaire was used to find out the students' perceptions toward the use of grammar learning strategies in learning grammar. The questionnaire was designed to cover 5 positive statements and 5 negative statements on Likert's Scale. The students were asked to respond whether they were strongly agree, agree, hesitated, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statements.

The data collected through the test were analyzed quantitatively. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics by employing Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 20 IBM for Windows. The data

from questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively. In order to find out the frequently used grammar learning strategies and student's perception, the data from the questionnaires were calculated by using a five-point rating scale.

### 3. Results

From the research findings described in table 1, the students in experimental group and control group were in "fair level" of grammar competence based on the pre-test result. The analysis of independent t-test for pretest score showed that there is no significant difference between control and experimental group. In experimental group, in which grammar learning strategies was implemented in learning grammar, the students' mean score were increased from 52.1 to 62.8. This indicated there is significant improvement, the level from "fair level" to "good level". It also happened to the control group in which the improvement were significant by having the mean score in pretest and posttest respectively as 54.7 and 61.1.

**Table 1.** The Result of Pretest and Posttest of Control and Experimental Group

Test	Groups	N	Min	Max	Mean	Level
Pretest	Control	36	12.50	82.50	54.72	Fair
	Experimental	36	30.00	70.00	52.08	Fair
Posttest	Control	36	32.50	82.50	61.1	Good
	Experimental	36	40.00	80.00	62.8	Good

The hypothesis in this research was tested by using the formula of Independent-sample T-Test at the significant level  $\alpha = 0.05$ . In output of Independent-sample t-test for pretest, the probability value 0.393 is bigger than  $\alpha = 0.05$ . This result means that there is no significant difference on pretest between control and experimental group. Thus, for testing the hypothesis we used independent sample t-test for posttest of control and experimental group.

**Table 2.** Independent Sample T-Test for Posttest

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
posttestscore	Equal variances assumed	,580	,449	70	,532	-1,73611	2,76672
	Equal variances not assumed			69,9	,532	-1,73611	2,76672

The output of independent sample t-test for posttest, the mean value indicates that the grammar competence of control group (M=61.1) was not significantly difference with experimental group (M=62.8). Moreover, the result from the analysis indicates that there is no significant difference between the control and experimental group in term of posttest,  $t(df=70)=0.532, p>0.05$ . Thus null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is accepted. This finding concludes that there is no significant difference between students who used grammar learning strategies in learning grammar and students who did not use any grammar learning strategies.

Based on table 3, the strategy that is most frequently used by the students was note taking strategy (M=3.93). Followed by self-monitoring strategy and analyzing expression strategy by getting mean score respectively 3.81 and 3.69. Conversely, the most infrequently strategy used by the student was advanced organizing strategy which only got 3.3 for its mean score. Note taking Strategy which corresponds to statement "I take notes when my teacher explains a new grammar structure (e.g. I write down the meaning and the usage of the structure)" is under the cognitive strategies categories. While self-monitoring strategy and analyzing expression are belongs to metacognitive and cognitive strategies, respectively.

Moreover, the data obtained also revealed that the means of every statement from the questionnaires ranged from 3.32 to 3.93. This means that all the grammar learning strategies of the questionnaire were employed by the students reported to be *sometimes* and *usually used*.

**Table 3.** Analysis result of Grammar Learning Strategies Questionnaire

No.	Strategies	Statements	N	Min	Max	Mean Score Statement	Mean Score Strategies
1	Practicing	S11	36	2,00	5,00	3,8333	3,68055

