

EMPOWERING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH SOCIAL LEARNING STRATEGIES IN VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

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e-ISSN: 2987-811X

MARAS: Jurnal Penelitian Multidisiplin

<https://ejournal.lumbungpare.org/index.php/maras>

Vol. 1 No. 2 September 2023

Page: 70-83

Article History:

Received: 20-06-2023

Accepted: 14-07-2023

Abstrak : This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of Social Learning Strategy (SLS) in empowering various English as a Foreign Language (EFL) language skills in SMK N 6 Semarang. A descriptive qualitative method was used with a questionnaire survey to collect data from 35 students from SMK N 6 Semarang who completed the first nine items of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire and a background characteristics survey. The study's findings indicate that how English is used in practice affects how well it is learned. The findings showed a connection between using social strategies and effectively learning English. The most commonly used social strategies are to mix Indonesian and English words if students do not know the English word or practice English with the English teacher and classmates.

Kata Kunci : Social Strategy, Vocational School, SILL, EFL

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected and globalized society, the ability to communicate effectively across cultures and languages has become an indispensable skill. As a result, language learners are increasingly turning to social language learning strategies to enhance their linguistic competence and cultural understanding. The impact of technology's advancement cannot be overlooked when it comes to the globalization of education and its effects on teaching and learning activities. In the 21st century, teachers are expected to adopt a more interactive approach in the classroom, moving

beyond traditional lecturing methods (Susanto, 2020). With the advent of digital platforms, social media, and online communities, language learners now have unprecedented opportunities to engage with native speakers, access authentic resources, and participate in immersive language environments. However, the rapid evolution of technology and the proliferation of online communication channels also bring forth new challenges and considerations for social language learning. Hence, it is of utmost importance to recognize language learning techniques that are efficient in improving learners' language skills and cater to their specific educational requirements, particularly in the context of vocational high schools where English is the subject of study. This interest oriented the line of this study toward the students' employed strategies while collaborating, discussing, and elaborating on the received information.

In order to address the difficulties encountered in acquiring English as a foreign language, scholars have put forward the Social Learning Strategy (SLS) as a viable approach. The application of social learning strategies, including methods like questioning and collaboration, assists in fostering interaction and facilitating learning among individuals (Ardasheva & Tretter, 2013). They additionally contended that the efficacy of SLS is contingent upon learners' readiness to assume accountability for their own learning as well as the surrounding environment in which they find themselves. For instance, language can be viewed as a type of social behavior, representing a means of communication that takes place among individuals. However, the Social and Intercultural Learning for Language (SILL) framework encompasses six social strategies, which encompass activities such as inquiring, collaborating with peers, and developing cultural awareness (Bessai, 2018). Naeimi & Foo (2015) points out that the SLS approach incorporates an element of indirect learning that greatly improves learners' vocabulary when they engage in classroom activities by collaborating, inquiring, and empathizing with their peers. In contrast, Dolores, (2017) found that certain learners did not effectively utilize these techniques, and some were not even aware of the process of language acquisition.

Notwithstanding the encouraging outcomes of previous studies, there exists a research gap regarding the efficacy of SLS in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Furthermore, limited research has been conducted on the effectiveness of social strategies specifically tailored for distinct groups of EFL learners, such as those enrolled in vocational schools. Therefore, this research aims to examine the perspectives of students regarding the impact of SLS on enhancing various language skills among EFL learners, as well as to identify potential emerging social strategies among vocational students. Wiyaka, et al (2017) explained EFL teachers are responsible for selecting suitable materials, methods, and models that effectively support students in acquiring the language. Simultaneously, they also have the duty to integrate moral values into their teaching. The demand for moral education integration in school curricula has garnered the interest of educators in the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This research is of utmost importance as it can offer evidence-based recommendations for EFL learners and teachers to enhance their language learning outcomes. By developing knowledge about the effectiveness of the use SILL in social strategy through the digital age, shedding light on both the potential benefits and potential pitfalls that learners and educators need to navigate in this dynamic landscape.

