

## **LEARNING STRATEGY OF SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS IN AN ONLINE INTERMEDIATE GRAMMAR CLASS**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to investigate the learning strategies of successful students in an online intermediate grammar class. The research participants were all English as Foreign Language (EFL) students, batches 2019, 2020, and 2021, who got an A or AB in the intermediate grammar class at the English Language Education Program (ELEP), a private university in Indonesia. A closed-ended questionnaire and interviews were used as the instruments to collect the data. In the questionnaire, 49 participants were asked to respond to statements on their learning strategies to learn grammar. At the same time, 6 participants were interviewed to clarify their responses to the questionnaire. The descriptive statistics revealed that three grammar learning strategies successfully helped students learn in their grammar class are: (1) determining difficult grammatical structures and trying to learn the difficulty; (2) paying attention to grammatical structures when translating sentences; and (3) taking notes when the teacher explains a new grammatical structure.

**Keywords:** EFL, Intermediate Grammar, Learning Strategies

### **INTRODUCTION**

Grammar is a lesson that must be mastered by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students because if they have sufficient knowledge of grammar, they will be able to use correct sentences to achieve meaningful communication with others (Nelson et al. 1996; Murcia, 2001) and to reduce the difficulties in interpreting written and spoken text (Cussuseno & Setyawan, 2014). However, many EFL students struggle to understand grammar, especially when they learn about tenses and change the sentence structure from Indonesian to English (Kahsay, 2020; Payne, 2008). Moreover, Bayram (2018) also argues that even though grammar learning is maximally delivered to students and not combined with other lessons, the grades achieved by students are not very satisfactory. In the English Language Education Program, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, Salatiga, Indonesia, students said grammar lessons were challenging, especially the Intermediate Grammar lesson. Meanwhile, to reduce students' difficulties, additional materials on grammar are provided by seniors, who lecturers have trusted. Unfortunately, some students skipped classes when the teaching assistant gave additional material on grammar. When viewed from the test scores, not all students can get good grades in this Intermediate Grammar class. Sometimes students repeat Intermediate Grammar classes more than once; this situation can slow them down in taking Academic Writing and other prerequisite courses.

Therefore, to reduce the repetition rate in Intermediate Grammar classes, the researcher is interested in exploring further on learning strategies that influence a student's success in getting good grades. With that background in mind, this research

addressed the following question: What are the learning strategies of successful students in an (online) Intermediate Grammar class?

Learning strategy cannot be separated from the process of learning a second or foreign language. Many researchers convey different concepts and ideas about learning strategy in their research, thus giving learning strategy a meaning that is not fixed (Azizmohammadi & Barjesteh, 2020; Bayzal, 2011). Learning strategy is an effort that students make based on their willingness to reduce fatigue in achieving good results in a lesson (Chamot, 2004; Ozmen & Gulleroglu, 2013; Pawlak, 2009). Besides, Abri et al. (2017) argued that the learning strategy also guides students in learning. Moreover, a learning strategy is a system that helps students process information, such as deepening and retaining the information received (Aslan, 2009; Azizmohammadi & Barjesteh, 2020).

Oxford et al. (2007) stated that Grammar Learning Strategies (GLS) are acts and concepts that learners consciously utilize to make language acquisition and/or language usage simpler, more effective, and pleasurable. There is a plethora of research investigating learning strategies used in grammar class. The research on the use of translation to study grammar was carried out by Murtisari (2020). The author looked at how a translation unit assists tertiary EFL students in learning grammar. In the study, the perceptions of 15 participants in an undergraduate English language education program at a university in Central Java were gathered using students' reflections on the use of translation units in studying grammar. The findings revealed that the translation unit could help students differentiate between Indonesian and English sentence structures and use English grammar according to the rules.

