

Students' strategies in learning English autonomy: Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the students' strategies in learning English autonomy. In this study, the students are majoring at non-English study program and they are graduated from the same standard senior high schools (not international school). However, based on the result of writer's interview in English, there is only one or two of the students in one generation at STAI Darul Ulum Kandungan that their speaking competencies are regarded as higher than average students in their level. They could speak English very fluently with good pronunciation and could choose the correct dictions for their speaking. This study is qualitative research in the form of narrative inquiry. This study uses students' life story as the source of data. In gaining the data, the writer uses semi-structured interview for the main source of data and questionnaire as the secondary data. The writer interviews two students of STAI Darul Ulum Kandungan who have those level of English. This study shows that the students have their own strategies in learning English autonomy outside of the classroom such as using pictures, social media, YouTube's subtitles in learning English and so on. Therefore, the main strategies that they used are compensatory strategies. These strategies could be used by the teachers or lecturers to develop the students' competencies in English especially in speaking and the teachers or lecturers could promote these strategies to the students who want to have good speaking English.

Keywords: students' strategies; learning English autonomy; narrative inquiry

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, learning English could be done everywhere because of the technology. It is easy to find many sources for learning English such as in YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and online courses. The only needed is connection and smartphone then learners could look for the channel of online English learning based on their desires. All of the learners have these facilities for learning English. The learners only need motivation to learn English whether by taking an English course or learning by themselves (autonomy). It is in line with Yorkey, College, & Vermont (1982), it is stated that requirements of learning English are motivation and concentration. Motivation leads the learners to the goal that they want to achieve in learning English. Motivation can come from the inside and outside of the learners. In the first, motivation comes from the desires and expectations, and they are from personal desires. On the other hand, motivation can also appear from outside of learners such as coming from the environment, people around us, culture and so on. Therefore, the success of learning English is based on their own motivation. This motivation will lead the learners to learn English in the formal and informal English learning.

Formal English learning is a learning process defined by regulations and predetermined outcomes that has set-up physical class, instructions, limited time and fix learning setting (Zainuddin & Yunus, 2022). Learning English in the formal setting is like taking English in English department, taking English course, taking English at language development unit, learning English at schools that have their own curriculum. It is very strict that the learners should follow the regulation that has been determined by the institution. On the other hand, informal English learning is learning English outside of the context of formal setting that the objectives, contents, means, process of acquisition, duration, evaluation are determined by individuals (Sundqvist, 2020). They have their own decision in determining what they want to learn, where they learn, when they learn, with whom they learn English. They have freedom to manage their time to learn English and it is free. Therefore, the learners have their own learning strategies in managing their time, materials, process, goals etc to achieve their competence and expectation in English.

Learning strategies are specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques used by learners to enhance their own learning (Oxford, 1990). Tarone in Ellis (1994) defined language learning strategies are learners' attempts to master new linguistic and sociolinguistics information about the target language. In this study, English learning strategies are students' strategies in learning English autonomy. Learning strategies can also enable students to become more independent, autonomous, and lifelong learners (Oxford, 1990). The students have their own autonomy in learning English

because they are as manager, doer, and evaluator for their own learning. Therefore, the students have their own strategies in learning English autonomy. There are six main categories of leaning strategies proposed by Oxford (1990). They are cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, memory-related strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. Cognitive strategies are the strategies to manipulate the language material in direct ways. It includes reasoning, analysis, notetaking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, reorganizing information, practicing in naturalistic settings, practicing structures and sound formally. Metacognitive strategies are the strategies used by students to manage the learning process overall such as identifying one's own learning style and needs, planning, evaluating and so on. Memory-related strategies are the strategies used by the students to connect one language item or concept with another, without deep understanding. Compensatory strategies are the strategies that the students used to guess from the context in listening and reading. Affective strategies are the strategies used by the students to identify one's mood and anxiety level that talk about feelings. The last is social strategies. The social strategies are the strategies used by the students to engage to the environment in practicing the language.