		S5	36	2,00	5,00	3,5278	
2	Note Taking	S10	36	1,00	5,00	3,7778	3,93055
		S3	36	3,00	5,00	4,0833	
3	Analyzing	S1	36	2,00	5,00	3,7778	3,69445
	Expression	S15	36	1,00	5,00	3,6111	
4	Advanced	S7	36	2,00	5,00	3,9444	3,3194
	Organizing	S8	36	1,00	5,00	2,6944	
5	Selective	S4	36	2,00	5,00	3,6389	3,625
	Attention	S9	36	2,00	5,00	3,6111	
6	Self-	S12	36	2,00	5,00	3,8889	3,80555
	Monitoring	S13	36	1,00	5,00	3,7222	
7	Quest. for	S2	36	2,00	5,00	3,4722	3,69445
	Clarification	S6	36	2,00	5,00	3,9167	
8	Overcoming	S14	36	1,00	5,00	3,5833	3,5833
	Limitation						

In basis of the finding part, the students gave positive responds since the mean score obtained was 38 which is categorized as positive. The data in finding part also narrated that grammar learning strategies could help the students to improve their grammar competence. Finally, it can be concluded that students were enjoy using grammar learning strategies in learning grammar, they got some improvement by applying the strategies, and they only need more time to be get accustomed with the strategies used in learning grammar

#### 4. Discussion

In teaching students' grammar concept and also strategies in learning concurrently, the researcher who acted as a lecturer firstly introduced the strategies to the students as the starting point to help students improve their awareness about grammar learning strategies. Furthermore, in introducing the strategies, the researcher tried to ask students to identify their own strategies in learning grammar and then named some specific strategies which students mentioned. As Chamot (in Cohen 2005:133) argued that the important aspects of strategy training are having students understand about the strategies and how to use it properly in solving the problems, so the main objectives of strategy training is having students understand not only the kinds of strategies but also the way to use them effectively in learning process.

In addition, by giving simultaneous strategies practice in every task, students became more familiar with the strategies and made them aware about the strategies which were efficient and beneficial in learning grammar. The training not only provided the students chances to practice and use the strategies but also made them easy to identify the best strategies to learn grammar by evaluating the strategies in the end of class. The process of strategies training was employed to give treatment in experimental group in order to find out the effect of grammar learning strategies on students' grammatical competences.

From the research findings, the students in experimental group and control group were in "fair level" of grammatical competence based on the pretest result. The analysis of independent t-test for pretest score showed that there was no significant difference between control and experimental group. In experimental group, in which grammar learning strategies was implemented in learning grammar, the students' mean score was increased ranging 52.1 to 62.8. This indicated there was significant improvement, the level from "fair level" to "good level". The control group also showed the same result from which the improvement was significant by having the mean score in pretest and posttest respectively 54.7 and 61.1. Finally, the analysis of independent t-test for posttest score showed that there were no significance differences between students who were taught by using grammar learning strategies and students who were not taught by using grammar learning strategies. In other words, the findings claimed that the null hypothesis was accepted.

The result of this study showed a different finding toward the powerfulness of learning strategies to improve students' performance in language learning as some researchers had argued such as Nunan, Chamot et al. and Green and Oxford (Oxford, 2003:10-11). Despite the focus of this study was grammatical competence, the strategy training should give benefits to the students for improving their score in posttest significantly.

Nevertheless, the research from Pawlak (2009) confirmed the result which supported this current study. He found out that there was no positive relationship between the use of grammar learning strategies and students' achievement. This finding yielded a positive reason in term of statistical significance why the students of control and experimental group did not differ significantly.

Furthermore, this finding was supported also by the research on the effect of language learning strategies on the students learning achievement which conducted by Cheng and Chang (2013). In their study, they found that there was no significance difference in term of progress or achievement found from the students' who were taught by using learning strategies and the students who were not.

The findings of the current study yield a new perspective of how the strategies training affect the students' performance in learning. The main difference between the strategies training explained in previous research and this study is the subject to be trained by using certain strategies. In some previous studies, the subject, or things to be trained to the students were the skills, such as listening comprehension (O'Malley et al., 1985 in Oxford, 2003), speaking (Da dour & Robbins, 1996 in Oxford, 2003) and reading (Park Oh, 1994 in Oxford, 2003), while this study had tried to train the strategies to teach grammar or the subject to be taught is dealing with the competence. Thus, the difference between skills in which focused on performance and the grammar which deals with competences should become the main reason why the strategy training for learning grammar yielded a negative result or gave no significant improvement toward experimental students' score compared with control group.