Based on research conducted by Nakachi (2021), who examined the grammar learning strategy used by English-Major University students, five learning strategies are considered useful. The first is when students do not know the part of speech, they consider such clues as form, meaning, and context. Second, students pay attention to rules provided by the teacher or the coursebook. Third, students pay attention to grammar structures in their speaking and writing. Fourth, students compare their speech and writing with that of more proficient people to see how they can improve. Last, students pay attention to how more proficient people say things and then imitate.

Research conducted by Zekrati (2017) regarding the relationship between grammar learning strategy use and language achievement of Iranian high school EFL learners showed ten learning strategies that are helpful in learning grammar. First, students take notes when their teacher explains a new grammar structure. Second, students encourage themselves to speak English even when they are afraid of making a grammar mistake. Third, students underline and use different colors or capital letters to emphasize the important parts of grammar rules and explanations. Fourth, if students do not understand their teacher's explanation, students ask their friends for help. Fifth, students review the grammar subjects that will be covered before class. Sixth, if students are unsure of a grammar structure, they try to use another one while writing or speaking. Seventh, students repeat the correct form when the teacher corrects students' grammar mistakes. Eighth, students examine the mistakes their instructor marked in a written assignment and try to correct them. Ninth, students use grammar books to review or better understand

new grammar structures. Last, students determine the grammar structures they have trouble with and try to improve them.

Research on grammar learning strategy was also carried out by Gurata (2008). The research focused on grammar learning strategies employed by Turkish university preparatory school EFL students. The research revealed 10 grammar learning strategies that were considered useful for students. First, students encourage themselves to speak English even when they are afraid of making a grammar mistake. Second, students examine the mistakes that which instructor has marked in a written assignment and try to correct them. Third, students determine the grammar structures they have trouble with and try to improve them. Fourth, students try to practice a new grammar structure in speaking or writing. Fifth, students review the grammar structures they learn regularly. Sixth, students take notes when their teacher explains a new grammar structure (e.g., I write down the meaning and the usage of the structure). Seventh, if students do not understand their teacher's explanation of a new structure, they ask him/her to repeat it. Eighth, students pay attention to grammar rules when they speak or write. Ninth, students try to notice their grammar mistakes and find out the reasons for them. Last, when students see a new grammar structure, they use the context/situation, the dialogue, or the picture to understand its meaning.

All previous studies discussed above have informed researchers on grammar learning strategies that are considered to help students understand grammar learning. Therefore, to carry out this research, some learning strategies were adapted from Azizmohammadi and Barjesteh (2020), Hakima (2015), Nakachi (2021), Zekrati (2017), Gurata (2008) and Murtisari et al. (2020); then, the researcher would like to see if the participants of this study used similar strategies in learning grammar to those reported by the previous studies. This research is expected to provide students with practical strategies they can use to succeed in their intermediate grammar class. For EFL teachers, this research is expected to provide awareness about the learning strategies used by students so that teachers can adjust their instructions in the class based on the learning strategy that students use.

## **METHOD**

This research explored the learning strategies of successful students in an online Intermediate Grammar class at ELEP, UKSW. To achieve this objective, the researcher approached the study quantitatively. The participants were students who had already taken intermediate grammar class courses with A and AB scores and were still studying at UKSW. To select the participants, the researcher first distributed a questionnaire to 49 students on their grammar scores in batches of 2019, 2020, and 2022. Thirty-nine students who got an A or AB score in their Intermediate Grammar class participated in this study.

To collect the data, the study used closed-ended questionnaires on strategies to use for grammar learning. The results of the questionnaires were analyzed using a descriptive statistics technique. The participant's responses were processed with Microsoft Excel to perform descriptive statistics in which frequencies and percentages were computed and analyzed to answer the research questions.