Based on the observation in STAI Darul Ulum Kandungan, many students of STAI Darul Ulum Kadangan from different background and study programs are in the basic or elementary level of English proficiency. It is proved by the previous study done by Prasetya (2022), he stated that the average students' English level in STAI Darul Ulum Kadangan is in elementary level that they only produce simple phrases and simple language. The students still have many problems in making sentences in English such as making errors in referring back the subject, verb-agreement, compound sentences and so on. It is also supported by the writer's experiences in teaching English in this institution since 2018 that many students from traditional boarding schools have very limited English because the schools do not include English subject in their curriculum and some of teachers in some schools use inappropriate methods in teaching English in their classroom such as giving tasks like answering the written questions in English without explanations, giving tasks without guidance, and without an English teacher at learning process. The goal of learning English is only to pass the examination. Thus, they do not learn English well. It is accordance with the previous study conducted by Prasetya (2023) he stated that the students had learned English, but their English is still limited. It is also supported by Renandya et al. (2018). It is stated that limited proficiency of the teacher in Indonesia is not unique and it is a common. That is why the students also are not fluent in English. On the other hand, the writer found very few students who have very fluent in speaking English and make very little mistakes in their speaking. Their level of English is like students at English department who can speak fluently in the classes. They could speak everything without hesitation. This motivates the writer to conduct this study in order to find out the learning strategies that the students used in learning English to arrive in their level of competency or proficiency. This study want to find out the students' strategies in learning English autonomy by using narrative inquiry.

There are some previous studies about learning autonomy such as conducted by Indah, Rachmawati, & Evenddy (2021). This study investigates the factors affecting and influencing the autonomous learner in learning English. The result of this study showed that the factors are from internal such as self-motivation and external factor such as environment. This study focuses on the factors that make someone learn English autonomy. The other studies are done by Fatmawati & Wirza (2022) examining students' experience in doing autonomous language learning behaviour and challenges of doing autonomous language learning. This study showed that there are some challenges in doing autonomous learners such as dilemma in determining the goals, lack of motivation, and needing other's help. This study concerns about the challenges of doing autonomous learners. The other study is about strategies in learning English done by Aunurrahman, Kurniawati, & Ramadhiyanti, (2013). They investigate the students' strategies in learning English and how the students use the strategies in learning English. The result of the study showed that the students use different strategies in learning English. This study concerns about students' strategies used by a large amount of students of STKIP PGRI Pontianak and the current study wanted to investigate in depth or detailed strategies used by the students of STAI Darul Ulum Kadangan based on their level of proficiency. Zulaihah & Harida (2017) investigate the autonomous learning strategies used by the students of English Education Department of STKIP Ponorogo and the reasons used those strategies. The study showed that metacognitive and social mediation strategies are mostly used by the students. Therefore, the focus of this study is autonomous learning strategies used by English education department students. The participants are majoring in English. However, in advance study, this focuses on non-English department students that have good proficiency in speaking English.

Therefore, this study investigates the strategies that the students used in learning English autonomy by using narrative inquiry.

METHODS

This study uses the qualitative research in the form of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is analyzing participants' stories (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014). Narrative focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those individual experiences (Creswell, 2012). Narrative inquiry is used to understand how language learners organize their experiences and identities and represent them to themselves and to others (Barkhuizen et al. 2014). This study investigates the students' strategies in learning English autonomy using narrative inquiry. In this study, two participants or students of STAI Darul Ulum Kandungan are chosen purposively based on their speaking level of proficiency. The writer had interviewed them in English few times in the classess when they were fresh learners in 2019 and 2021 and they always got highest score of English in the classes. However, in that time, the writer did not ask their strategies in learning English. Therefore, the writer want to investigate their strategies in learning English in the past, now, and maybe in the future.

In collecting the data, semi-structured interviews are used for collecting the main data, and questionnaires are used for collecting the supporting data. Based on Barkhuizen et al., (2014) interviews are mainly used to elicit oral accounts of language learning and experiences. In semi-structured interview, the writer uses the interview guides or written questions but also uses open-ended questions to allow the participants to elaborate the answers. Some questions are taken from language learning histories (LLH) proposed by Murphey, Chen, and Chen, 2004 cited by Barkhuizen et al. (2014). There are six steps in doing interview: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. For the supporting data, the questionnaire is taken from strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990). This SILL contained 50 items which the items would show the students' strategies in learning English by choosing one respond of five Likert scale (never or always not true of me, usually not true of me, somewhat true of me, usually true of me, and always or almost always true of me).

In data analysis, the data are analyzed by using data analysis strategis: iterative, emergent, and interpretive (Barkhuizen et al., 2014) and the data are also analyzed by using six categories of learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1990).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data thematically, the findings and discussions of the students' strategies in learning English autonomy are presented as the following: learning English in early age, using pictures, learning from the simple things and not starting with grammar, English community, using social media, using subtitles, independent learner, practicing, and starting from what you like or love.