Language learning strategies play a crucial role in enhancing language skills and motivating learners. Wikipedia, (2020) stated that the primary objective of these strategies is to empower learners to become self-sufficient in managing their own learning. Madhumathi, Ramani, & Prema, (2014) emphasize the significance of understanding the specific language learning strategies utilized by students with below-average proficiency levels. They suggest that by identifying and analyzing the strategies employed by these students, educators can develop targeted interventions and instructional approaches to enhance their language learning outcomes. Furthermore, the researchers highlight the importance of providing explicit instruction and guidance on effective language learning strategies to students. They propose that incorporating strategy training programs into language instruction can empower students to become more autonomous and strategic learners, leading to improved language proficiency. Magfiroh, Susanto, & Setyorini, (2022) emphasized that employing social strategies in language learning can amplify students' communication and interpersonal skills, particularly within group discussions. In order to facilitate language learning, Kusumawardhani et.al (2017) stated language learning is essential for both teachers and students to effectively teach grammar, thereby enabling meaningful interpersonal communication between them. By employing communicative language teaching methods, the utilization of social learning strategies can assist students in purposefully achieving their speaking goals in English.

Different researchers such as Guganeswary Vellayan, et.al, (2021) and Bessai, (2018) have defined language learning strategies as cognitive approaches, behaviors, attitudes, or specific actions that facilitate language acquisition. According to Oxford (2011), there are six types of language acquisition approaches, namely memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensatory methods, metacognitive strategies, emotional strategies, and social strategies. These techniques can be utilized to improve academic performance, time management, and effort management in language learning. Direct strategies involve mental processing, such as practicing speaking and memorizing vocabulary, while indirect strategies support learning through activities like note-taking and summarizing. Indirect strategies are further categorized into metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Achieving success in language learning relies on the use of suitable strategies, matching learning styles, and fostering effective communication between learners and educators.

Social strategies provide increased interaction and more empathic understanding. According to Oxford, (1990), social language learning refers to the process of acquiring language through social interactions and communication with others. It involves engaging in conversations, participating in group activities, and interacting with native speakers or proficient language users. Social language learning recognizes the importance of real-life interactions and the social context in which language is used. It emphasizes the role of social factors, such as collaboration, cooperation, and cultural understanding, in language acquisition. By actively engaging in social interactions, learners can develop their language skills and cultural competence. To attain comprehension and accomplish the objective of acquiring knowledge, it is imperative to select an appropriate approach to learning. When it comes to learning English, employing a productive and streamlined learning strategy becomes crucial, especially for mastering oral communication abilities. These strategies

encompass cognitive, affective, and social aspects, among which social strategies play a more prominent role in refining speech proficiency (Sahalluddin et al., 2023). In addition, Sani, et al (2023) explained that social strategies in language learning require the use of speech functions, which are activities or performances undertaken by language users, including asking, directing, and responding. These speech functions are essential for conveying the intentions of both speakers and listeners and serve as a means to facilitate discussions and exchange of experiences. Halliday further identified four fundamental speech functions - offering, questioning, stating, and commanding - which are closely intertwined with the concept of social learning strategies. These functions align with the fundamental goals of any classroom discussion, highlighting their importance in fostering effective communication within a learning environment.

Fuente, et.al. (2015) have highlighted the crucial role of social interactions, collaboration, and learning in genuine settings. They argue that learning goes beyond an individual endeavours and takes place through active engagement in social communities, where knowledge and skills are shared, developed collaboratively, and put into practice within real-life contexts. (Slavin, 1990) also emphasizes the importance of social interactions and cooperative group activities in improving learning outcomes. Also, Machmut, Susanto, & Suwarti (2023) has proven the potential relationship between the effective implementation of social learning strategies and students' motivation to actively participate in English language classroom.