Six participants, who provided their cellphones and consented, were interviewed to clarify the answers to each statement; strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with. The list of interview questions are; 1) Why do you agree with the strategy “I take notes when my teacher explains a new grammar structure” can succeed you in grammar class?; 2) Why do you agree with the strategy “I determine the grammar structures that I have trouble with and make an effort to improve them” can succeed you in grammar class?; 3) Why do you agree with the strategy “I pay attention to the grammar structure when translating a sentence from Indonesian to English or vice versa” can succeed you in grammar class? Their answers were used to clarify the answers to the questionnaire previously taken.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the questionnaire are described in one section: students' opinions about learning strategies that can make them successful in the intermediate grammar class. To achieve comprehensive results, the author conducted interview with the participants to clarify the questionnaire results.

**Table 1 Students' Opinions about Learning Strategies that Can Make Them Successful in Their Intermediate Grammar Class**

<b>No</b>	<b>Grammar learning strategies</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
1.	I take notes when my teacher explains a new grammar structure (e.g., I write down the meaning and the usage of the structure.)	2 Students (5%)	3 Students (7%)	22 Students (56%)	12 Students (31%)
2.	I determine the grammar structures that I have trouble with and make an effort to improve them.	0 Student (0%)	1 Student (2%)	25 Students (64%)	13 Students (33%)
3.	I study grammar with a friend or a relative.	3 Students (7%)	6 Students (15%)	16 Students (41%)	14 Students (36%)
4.	If I don't understand my teacher's explanation of the new structure, I ask him/her to repeat.	2 Students (5%)	13 Students (33%)	18 Students (46%)	6 Students (15%)

No	Grammar learning strategies	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
5.	I pay attention to grammar rules when I speak or write.	1 Student (5%)	4 Students (10%)	23 Students (59%)	11 Students (28%)
6.	I review the grammar subjects that will be covered before coming to class.	2 Students (7%)	13 Students (33%)	18 Students (46%)	7 Students (18%)
7.	I pay attention to the grammar structure when translating a sentence from Indonesian to English or vice versa.	0 Student (0%)	2 Students (7%)	15 Students (38%)	22 Students (56%)
8.	I underline, use different colors or capital letters to emphasize the important parts of grammar rules and explanations.	1 Student (5%)	7 Students (18%)	15 Students (38%)	16 Students (41%)
9.	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a grammar mistake.	0 Student (0%)	7 Students (18%)	23 Students (59%)	9 Students (23%)
10.	I pay attention to how more proficient people say things and then imitate.	0 Student (0%)	6 Students (15%)	23 Students (59%)	10 Students (26%)

As shown in Table 2, most students agree that taking notes (87%) and drilling difficult grammatical structures (97%) can make them successful in learning intermediate

grammar lessons. A few students agree that learning grammar with a friend or a relative can make them successful in learning grammar (77%). A very small percentage of students agree that asking the teacher to repeat the difficult explanations can make them successful in learning grammar material (66%). Most 87% of students agree that paying attention to grammatical structure when students speak or write can make them successful in learning grammar material.

The other strategy students thought less helpful was reviewing grammar subjects that would be covered before coming to class (62%). Most students agree that paying attention to grammatical structures when translating sentences can make them successful in learning grammar material (95%). About 78% of students agree that underlining and using different colors or capital letters to emphasize the important parts of grammar rules and explanations can make them successful in learning grammar material. Many students agree that encouraging themselves to speak English (82%) and paying attention to how more proficient people say things and imitate (85%) can make them successful in learning grammar material.

From the results, it can be concluded that students agree with the strategy of determining difficult grammatical structures and trying to learn the difficulty can make them successful in learning grammar material. Determining in this context means choosing a difficult strategy. Students presented some reasons to support the usefulness of this strategy (E refers to Excerpt from the interview, and S refers to the student).

