

## LEARNING AND TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES PERFORMED BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN DOING TEST OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (TEP): A CASE STUDY

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### Abstrak

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui strategi belajar dan strategi tes yang digunakan oleh mahasiswa yang telah lulus TEP. Penelitian ini juga bertujuan untuk memberikan contoh strategi yang bisa digunakan oleh mahasiswa lain, terutama mahasiswa yang belum lulus TEP, untuk membantu mereka baik dalam mengembangkan ilmu bahasa Inggris ataupun membantu lulus TEP. Data dalam penelitian ini dikumpulkan menggunakan interview secara mendalam dan dianalisis menggunakan model analisis kualitatif. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa semua subjek menggunakan bermacam-macam strategi belajar untuk membantu meningkatkan ilmu bahasa Inggris mereka dan menggunakan bermacam-macam strategi tes untuk membantu mereka lulus TEP. Untuk penelitian lebih lanjut tentang masalah ini, peneliti mensarankan untuk meneliti tentang hubungan antara strategi belajar, strategi tes, dan gaya belajar mahasiswa, dan apakah itu semua mempengaruhi pencapaian mahasiswa dalam konteks tes kemampuan bahasa Inggris.

**Kata Kunci:** Strategi Belajar, Strategi Tes, Tes Kemampuan Bahasa Inggris.

### Abstract

This study aims to discover learning strategies as well as test-taking strategies used by students who have successfully passed the Test of English Proficiency (TEP). The study intends to give an example of a strategy that the other students, especially those who have not passed TEP yet, can imitate in order to aid them in both developing their English skills as well as passing TEP. The data were collected through an in-depth interview and analyzed by using the qualitative analysis model. The result revealed that the participants utilized various learning strategies to help to improve their English abilities and various test-taking strategies to assist them in passing TEP. For further findings, related to the issues, the researcher suggested to investigating the connection between learning strategies, test-taking strategies, and students' learning style and whether they affect students' achievement in the context of the test of English Proficiency.

**Keywords:** Learning Strategies, Test-taking Strategies, Test of English Proficiency.

### INTRODUCTION

As an international language, many people study English both as a second language and a foreign language for various purposes. There are numerous uses for English as an international language, such as in economy, culture, social, tourism, and education. When it comes to English, proficiency is a topic that many people will talk. According to ACTFL (2012), in terms of education, proficiency is the ability of students to use the four Basic English skills, which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing, in an appropriate manner. In the field of education, students' proficiency in English will usually be tested by a test designed to assess students' English proficiency, known as the Test of English Proficiency.

Because of the increasing importance of English, the demand for the students in achieving higher proficiency

in English has also increased. This mainly stems from the fact that English language proficiency is utilized as a scale to measure the degree of an individual's relation in the fields of economy, business, politics, society, and education (Nallaya, 2012). The role of English in Indonesia has caused various institutions to apply a policy where English proficiency test is used as a part of the graduation requirement. This shows the importance of assessment in English proficiency because graduates with a higher standard of English proficiency are demanded to respond to the global challenge.

One of the institutions that have applied this policy is States University of Surabaya or UNESA, which used a test of English proficiency known as TEP to assess the level of English proficiency of the students. The section of TEP is divided into three sections; listening section, structure or grammar section, and reading section.

According to the university's guide book, the score that the students need to achieve to pass TEP is 525 for those in English major and 450 for those who do not come from the English major.

The English major students learn English language skills and components throughout the semesters, at the same time students who attend other majors also receive English course for one semester in part to prepare them for TEP. Therefore, the students of all majors should have a good preparation to achieve the minimum score to pass TEP. However, according to the researcher's observation, there are still many students, both from English major and non-English major, who still find difficulty in achieving the minimum score for passing TEP.

It is also apparent that even for some students who have passed the test, it takes some of them multiple tries before they finally can achieve the required score to pass TEP. A situation like this can become a hindrance for some students especially for those who have completed their thesis and passed the thesis examination only to be unable to graduate because they have not gained the TEP passing certificate yet.