Vocational education is a form of education that focuses on mastering skills to work. Vasilopoulos, et.al. (2019) says empowering (ELL) English Language Learning in vocational schools is a crucial endeavor that equips students with the necessary language skills to thrive in their professional fields. By focusing on English language acquisition, vocational schools can offer students a competitive edge in an increasingly globalized workforce. Through effective teaching methodologies, vocational schools can create an immersive and engaging English language learning environment. This includes incorporating real-world contexts and industry-specific language into the curriculum, enabling students to develop the language skills needed for their future careers. Furthermore, Ardasheva & Tretter, (2013) empowering ELL involves promoting learner autonomy and self-directed learning. By encouraging students to take ownership of their learning process, vocational schools foster independence and initiative in language acquisition. Providing students with resources and opportunities for practice, such as language labs, interactive materials, and authentic communication tasks, can greatly enhance their language proficiency. Collaboration and communication play a vital role in empowering English language learning. Encouraging students to engage in group activities, discussions, and projects enables them to practice their English skills while also developing crucial interpersonal and teamwork abilities. Creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment where students feel comfortable taking risks and making mistakes is essential for their language development Gilakjani, (2016). To empower English language learning in vocational schools, it is also important to utilize technology effectively. Integrating digital tools, online resources, and language learning platforms can enhance engagement, provide additional practice opportunities, and facilitate independent study. Ultimately, empowering English language learning in vocational schools goes beyond language proficiency. It prepares students to effectively communicate, collaborate, and succeed in

their professional fields, opening up a world of opportunities and ensuring their competitiveness in the global job market.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, a qualitative descriptive approach was employed. According to Creswell, (2018), qualitative research is a method used to explore and comprehend the subjective meanings that individuals or groups attribute to a social human problem. The research process involved formulating questions and techniques, collecting data within the participants' environment, conducting inductive data analysis, deriving general themes from specific observations, and analyzing the data. The structure of the final report varied. This indicates that the writer's depiction of the facts was facilitated by the utilization of qualitative methods. The findings of the analysis provided a description of the investigation, which involved observing and evaluating the responses obtained through a questionnaire administered to the individuals or group under examination.

For data analysis, a qualitative examination of the results obtained from a Google form was conducted, and the percentage results were taken into consideration. The selection of the research topic was purposeful and aligned with the requirements for obtaining the necessary data. A total of 35 students in the second grade of a vocational high school participated in the study. To investigate language learning strategies, a questionnaire based on the Self-Inventory Language Learning (SILL) proposed by Rebeca Oxford was utilized. The questionnaire comprised nine Likert-type statements. The results obtained from the questionnaire were qualitatively analyzed and described.

This research targeted vocational students in SMK N 6 Semarang at the Secondary Education level. The students were randomly selected and invited to participate in the research by completing a questionnaire administered through Google.docs. The focus of the research was on the social learning strategy in English as a foreign language within the context of vocational studies.

A total of 35 students studying English as a foreign language at Vocational Studies from SMK N 6 Semarang participated in the survey study. Among the participants, 88% were female students, suggesting a preference for Vocational Studies among female students. The majority of the students reported being between the ages of fifteen and sixteen, indicating that they were studying at the Secondary Vocational Studies level. It should be noted that due to the nature of lifelong learning, students engage in internships while attending Vocational Schools.

To gather data on language learning strategies, we utilized the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) developed by Rebecca Oxford and published in 1990. The administration of these tests was conducted through Google Docs, enabling us to receive prompt responses from participants who were physically distant. However, certain data analyses, such as comparisons based on sex or age, were excluded from our analysis.

Indirect Strategies: Social

1. If I do not understand something in English, I ask my teacher to slow down and say it again
2. I ask my English teacher to correct me when I share the result of discussion (presenting something)

3. In a group discussion, I practice English with my friends or my teachers
4. I ask for help to English teacher
5. I ask questions in English
6. I try to learn the culture of English
7. I pay attention to thoughts or feelings in language interaction
8. In a group discussion I ask others to correct my pronunciation
9. In a group discussion, I mix Indonesian words and English words if I do not know the English words

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To accomplish our objective, we provided our students with a series of inquiries that included several options to choose from. Additionally, we collected relevant information about each individual, such as their name, age, length of time studying English, and their motivation. We utilized the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), developed by Rebecca Oxford in 1990, to gather data on language learning approaches. To facilitate efficient communication with participants who were geographically dispersed, we administered these assessments through Google Docs, enabling us to promptly receive responses. Out of the total of 40 students, 35 of them completed the questionnaire.