#### **Except 1**

*I agree with the strategy of determining difficult grammatical structures and trying to learn the difficulty can make them successful in learning grammar material. I think not all intermediate grammar materials are easy to understand, some grammatical structures are difficult to understand, so we need a longer time to understand them. I focus more on learning difficult grammatical structures. I want to understand everything first rather than focusing on what I already know and leaving difficult material not to be learned. Understanding all the grammatical structures makes it easier for me to do grammar tests. (S1/ interview)*

#### **Except 2**

*I usually determine the difficult formula and try to learn it. I study the formula more often and do exercises related to difficult formulas. Learning difficult formulas can improve my understanding and help me do the grammar test.*

From the statements of S1 and S2, it can be seen that focusing more on and understanding difficult grammar structures shows that they can master existing grammar material and make it easier to answer test questions. Besides, students agree with the strategy of taking notes when the teacher explains a new grammatical structure, which can make them successful in learning grammar material. Some reasons were presented by students to support the usefulness of this strategy.

### Except 3

*I agree with this strategy. I like to take notes when my teacher explains. I wrote down the parts of the formula that I thought were important. When I want to take the test, I have no trouble finding the formulas I will learn because I have collected the formulas in one note.*

### Except 4

*When I write, I feel that my brain is also working to understand the formula that wrote, and writing the formula, helps me to remember the formula.*

S3 said that taking note of the teacher's explanation can make it easier for him to learn the material before the test. Meanwhile, S4 said that taking notes can improve her memory of the material explained by the teacher. Besides, students agree with the strategy of paying attention to grammatical structures when translating sentences.

### Except 5

*I agree with the strategy of paying attention to grammatical structures when translating sentences. By translating a sentence into Indonesian, we can know when the grammar form can be used. With the help of Indonesian, I can understand some grammar formulas. For example, when I first learned grammar, I used to equate the simple past and the present perfect. I often use the simple past in sentences that should use the present perfect. Then I tried to translate the sentence into Indonesian. Now I understand that the simple past is the context of something that happened in the past and it's done, while the present perfect is an event that happened in the past and is continuing at a certain time.*

### Except 6

*Studying grammar by translating the text can help me find the meaning of a sentence correctly or reduce mistakes in interpreting the meaning of a sentence.*

S5 and S6 said that learning grammar by translating sentences could give an accurate meaning to a sentence. Paying attention to the grammatical structure when translating also helps students recognize the different uses of a formula in the context of a sentence.

This research aims to explore learning strategies used by students to be successful in their intermediate grammar classes. A learning strategy that can make students more successful in intermediate grammar class namely determining difficult grammatical structures and trying to learn the difficulty. Previous researchers also reported this strategy (e.g., Gurata, 2008; Zekrati, 2017) as one that can help students understand grammatical structures. It indicates that learners adopt strategies when they learn and apply grammatical structures (Gurata, 2008). Besides, trying to understand the grammatical structure in the translated sentence (95%) is also a strategy that can make students successful in grammar class. This finding confirms Murtisari's (2020) argumentation that looking for the meaning of the second language will make students pay more attention to the differences in the structure of the first and second languages (Murtisari, 2020). Moreover, learning grammar by meaning can help students find clear and accurate

grammar formulas (Mart, 2013). Another learning strategy that can make students successful in grammar class is taking notes when the teacher explains a new grammatical structure (87%). This strategy was also reported by previous researchers (e.g., Gurata, 2008; Zekrati, 2017) have succeeded in making students understand grammar material.

Meanwhile, two strategies did not make the students successful in intermediate grammar class. First, ask the teacher to re-explain difficult explanations. Second, review grammar subjects that would be covered before coming to class. This result is not in line with previous research, which states that these two strategies can be helpful for students in grammar classes (Zekrati, 2017). Zekarti (2017) pointed out that the teacher plays the primary role in overcoming students' difficulties in grammar lessons, but there is a second source that could help students solve problems in grammar class by asking their friends about the difficulty. For this reason, students prefer to ask friends about complex material rather than ask the teacher.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research concludes three grammar learning strategies that make students successful in their Intermediate Grammar class. First, determining difficult grammatical structures and trying to learn the difficulty. Second, paying attention to grammatical structures when translating sentences. Third, taking notes when the teacher explains a new grammatical structure. This study focused on an online Intermediate Grammar Class in Indonesia who are staying in batches 2019, 2020, and 2021, and got an A or AB score in this class.

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