

# A CASE STUDY OF AN ESL STUDENT LEARNING ENGLISH IN AN ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRY

*by* T Wahyu

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**Submission date:** 03-Nov-2022 10:56AM (UTC+0700)

**Submission ID:** 1943100852

**File name:** a\_case\_study\_of\_esl.pdf (136.83K)

**Word count:** 3642

**Character count:** 18903

## A CASE STUDY OF AN ESL STUDENT LEARNING ENGLISH IN AN ENGLISH SPEAKING COUNTRY

Wahyu Taufiq

The Lecture at the Department of Information Technology and Computer in Education  
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo  
Jl. Mojopahit 666b, Sidoarjo  
Email: [taufiq@umsida.ac.id](mailto:taufiq@umsida.ac.id)

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### Abstract

Different students who learn English as the second language has various problems and strategies to overcome. A case study on an international student who learns English as a second language in an English speaking country raised some problems he had and offered some strategies he used during the process of learning. The progress of learning from the first time coming and studying at a college in Australia was mainly the core data collected on this study. The data comes from his formal academic learning experience and also from informal situation that he met at his everyday life. This study applied qualitative research method and use interview and recording as the instruments. The data were analyzed through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results of the study show that the learner experiences a range of English learning problems which happened after his coming to Australia and some strategies he used to overcome.

**Keywords:** learning problems, Strategies, English as Second Language

## INTRODUCTION

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As an international language, English is used as a medium of interaction and communication among people from different parts of the world. It becomes the most popular language in the world. It is not an easy language to learn, though. It requires understanding and serious willingness to learn, since there are many reasons why people learn this language. One of them is knowing the fact that it is one of the most important lingua francas in today's globalized world.

For some English Second Language (ESL) students from countries like Indonesia, Vietnam or some other Asian countries which do not use English as the first language, getting information on how English is learnt is very important. In some cases, some techniques, methods or simply so called as strategies might be different to the others, while it is also possible that some of those ways might be appropriate or suitable to be applied among some learners.

There is no substantial distinction between acquisition and learning. As mentioned by Arifuddin (2010) both acquisition and learning have no significant different since they can be used interchangeably. The term learning English or the second language acquisition in general is about learning a second language by individuals and groups and processing of learning that language (Troike, 2006).

Additionally, Stefánsson (2013) mentions that the second language acquisition or learning is a study about how students get the second language so called L2 additionally after their first language so called L1 which processes in a way of learning any language after L1 whether it is the second, third, or fourth language which then is called as the target language (TL).

This research is a report on a case study of an international student who learns English as a second language in an English speaking country on the problems he had and the strategies he used during the process of learning. At the moment, he took an English course at a college in Wollongong, Australia. He is a thirty-year old student, originally comes from Indonesia. His first language is Bahasa Indonesia or Indonesian language. He has an undergraduate degree certificate majoring in Information Technology from one of universities in Indonesia. He is a full time staff in the Minister of Education of Indonesia. At the moment of this research, he was joining an English course in an Australian college before pursuing his Master degree.

The background of the learner is from in a small village with educational facilities that were not as good as those in urban areas. Instead of local dialect, Bahasa Indonesia was mainly used at schools. After completing the schools, his three brothers and three sisters moved to other towns to work as entrepreneurs, while the parents remind in the village. The father is working as a farmer and the mother is a merchant. He is the only member of family who continue the education until postgraduate level, particularly in Australia.

He started learning English subject when he was at Junior High school, at age of 14. The English was given as a compulsory subject. However, he considered that the English subject he got was not really helpful for him to speak and write well. What he learnt at the moment was merely a test-oriented English course. Moving to study at a university level, English was rarely used and even needed. Also, he found lack of partner to communicate in English, even later at his workplace.

A few months before coming to Australia, he decided to join some English courses and English conversation club in Indonesia, in order to prepare himself studying there at University of Wollongong. When the research was conducted, he

was taking an English course at UOW College since January 2012. Based on English requirement test, he had to sit at college for about 36 weeks to learn English, before continuing to study at postgraduate level at University of Wollongong.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Since the purpose of this research is to collect the information on the problems and the strategies during the ESL student learns English as the second language, the writer use qualitative method to get the description information in the form of words or pictures rather than number about the phenomena.

The information was collected via interview which is recorded several times. Then, this information was studied and correlated with the existing theory in order to get valid data. Intentionally, the report can be acknowledged as information on how an ESL speaker has processed to gain better English and also as data for further study. The focus of this report was on the speaker's achievement and weakness, particularly in spoken English as second language (ESL), strategies to overcome the weaknesses from the speaker's perspective and completed with some suggestions from literatures related to his conditions in order to acquire English as a second language successfully.