1. Background Characteristic

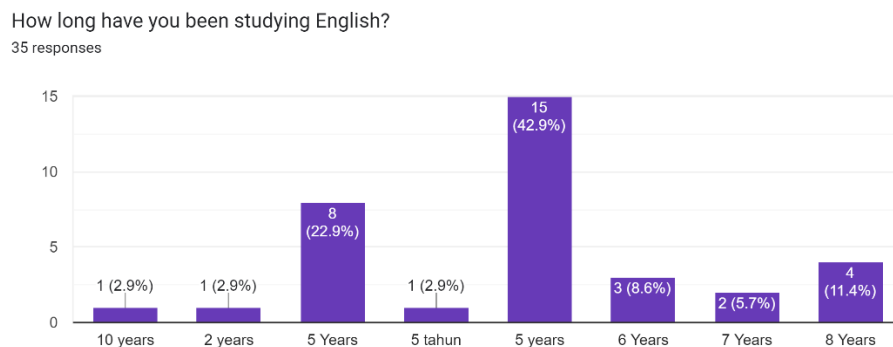


Chart 1. Background Characteristic 1

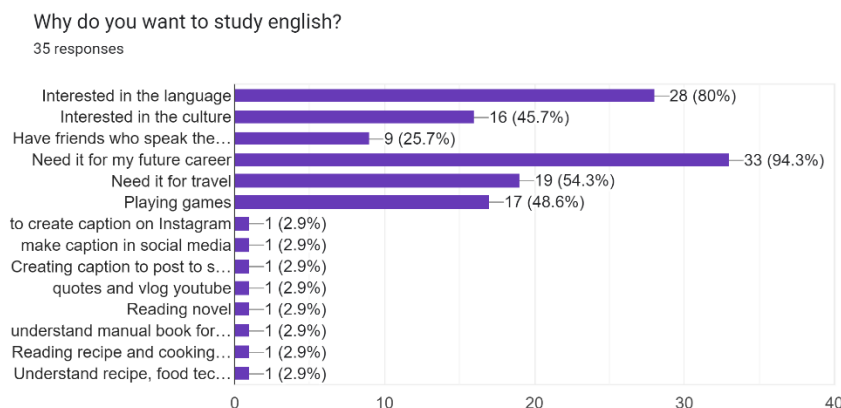


Chart 2. Background Characteristic 2

The initial section of the background questionnaire (referred to as Questions 1 and Questions 2) was designed to gather personal information from the students, including age, gender, and years of English study. The responses revealed that eleventh graders consisted of thirty-one female students and four male students, all aged between sixteen and seven teen. Additionally, it was found that all the students in this class had been studying English for approximately five years prior to attending senior high school.

There were notable similarities among the students when it came to their reasons for studying English at the vocational high school. A significant majority of 94% stated that they had vocational goals and believed that English was necessary for their future careers. The second most common reason, mentioned by 80% of the students, was their genuine interest in the language. Additionally, 54% of the students expressed their need to learn English for traveling purposes. A smaller percentage of students mentioned their interest in the culture or the need to socialize in English. Consequently, the majority of students in the class appeared to have vocational goals. Now, we will proceed to present the data collected from the SILL.

2. Results Of Data Collection

Subsequently, we will provide a comprehensive examination of the SILL questionnaire and present the responses provided by our survey participants.

If I do not understand something in English, I ask my teacher to slow down and say it again.