Learning English in Early Age

The first notion about learning English strategy is learning English in very early age. However, actually it is not strategy that the students directly use in learning English, but it can be assumed that when the learners start learning something in early ages, they will acquire the language easily and fast. It can be proven by the excerpts from the interview from two participants.

Participant 1 : *actually, I start learn English for the first time when I... I think when I am one grade in elementary school.... maybe six years or seven years...*

Participant 2 : *Actually, I start learn English when I was young, when I was I think when I was 10....*

These excerpts showed that they started learning English in early ages. The first participant said that she started learning English when she was six or seven years old and the second participant stated that she begun to learn English when she was ten years old. When the writer did the interview, it showed that they had good pronunciation, they spoke like native speakers, they spoke fast and focused on the meaning. It is in line with the previous study such as done by Hakiki & Hidayati (2017). They stated that early age learners seem to be more easier to have the ability to acquire the phonological aspects that make the them to be native-like speakers. Winskel, et al., (2016) cited by Hardi & Marleni (2020) argued that these early ages of learners are called as a critical period in learning and development. In these stages, the learners develop language and other cognitive skills rapidly. They are more likely be able to pronounce English words similar to native speakers. However, in the final statement of their study said that the early age issue is not the factors determine their fluency and

proficiency in English. They continued that the important thing is giving language input that the students engage in many learning activities. Based on the writer's experience, learning in early age especially in elementary schools has a big impact on the acquisition of the language and this happens on two participants of this study. Therefore, this notion needs to be considered if English learners want to be fluent like English native speakers especially in speaking English.

Using pictures

The strategy that the participant used in learning English is using pictures or visual things to motivate them in learning English. It can be seen on the excerpts from the interview as the following:

- Participant 1 : *it is because my sister brought a story book in English so first time, I interest with the I interest in the picture...because the picture is so eye-catching for the kids...*
 Participant 2 : *For the first time, no one motivate me. Actually, I can just see it. Or maybe because I see my teacher speaking English or teaching me English at school.*

These excerpts showed that the first participant engaged in learning English because she saw a story book with pictures on it. She said that she was interested in the pictures. She learned English from the pictures such as safana, sea, or something else. She learned the names of those pictures. The second participant engaged in learning English because she saw her teacher speaking English at school. The teacher inspired her to learn English. She thought that being an English speaker is cool. Therefore, using visual things such as pictures or role-modelling will motivate the students to engage in learning English. It is supported by the study conducted by Sering & Khan (2022). They stated that the use of pictures in the primary classroom in language teaching increases the students' motivation in learning English. Another study is done by Yuskar (2022). His study showed that using pictures in teaching English resulted in good score of the students in learning English. Liando, Tatipang, Tamboto, Poluan, & Manuas (2022) also stated that pictures make enthusiastic and attract the learners in learning English. Therefore, using pictures and modelling in speaking English will motivate to engage the students in learning English.

Learning from the simple things and not starting with grammar

In starting learning English, it is needed to start from easy. It cannot be directly to the difficult one. It can be seen on the excerpts as the following:

- Participant 1 : *I think I try remember but it's just a simple word like "I", "you", and "we" and it's my sister told me the mean of that words...*
 Participant 2 : *In that course, in my English course actually, the teacher always teach us about, you know, grammar or something...I don't really like the grammar because they don't teach us how to speak English probably. I think grammar is not really important to study English, because we have to start speaking.*

This indicated that the students need to learn from the simple things that they use in their everyday life. It is accordance with Prasetya (2020) that he stated learning English must be started with the simple vocabularies and phrases in English. Krashen's Input Hypothesis in Ellis (1994, p. 273) stated that "learners progress along the natural order by understanding input that contains structures a little bit beyond their current level of competence". It means that the learners learn something from what they had known previously. If the students are in elementary level, they need to start learning English from the simplest one that they know and gradually develop to be more complex one. Nation (2005) said that teaching can effectively deal with the only a small amount of information about a word. If the information is too complex, the students are more likely misinterpreting it. The second participant said that the teacher always taught the grammar and she did not like the grammar. This is probably because of the teacher's ways in delivering the grammar. Many of the English teachers do not present the language first or the input for the students but directly come to explained the grammar. They probably feel unconfident in speaking English because they are afraid making mistakes. Renandya, Hamied, & Nurkamto (2018) stated that many Indonesian English teachers are not very fluent and lack confident in using English inside or outside of the classroom. Therefore, grammar is important in English because it is the way how make a meaning to other people but it should be coming after giving the input in learning English.