Mostly, the interview was conducted using English which is occasionally switched to Bahasa Indonesia. The consideration to use the Bahasa Indonesia is mainly from the fact that the first language of both the learner and the writer is this language. It can be used to deliver some important messages which are too difficult and complicated to be explained in English. Purposefully, comprehensive information can be collected in order to get valid data.

In this study, the data could be obtained from the result of the interview and recording. There are three procedures to analyze the data:

### **1. Data Reduction**

Data reduction is the data processing by selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data from field notes or transcriptions. The writer reduced and organized the data that was obtained from his notes and

transcriptions by discarding the irrelevant information. The relevant data would be classified related to the purpose of this study.

## 2. Data Display

Data display is drawing conclusions from the information which is organized and compressed assembly. The writer drew conclusions on how the student learns the English as the second language.

## 3. Conclusion Drawing

Conclusions are verified which may be as brief with a short excursion, lengthy argumentation, or extensive efforts to replicate a finding in data set. The writer developed initial conclusions which is then examined through references to get credible information.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The progress the student's learning from the first time coming to Australia studying at college was mainly the core data collected on this study. The data comes from his formal academic learning experience and also from informal situation that he met at his everyday life. Based on the interview, there were several problems and achievements in spoken English gained by the learner. Some of them are explained as follows.

The learner admitted that his weakness was mainly on his poor ability on the grammar, pronunciation and word choices. He needs more time to practice the spoken language in order to avoid the problems. This condition is in line with Afisa & Yolanda (2015) stating that the ESL learners find difficult to speak in English since they are lack the regularity to practice the language.

When interview was conducted using English, the student mentioned several mistakes in grammar even he said the words carefully. In addition, it was found that he had some problems in pronunciation and word choice. He mentioned that since the native speakers speak very fast and their mouth tend to not show the words they said. Some words like "catch" were not clearly pronounced. After being clarified in the interview, the word "catch" /kætʃ/ was pronounced several times differently which sound like "just" /dʒʌst/ or "guess" /gest/.

He also missed some words that he did not know. He then asked the interviewer to help him to translate the word in Bahasa Indonesia to English. In some occasion, he needed to speak in Bahasa Indonesia in order to explain a complicated thought.

Related to his experience, he remembers that the first time having a short dialog with a native speaker was when he was shopping at a supermarket. The shopkeeper asked a common greeting like “how are you?” or “how are you doing?” At that moment he just kept silent, and pretended to not hear what the person said. He considered that it was not common to his culture to be asked such a question particularly by a stranger.

Sometimes, he also finds himself to be inferior, when he had to speak or even only to be surrounded by other speakers from other countries. At this situation, he might lose his confidence in English and be a bit frustrated since he cannot catch the message. It was because they spoke not clearly, at least based on his perspective. He expected that the speakers speak clearly with clear sound and utterance, so at least he can guess what he was saying. The same problem actually has been found by Paakki (2003) who studies on the ESL learner in Japan and Finland. It was found that since the accent is different among the speakers, the process of transferring information is not complete.

While understanding that the speaker’s weaknesses mentioned above do not occur most of the time, the learner had some strategies to overcome them or at least to lessen the frequency. According to the student’s statement, his English develop progressively since he was moving to Australia, studying and living in English speaking country. Here, studying at the college and reading books were still ideal strategies in order to develop and improve his grammar and vocabularies. Then, practising to communicate with peers in the class or people on the bus was his next strategy in order to able to speak fluently without fear.

Waiting and listening to someone with whom he speaks might be a good strategy. While waiting to his peer to finish talking, he took time to reply back. He actually took the time to think what he was going to say, by preparing words and also the grammar while waiting for his opponent finish saying his idea.

The other strategy was also acknowledged from some sentences that he revised several times with other simpler utterances. He lost or did not know the word he was looking for, so he decided to change the sentence using some words that he mastered most. Here, the learner understands the general works of English, influenced by his first language to the second language acquisition had by the second language speaker (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1999), by changing complicated words containing grammar setting that he does not understand to a simpler sentence that he masters.

These strategies so far, successfully helped him to learn the language. One of the best achievements recently was having the best score at doing task-based presentation in front of the class. Also, the confident risen along with his effort to learn at the college.

In informal situation, the learner also had strategies in order to overcome some of his weaknesses in ESL process. Related to being silent after greeting with the shopkeeper for example, he went back to supermarket one week later. This was not about meeting and speaking to the same lady, but to ensure that he would answer confidently who ever greet him, and even prepare to ask the greeting back, "How about you?" and most importantly with confident.