35 responses

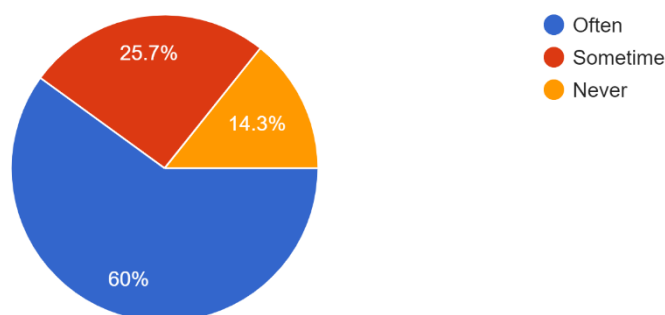


Chart 3. Percentage of social strategy 1

A majority of 60% of students admit that they frequently encounter difficulties in understanding certain English words, leading them to request their teacher to slow down and repeat the word. Around 26% of students sometimes employ this strategy, while 14% never utilize it. Social learning strategy of seeking clarification can significantly enhance their outcomes in the second language. By connecting vocabulary instruction to students' existing knowledge and building a foundation of background knowledge, learners can better recognize unfamiliar words encountered during their lexical learning activities. Thus, employing this strategy effectively aids in improving their overall language skills.

I ask my English teacher to correct me when I share the result of the discussion

35 responses

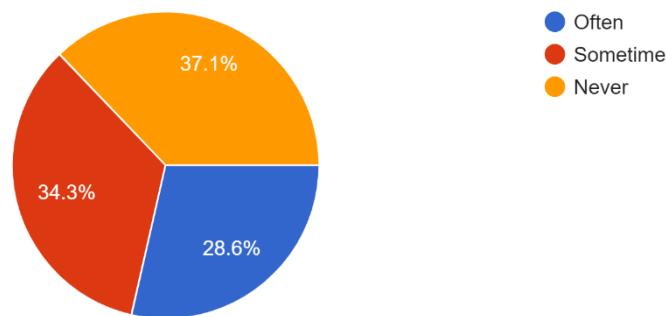


Chart 4. Percentage of social strategy 2

The majority of the students (37% never and 34% sometimes) indicate that they employ this strategy to a varying degree. Only 29% of the participants state that they frequently seek correction from their English teacher when sharing the outcomes of a discussion. The connection between the frequency of this learning strategy and group discussion activities is apparent. Nevertheless, despite substantial efforts by editors, there remains a prevalence of grammar-focused activities and mechanical practice, suggesting the need for a more comprehensive approach to language learning.

In a group discussion, I practice English with my friends or my teachers

35 responses

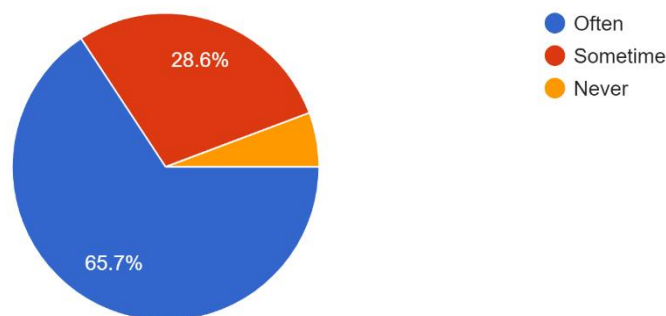


Chart 5. Percentage of social strategy 3

The students highly favor this strategy, with a significant majority of 66% stating that they frequently practiced it. Furthermore, an additional 29% confess to occasionally employing this strategy. Only a small minority of 5% never take advantage of this particular language learning strategy. This finding indicates a strong preference among students for integrating cultural awareness into their language learning process. However, it is concerning that a small minority of 5% never take advantage of this strategy, suggesting a need to address their lack of interest or awareness in exploring the cultural aspects of the English language.

I ask for help to English teacher

35 responses

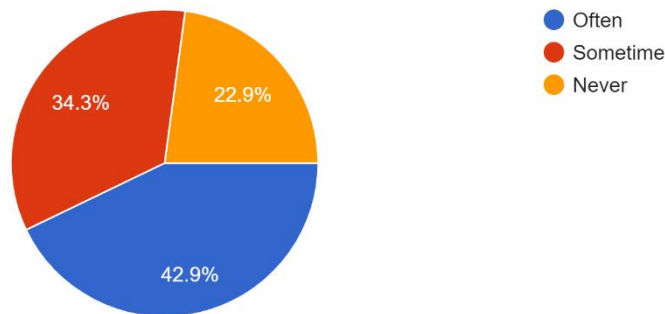


Chart 6. Percentage of social strategy 4

A majority of the students, with 43% often and 34% sometimes, frequently seek assistance from their English teacher when encountering unfamiliar words during group discussions. The third most common response is never, accounting for 23% of the participants. Notably, language activities that prompt students to mentally associate semantic relationships between English words or concepts can significantly enhance their social language learning outcomes. Therefore, encouraging the use of such activities in language learning environments can further support students in overcoming difficulties in understanding unfamiliar words.