English Community

In learning English, the students have to find a partner in practicing their language based on the context. They have to find the English environment that can support them to practice in English. It can be seen in the excerpts such as the following:

Participant 1 : *I joined Extracurricular English English Club in junior high school and Senior High School, but for the English learning... in my English club or in English club, yes, I am comfortable, but in my socio socio "biasa" kaya "lingkungan biasa", not that comfortable...*

Participant 2 : *In junior high school I learned English at English course and at school*

These excerpts showed that the students' strategies in learning English are joining or involving in English community such as English club or English course at school. This English community will help the students to have English environment that they can share the same ideas and same mission in learning English. They feel comfortable when they speak in English. They have same belief and behaviour in learning English. Alshehri (2020) argued that community can shape the individual beliefs, values, and behaviour. He continued to say that creating the right environment or community is very important for students in learning English. Kaharuddin & Latif (2019) also argued that English community is not only as a learning strategy that encourages the students to learn and practice English outside of the classroom, but also very useful for improving their assertiveness, critical thinking, leadership, initiatives and inclusiveness.

Using social media

In learning English, the students use their social media for searching the contents that are using English. They can find the contents and also listen to the real English. It can be seen in the excerpts such as the following:

Participant 1 : *I was learning from social media, game and music and movie.....At the time maybe YouTube because in Instagram for the time is not... really really often I find something in English, so I find it in YouTube for the first time.*

Participant 2 : *I have a smartphone in Senior High School. So, in the smartphone. I can gist to start studying English on youtube maybe on Instagram maybe because I don't really like to reading.*

This strategy is very useful for the students in learning English because in this digital era, everyone has this access in learning English. They use social media such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok or other applications such as games for getting information about everything around the world. They do not only enjoy the contents on the social media for their pleasure but also learn something on it especially learning English. Safitri, Yuliyani, Hamid, & Suriaman (2022) stated that social media has potential use as a media in English language teaching that can develop students' English competence. Arif (2019) also argued that positive impacts of social media should be considered by the teacher in improving the students' competence in acquiring English. Another study is done by Karim, Mondal, Hussain, Alam, & Nazarieh (2022). This study showed that social media has a great role in learning English. So that learning English can be done everywhere because they can use social media for learning English, the students only need a smartphone and connection to access the social media. However, they need to focus on learning English because sometimes they are distracted by the attractive views on the screen.

Using subtitle

When the students do not listen or get what narrators are talking about in the social media especially on YouTube, they use the subtitles in English. Therefore, they can understand and learn how they pronounce the words or sentences. It can be seen in the excerpts as like:

Participant 1 : *I try to learn listening but when I can't get the means of what they talk so I will.... open the subtitle and if I find the word that I don't even know I will search it.*

Participant 2 : *another tips that I always use is I am gonna watch video that they speaking English but I use subtitle on it. But the subtitle in English.*

The other students' strategy in learning English is opening the subtitle on YouTube. This strategy is the continuity of using social media in learning English. The subtitles help the students to know and understand the messages delivered by the speakers on YouTube. The students also can imitate the words or phrases that the speakers' saying on YouTube. Zanon (2006) stated that video and subtitles can enhance the students' language learning motivation and skills in general, and specifically in listening and speaking. Another study is conducted by Furaidah, Ngadiso, & Asrori

(2019). The result of this study showed that there is a correlation between watching Youtube with the subtitles and reading skills. This study confirmed that when the students watching the youtube with subtitles will also improve their reading skill. Bellalem, Neddar, Bouagada, & Djellou (2018) in their study presented that subtitled videos in specific can have strong effect on acquisitions of new words in English. This study suggested that the teachers should promote the use of subtitled videos in learning English especially for gaining new vocabularies. Therefore, this strategy is very helpful for the students in improving their listening, speaking, reading and ganing new vocabularies in English.