The current condition has caused the researcher to assume that the students' difficulty in passing the test might be caused by their lack of test-taking strategy or ineffective learning strategy. As stated by Anderson (1991), the result of the students' test is mostly influenced by the strategy that they choose during the test which might become the reason why many students still failed to pass the proficiency test despite trying more than five times or more. This statement is supported by Allan (1992) and Amer (1993) who both state that the students' performance in test and their skills in test-taking or the strategy they choose during the test have a significant relationship that affects one another. Aside from test-taking strategy, another major factor that affects students' performance is learning strategies as stated by Rubin (1981) who said that learning strategies play an important role in the development of students second or foreign language as it helps them develop language competence in various ways.

Interestingly, in the case of TEP in UNESA, there are a few cases where some exceptional students manage to pass the TEP and get the passing certificate in only one up to three tries. This phenomenon has led the researcher to believe that those exceptional students could pass the TEP because of their learning strategy and test-taking strategies. Based on the explanation above, it can be easily seen why test-taking and learning strategy might play a significant role in determining whether a student can pass the English proficiency test that has become part of graduation's requirement in university level.

In the past, several researchers had conducted research on the topic of test-taking strategies, learning strategies, and how it can affect EFL students in various ways. Zhang, Liu, Zhao, and Xie (2011) conducted a study with the result that shows students have a medium use of test-taking strategies. Furthermore, the result also shows the most used strategies are compensation strategies, followed by affective, metacognitive, social, cognitive, and memory strategies. The result of the study also indicates that the performance of students on the test is significantly correlated with the test-taking strategies, particularly compensation and social strategies. Lastly, the result also reveals that a significant difference emerged in the use of memory strategies among students in different study years.

Lai (2009) conducted a study about learning strategy that shows that the levels of students' proficiency do affect the choice of strategy that they use. The result is proven by how the students with higher proficiency level will prefer to use cognitive and metacognitive strategy while students with lower proficiency level use memory and social strategy rather than cognitive or metacognitive strategy. Moreover, the result of the study also shows that most students with higher proficiency level frequently use learning strategies such as arranging and planning their learning, using analytical and reasoning skills, and practicing their pronunciation and speaking.

Yunyun, Meyling, Laksana, and Abednego (2018) conducted a research which ended with the result reveals that majority of the students encounter a problem during the reading section in English proficiency test, especially in the questions that demand them to review the overall reading text. To solve this, the researchers have suggested the use of cognitive strategy to overcome the problem, especially in the use top-down reading strategies in order to anticipate the goal of the author, preview the text, think about what one already knows about the topic, and skim for main points.

The result of the three studies above shows how learning strategies and test-taking strategies can affect the result of the test of English Proficiency. Furthermore, the result of the studies shows that strategies matter in determining the result of the test. However, the three researches studies were only researching the strategies used by students in general and not in detail. It results in a lack of detailed explanation regarding why certain students use particular strategies and how they use it. Furthermore, none of the research studies focused on students who have passed the test only in a few attempts.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the test-taking and learning strategies of the students who have passed the English proficiency test used. From the aims

of the study, the researcher formulated two broad research questions as follows:

1. How are the learning strategies performed by some university students who have passed TEP?
2. How are the test-taking strategies performed by some university students who have passed TEP?

**Strategies**

*Learning Strategies*

Oxford (1990) and Rubin (1981) have defined learning strategy as an action that is taken by learners in order to make language learning become faster, more enjoyable, more self-direct, and more transferable in various situations. In other words, learning strategy is the process in which the learners use various techniques to comprehend and perform a second or foreign language and improve their effectiveness in using that language in many aspects.

During the early years of language education, the language learning strategies were clarified into some classifications that were derived from two theories that cause the born of the classification system. Those two theories were cognitive learning theory and social cognitive models. While there are indeed many classification systems, the one proposed by Oxford in 1990 was considered to be the most comprehensive one because it was subsumed strategies that had appeared in literature and various studies from the previous years into Oxford’s taxonomy. Oxford (1990) classifies the learning strategy into two categories; direct strategies and indirect strategies. There are three groups of strategies that belong to each category. The categories and groups can be seen on the table below:

<b>Direct Strategy</b>	<b>Indirect Strategy</b>
<u>Memory Strategy:</u> A Strategy that helps students in storing and retrieving information from their mind (e.g., applying images and sounds, creating mental linkages)	<u>Metacognitive Strategy:</u> A Strategy that helps students in controlling their own cognition (e.g., coordinating the planning, organizing, and evaluation of the learning process)
<u>Cognitive Strategy:</u> A Strategy that is used by students in order to comprehend and produce the target language better (e.g., summarizing, analyzing, reasoning)	<u>Affective Strategy:</u> A Strategy that is used by students in order to control or adjust their emotions, motivations, and attitudes (e.g., taking emotional temperature, self-encouragement)
<u>Compensatory Strategy:</u> A Strategy that students	<u>Social Strategy:</u> A Strategy that involves