I ask questions in English

35 responses

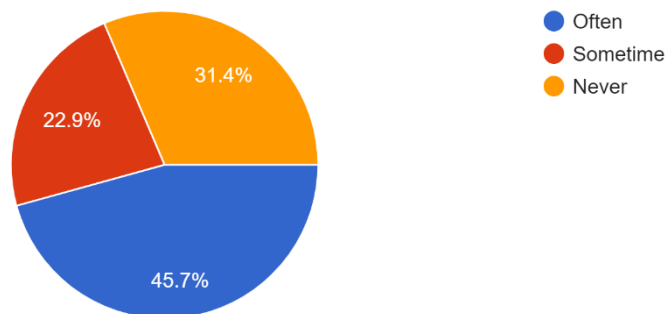


Chart 7. Percentage of social strategy 5

English students in Vocational Studies frequently employ this strategy. A significant portion of them, 46% and 23% respectively, often or sometimes ask questions in English to their teacher during learning activities. Conversely, 31% of students never ask their teacher for clarification. Interestingly, students with a strong vocabulary are more likely to ask questions in English, suggesting that language proficiency plays a role in their confidence to seek clarification and engage in active communication. This finding emphasizes the importance of vocabulary development in supporting students' language learning and their ability to actively participate in discussions.

I try to learn about the culture of English

35 responses

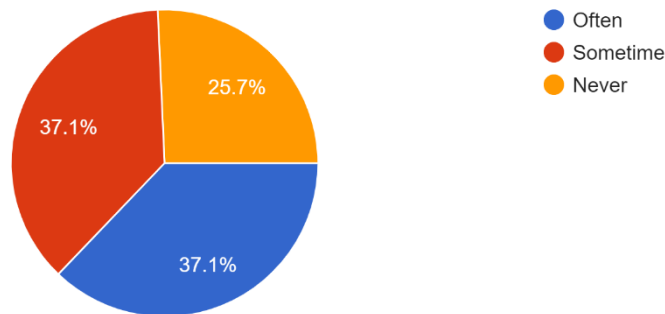


Chart 8. Percentage of social strategy 6

A significant majority of the students (37% sometimes and 37% often) reveal that they utilize this strategy to some extent. Interestingly, only 26% of the participants admit that they never make an effort to learn about the culture of English. This finding suggests that cultural understanding is an integral aspect of language learning and that a substantial number of students recognize its significance.

I pay attention to thoughts or feelings in language interaction

35 responses

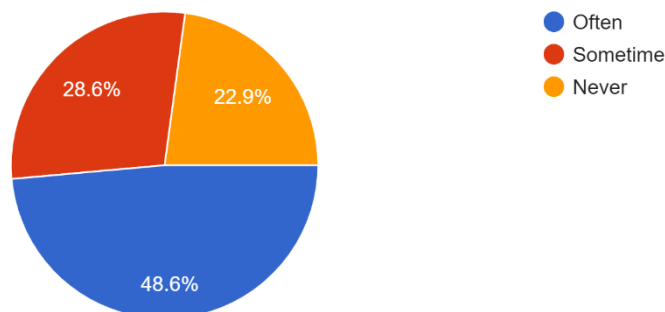


Chart 9. Percentage of social strategy 7

Nearly half of the students (49%) acknowledge that they frequently prioritize thoughts or feelings in language interaction during group discussions. Conversely, 29% of the participants indicate that they occasionally employ this strategy when learning English, whereas 23% never utilize it. This strategy is associated with emotional learning within the classroom environment. It is important to note that students with diverse learning styles will respond to this strategy in their unique manner. Therefore, teachers should consider incorporating emotional elements into language learning activities to cater to the individual needs and preferences of students.