Furthermore, the strategies used in this study was developed based on the strategy's classification offers by Oxford and Chamot in which their works focused on developing skills or performance in language learning, while this current study had tried to use the same strategies for developing students' competence, in this case grammatical competence. Since Chomsky had stated that competence is different from performance, in which students' performance will not always reflects students' competence. Moreover, the students' performance will be affected not only by students' grammatical competence but also non-grammatical psychological factors (Canale & Swain, 1980:3-4). So, this difference became another factor that affected the result of this study.

Additionally, it seemed that students' performance not only affected by the strategies used but also the other aspects which were contributed indirectly toward students' performances. As Chamot (2004:18) proposed that culture and context of learning can influence the effect of learning strategies, so the context of foreign language and the Indonesian culture can possibly influence the students' performance in posttest.

Moreover, the other factors that can affect the students' performance in learning grammar are variables in teaching grammar. These variables are divided into two factors, namely learner variable and instructional variable. According to Celce-Murcia (1991:463-464) the learner variable in learning grammar which should be considered by the teacher are students' age, proficiency level and educational background, while for instructional variable deals with skills, register, and need/use.

The proficiency level of students as one of variable in learning grammar should become consideration, since in this study the students in control group had higher proficiency level than experimental group as we can see in their pretest result. Even though the students in experimental group had been trained by using grammar learning strategies in learning grammar, because of their proficiency level, they could not perform better than control group.

Finally, it can be concluded that having grammar learning strategies training cannot improve the students' score significantly because the strategies training more beneficial to train students in performing language task, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing task, not to train the students in learning grammar.

The result from the questionnaire indicated that most of the students used the note taking strategy. It was claimed based on the data obtained that strategy number 3 "I take notes when my teacher explains a new grammar structure (e.g., I write down the meaning and the usage of the structure)" got mean score 4.01 which classified as 'usually used'. This finding was also in line with the previous research conducted by Gurata in 2008, in which he found that for pre-intermediate students, the most frequently used strategy was note taking strategy (Gurata, 2008:50-51). This strategy known as note taking strategy is under cognitive strategies classification.

Likewise, cognitive strategies had been claimed by Saricoban and Saricaoglu (2008) as one of the most frequently used strategies by the teacher and students in learning language. In term of learning grammar, the function of cognitive aspects was important, since the grammar dealt with the brain processing of knowledge or specifically the cognition of language rules, the strategies under this category were used most frequently. Thus, to booster students' grammatical competences, teacher needs to improve frequency of using cognitive strategies in learning grammar.

## 5. Conclusion

The researcher deduced that since the statistical analysis showed that there was no significant difference between control and experimental group, so the grammar learning strategies training did not contribute significantly to improve students score in grammar test. Besides that, the most frequently used grammar learning strategy was note taking strategy which is under cognitive strategies classification. These findings indicate that for learning grammar, the strategies dealing with cognitive aspects will be helpful to be used by the learner even though it will not give significant improvement. Despite of insignificance effect on students' grammatical competence, the students still had positive perception toward the used of grammar learning strategies in learning grammar and it shows that grammar learning strategies can improved students' interest in learning grammar.

As mentioned previously, the findings of this study claimed that strategies training on grammar yielded no significant effects on improving students' grammatical competence, it is suggested to avoid having strategies training focused on grammar because it will be useless and will give no significant effect on students' grammatical competence. Thus, for the further researcher, based on the limitation of this study, it is suggested to have independent strategies trainer to teach students to get more valuable data and also to make sure that sufficient time will be given to practice and use strategies that have been trained to the students.

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