Further, it could be acknowledged some strategies being used by the learner who learns English as his second language. First, it is motivation as one of some factors that influence the successfulness of second language learning (Lightbown and Spada,1999). The motivation here derived from himself as students and also from his teachers, supporting friends, as well as institution that facilitate the process of learning. The motivation here means the spirit to learn and practice more, which is supported with suitable environment, supporting teacher as well as available facilities. Even it is slightly vague to relate motivation with the successfulness of second language learning, both basically influence each other. Theoretically, this kind of intension to learn the second language can be motivated by the incentive, the need, or the desire that the learners feels to learn the language (Dulay, et al. 1982).The learner get motivated when he had the goal to be achieved, and the achievement motivated him to learn.

In order to support the motivation itself, the learner has made investment as part of his process in learning second language (Pierce, 1995). The investment in second language which is made the learner invests in the changing of the social world with the understanding that he will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of his cultural capital. He will expect or hope to have a good return on that investment as a return that will give him access to more unattainable resources of the target language.

Based on the data collection, the learner spent approximately eight hours learning English at college. This included studying in class which was conducted three days in-a-class meetings conducted every week, reading English books that he performed independently, and having discussion with the classmates. Additionally, he spent several hours outside the college. This included spending time to read and listen to some literatures in library and meeting English speaking people around that he could find on the bus or supermarket.

In term of investment, the learner had to pay the fee for college, as well as living cost while he was in Australia. Spending for about 36 months might need a lot of money to pay the cost. In the future, he would need to pay more until his graduation. This is part of his investments in order to learn the language.

At that moment, his skill in using English was not able to be defined as the best. However, he still had six month remarkable improvement from knowing a little bit about English to having a progressive acquisition in English language, from being afraid of responding native speaker's greeting to being confident making formal presentation. More importantly, the person being studied here was so excited when he had to meet people from Australia or other countries to practice communicating in English. Therefore, the progress here needed to be acknowledged and shared as an important reference for other ESL learners and teachers as well as for further study.

After coming back to his country, he would like to retain his English by willing to study hard, and joining with a community who have the same interest in reading and discussing English literatures. The same kind of investment will be demonstrated in the language achievement.



Understanding the social identity of the target language is also the strategies being applied by the learner. The theory of social identity in second language acquisition here is integrating the language learner and the target language learning context (Peirce, 1995). This theory promotes the important role of the power relations in social interaction between learner and target language speakers.

However, there is one of the problems of acquisition another language called anomie (Beardsmore, 1982). It is a condition where someone feels personal disorientation, anxiety and social isolation. At the moment, to overcome the anomie, the learner spends most of his time to meet his friends from various countries to communicate in English. This is the condition that he will never find at his home country. The needs to find people to make group of bilingual speakers is now becoming common to answer the need to enhance the language (Chin and Wigglesworth, 2007).

## **CONCLUSION**

The second language acquisition is a long and complex journey. There is no quick and easy method which is guaranteed to provide success. Therefore, various strategies in learning ESL should be applied in order to find the most suitable one related to the learner's needs.

There are many problems during learning English as the second language which can be minimalized using some strategies as suggested. Since the learner was in an English speaking country, the supporting environment might be the first benefit he feels to most problems occurred which is then followed with the chance to practice the language. Feeling confidence and motivated are also important to support the process. The frequency of practicing supported with the investment of money and time to learn the language become the last strategies to make. The more the student practice the language, the better English he may achieve.

The power of social identity and investment of the language are merely like a chance for the learners to gain more confidence and motivation in their target language. It is common to find the language learner feel inferior among native speakers or people whose language ability is a lot better than him. For example, a second language learner can be fluent among his friends in communication in the

target language. However, he might demonstrate a different level of confidence when he has to speak with one or more native speakers who communicate with the language faster and more fluently and sometime using words and accent that is totally new.

### **SUGGESTION**

It is important to note that the learner need the chance to interact with native or native-like speaker. Even it has to be direct face to face communication or by using online technology with synchronous way such as online chatting with or without audio visual, or with asynchronous way such as simple indirect meeting through email, social sites or other messaging facilities. These are important tools to practice using the language without too much cost and easy to do.

For the teacher, when he found an unmotivated looking student, he should bear in mind that the student can be helped with social and investment perspectives. Sometimes, some students want to improve their second language abilities, they seem to be unmotivated because they do not have any successful experience in learning the language.

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