In a group discussion I ask others to correct my pronunciation

35 responses

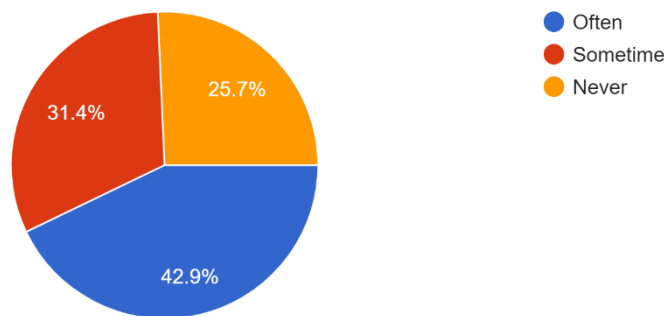


Chart 10. Percentage of social strategy 8

During a group discussion, almost half of students (43%) frequently seek individual correction of their pronunciation from others. Additionally, 31% of students sometimes request such assistance, while the remaining 26% never ask for pronunciation corrections. It is important to note that while correct pronunciation is beneficial, not all students prioritize it as long as the overall goals of communication are achieved and the message is understood. This finding highlights the importance of focusing on effective communication rather than solely on pronunciation accuracy.

In a group discussion, I mix Indonesian words and English words if I don't know the English words

35 responses

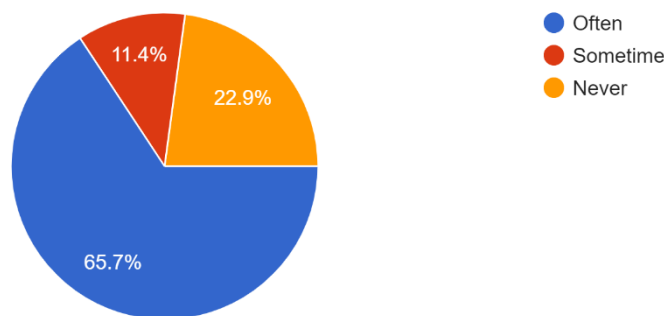


Chart 11. Percentage of social strategy 9

More than 60% of the students openly acknowledge that they frequently integrate Indonesian words with English words during group discussions to convey their intended meaning when they are unfamiliar with the English equivalents. Conversely, 23% of the students admit that they never utilize this mixed language strategy. This mixed language strategy is highly regarded among the survey respondents as one of the most effective approaches. The findings suggest that allowing students to use their native language to support their English language learning can facilitate better comprehension and expression of ideas. Therefore, educators should acknowledge and leverage students' existing language skills to enhance their English language development.

While group discussions within vocational education are generally appealing and motivating for students to learn, they also prove to be beneficial in enabling students to effectively communicate their ideas. The findings from the charts collectively demonstrate the diverse strategies employed by students during group discussions, including seeking clarification, connecting language learning to culture, focusing on thoughts and feelings, and utilizing mixed language strategies. These strategies contribute to students' language development and highlight the importance of creating an interactive and supportive learning environment that encourages active participation and meaningful communication.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The findings of this research have important pedagogical implications. It is crucial for students to be aware of and utilize social language learning strategies in their language learning process. Teachers should communicate this message effectively to their students. The study reveals that some students do not actively employ these strategies, and some may not even be aware of their existence, such as engaging in group discussions, cooperating, empathizing, and effectively communicating in English. Therefore, teachers should reflect on these findings and assist their students in developing and increasing awareness of the benefits of employing social strategies when learning English as a foreign language.

Considering the widespread use of the Internet among students for communication, socializing, learning, work, and entertainment, future research in English language teaching (ELT) could explore English learning strategies specifically related to online platforms. For instance, investigating strategies for acquiring new vocabulary, engaging in conversations with native speakers, reading for pleasure on the Internet, and other related areas could provide valuable insights for effective language learning in the digital age.

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