Independent learner

When the students learn English, they usually learn on their ways. They know what they want to learn or look for in learning English. It can be seen in the excerpts such as:

- Participant 1 : *Actually, I don't have any strategies to learn English, I just learn in...yeah freeway, maybe when I see social media or when I play a game and I find something I find a word that I interesting maybe I was searched it and maybe when I want to talk about something and I don't know what the word it is I was searched it too and I try to... to arrange the words together*
- Participant 2 : *I watch the content that I love maybe because I love ...maybe I love drawing ...I love cooking...I watch on youtube the contents that have cooking content, drawing content, but they use English on it. So, I learn day by day from that application. And now, we have TikTok maybe. So, I really like ...I really like watching ...I watch to...I so many watch tiktok videos but in the content that I always watch is English content. So, day by day we can learn by it.*

The next strategy in learning English is being an independent learner. The excerpts showed that the students are being independent learners. They learn English by their ways. They search for the contents that they like and then they try to understand what the speakers' saying on those contents. They do this based on their intentions and desires as well as their love. The first participant said that she liked to play games. In that game, they can interact with other people around the world using English. The second participant said that she loved cooking. She liked to search cooking contents on YouTube in English. Therefore, they can get the information that they want, and they can also learn English on it with their pleasure. Fajar & Agustina (2019) argued that independent learning gives the students' freedom in determining learning styles that they want. They can use their ways in learning English freely without burdening students in learning English. Nazmunissa & Rachman (2021) also stated that independent learning through social media can improve their skills in English such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Although, they need to have strong motivation to start in learning English because if they loose their motivation, they will not learn English anymore.

Practicing

In order to be fluent in speaking English, the students have to practice speaking in English whether by speaking to their friends or people from other countries or speak with their own ways in English.

It can be seen on the excerpts such as:

- Participant 1 : *I have in online for now, but when I am in senior high school, I have one friend I practice English when I found aaa...right time maybe when I play game and I see my other country friends online then I chat them.*
- Participant 2 : *for the first time, I always train my pronounce to speak like foreign person. After that I'm always speaking like on my with my parents but my parents don't understand what I am saying...When I always like speaking alone at home but I use English when I'm speaking alone at home.*

It can be denied that practice makes perfect. If the students want to be fluent in English, they have to practice a lot in English such as speaking with the foreigner people such as done by the first participant that when she was playing game, she could chat her friends from other countries. When she was at school, she also had a friend to talk in English. And the second participant always practiced English at home, she talked to her parents. Although, her parents did not understand what she was saying to them. Therefore, their English speaking is good and sounds like a native speaker. However, some of their grammar still needs to be improved. Saleh & Althaqafi (2022) stated that games can be good media for teaching English vocabulary for young learner. By using games, the students can practice English with other people.

Starting from what you like and love

The biggest motivation in learning English is from the inner and self-initiated. If the students like and love to learn English, they will find the strategies that they like to improve their English. It can be seen from the excerpts as the following:

- Participant 1 : *maybe if you want to learn English, you can start from what things you like, maybe if you like to looking social media, then try to...try to search content in English and that you like...*
- Participant 2 : *I think the first thing that I have to do if we want to studying something we have to love it first...if you want to learn something start it...if you want to make it different of other people start it...don't think about other people thinking about you if you start it ...just start what you love ...start what you want ...*

The excerpts showed that the students' strategies in learning English is by determining what they like and love. If they like cooking, then they will find the sources about cooking in English. Therefore, they will find the information about cooking in English and they also learn English on those contents. If they like to play games then they also learn English from those games. If the students feel burdened because they have to learn English, they will ignore to learn English. It is in line with the study conducted by Budiman, Untari, & Listyarini (2021). They stated that learning will not be succed if the students are in a psychologically burdened condition. Therefore, motivation in learning English should be from learners themselves.

Discussion

After doing thematic analysis and discussing the strategies that the students used in learning English. Now it arrives at the discussion of the result of strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) proposed by Oxford (1990, p. 365). SILL is used to find out the strategies that the students used in English language learning. There are two participants who fill this questionnaire. The result is shown on the following table and figure.

Table 1. Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

No	Categories of Learning Strategies	Score	Percentage
1	Memory-Related Strategies	60	67 %
2	Cognitive Strategies	109	78 %
3	Compensatory Strategies	51	85 %
4	Metacognitive Strategies	68	76 %
5	Affective Strategies	45	75 %
6	Social Strategies	48	80 %
	Total	381	76 %

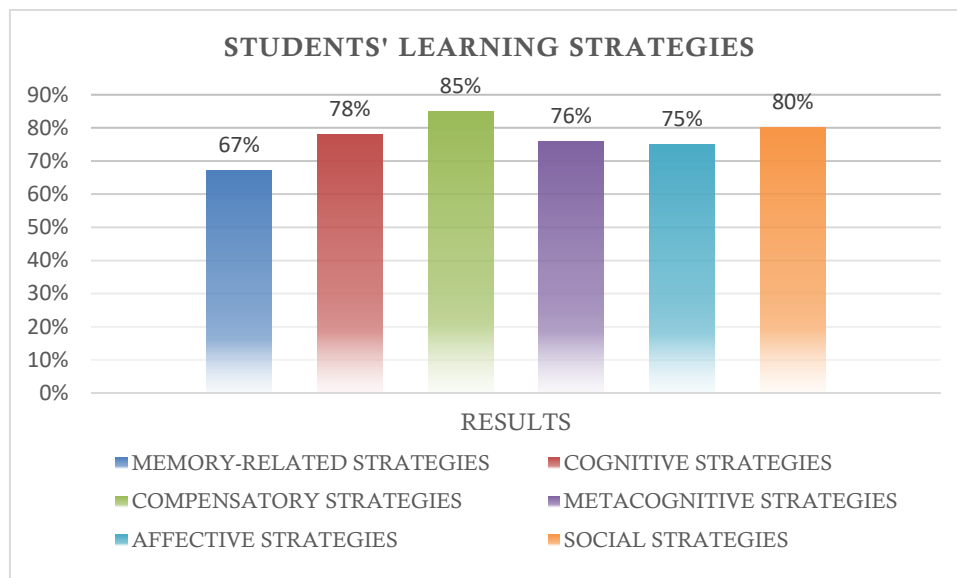


Figure 1. Students' Learning Strategies

From the table and figure of students' learning strategies, it showed that the score was 381 in 76 %. It means that the students are medium users of the strategies. Therefore, there is no prominent strategies that the students use in learning English. They use the strategies in a balance. This finding is in line with Aunurrahman et al., (2013) and Alhaisoni (2012) that there is no outstanding strategies used by the students. However, the highest score was compensatory strategies in 85% followed by social strategies in 80 %. Compensatory strategies are the strategies that the students used such as guessing meanings from the context, using synonyms, talking around and using gestures or pausing the words (Oxford, 1990). This finding is similar from the study by Zhang (2001) in Aunurrahman et al., (2013) that the most used strategies are compensatory strategies. However, Aunurrahman et al., (2013) showed that the most used strategies are social strategies. Social strategies are the strategies used by the students to communicate or interact with other people that contribute to the language learning. Therefore, these two strategies are the highest frequent strategies used by the students in learning English. It is in line with the thematic analysis findings. The finding showed that the students like to practice by talking around (speaking alone at home) and practice English to their online friends from other countries.

The third is cognitive strategies in 78% followed by metacognitive strategies in 76% and affective strategies in 75%. These three strategies are slightly different in the score. However, Alhaisoni's finding of study (2012) is the opposite of this recent study. His study showed that cognitive followed by metacognitive strategies are the most frequent used by the students. Cognitive strategies refer to the students' strategies to make repetition, take note, and elaborate. In the thematic analysis, it showed that the participants use social media in learning English such as watching YouTube then they open the subtitles and learn how native speakers say (repetition). Then, the metacognitive strategies refer to knowing one's own learning style preferences and needs. It can be seen from the thematic analysis that the students use freeways in learning English and learning by watching youtube day by day. Affective strategies refer to the strategies used by the students by talking about feeling. In the finding of thematic analysis, there is only about the participant's feeling that she was comfortable in speaking when she was in English club, but when she was in ordinary community, she felt awkward in speaking English. This does not include in the strategies in learning English. Therefore, participants are rarely using these strategies.

The lowest score is memory-related strategies in 67%. This finding is similar with the previous studies by Alhaisoni (2012); Aunurrahmah et al. (2013); Zhang (2001) in Aunurrahman et al., (2013) that the memory strategies are as the least frequently used by the learners. This indicated that the students did not like to memorize in learning English. One of the participants also said that she is a fast learner but she is easy to forget it. Therefore, the students who want to learn English can use these strategies in order to become a fluent speaker in English.

CONCLUSION

The students' strategies in learning English autonomy based on the thematic analysis are learning English in early age, using pictures, learning from the simple things and not starting with grammar, having English community, using social media as means of learning English, using subtitles when watching YouTube, being independent learners, practicing English with friends or by themselves, and starting from what you like or love. The most strategies used by the students are compensatory strategies followed by social strategies and the fewest strategies used by the students are memory-related strategies. These strategies are useful for developing the students' abilities in learning English such as listening and speaking, because these students have proved that they could speak English fluently like English native speakers. However, this study only focused on the strategies to develop speaking ability of the students. The further research should examine in developing all the skills of students' proficiency.

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