<i>use for overcoming the lack of sufficient knowledge regarding the target language (e.g., guessing meanings from context, using synonyms to convey meaning)</i>	<i>interacting with others through the use of target language be it in spoken form or written form (e.g., asking questions, cooperating with native speakers, becoming culturally aware)</i>
<i>Adapted from Oxford (1990)</i>	

*Test-Taking Strategies*

Test-taking strategy, on the other hand, can be defined as strategies that test-takers applied during the process of the test in order to aid them in completing the test (Cohen, 2006). Test-taking strategy is essential for every student not only because the strategy will help them in maximizing the result of the test but also to help them overcoming difficulty that might be caused by the students’ lack of knowledge from the test material.

There are many examples of test-taking strategies from simple strategy such as solving easy questions first to a more complex strategy like underlying keywords or concepts in questions (Dodeen, 2015). However, in the context of a test of English proficiency, the strategies that were focused were listening, structure, and reading strategies.

Heffernan (2006) describes that during the test of English proficiency, the two strategies that will aid the students the most are keyword and contextualize strategy; especially for listening and reading section. For example, in the listening section the students will encounter a question such as this,

*(man): Would you mind answering my phone for me while I am away from my desk?*

*(woman): Sure. I have to stay here and wait for a delivery anyway.*

*Question: What does the man want the woman to do? (Broukal, 1995)*

According to Heffernan (2006), listening intently for keywords and contextual clues might help the students that the words answering my phone are the most important in this conversation. They both set the tone for the context of the conversation and are the keywords in what the first speaker says.

Phillips (2001) and Pamela (2013) had offered several strategies that will help the students during the listening, structure, and reading section in their respective book, “Longman Complete Course for TOEFL Test” and “Barron’s TOEFL iBT”. Among those strategies are:

Listening section strategies:

- Focusing on the last line of the speaker

- Choosing answer with synonym
- Avoiding similar sounds
- Reading the questions beforehand
- Anticipating the topic

Structure section strategies:

- Making sure that the sentence actually has subject and verb
- Being careful of the object of preposition
- Ensuring that the subject agrees with verb
- Understanding what the sentence tries to express

Reading strategies section:

- Do not spend too much time on reading the passage
- Determining the content and context of the passage through the heading or title
- Scanning and skimming
- Determining meaning from words parts
- Recognizing the organization of ideas

## **METHOD**

Based on the aim and the research questions, this study required to investigate the chosen subjects in-depth in order to gain the insight of what were the learning strategies that the subjects used and if the subjects have incorporated their chosen strategy into their daily life and made it into a habit. Furthermore, since this study aimed to investigate individuals who possessed unique characteristics compared to their peers, therefore, this study can be categorized as a case study. Based on the conditions above, this research is designed to be a qualitative case study through interview data collection technique.

The subjects of this research were five students who attend State University of Surabaya that came from different majors. The reason why these students were chosen because not only they manage to pass the proficiency test only in one or two tries, but also that they earned a high score once they passed the test. The setting of this research was in State University of Surabaya or UNESA.

The instrument that was used in this study was recorder while the technique that was used to collect the data for this research only involved interviewing the participants in-depth.

After the data were collected, it was analyzed by using the qualitative analysis model that Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen (2010) suggested in their book. The model involves three stages which are:

1. Organizing and familiarizing, after the data were collected, the first step that the researcher do was to familiarize and immerse with the data by transcribing the result of the interview and the observation into written form like sentences, phrases, and words, and the result of the transcription carefully. Afterwards, the data were organized through a folder in the computer.

2. Coding and reducing, once the researcher has already become familiar with the data and has organized the data in a way that makes it easy for the researcher to keep track on them, the second step that the researcher do was to code the data. The data were divided into two codebooks; learning strategies and test strategies. Each codebook was further divided into several categories. The first codebook, learning strategies, was divided into six categories, cognitive, metacognitive, memory, affective, compensation, and social. While the second codebook, test strategy, was divided into three categories; listening strategies, structure, and grammar strategies, and reading strategies,. In this stage, any data that has no connection or cannot be used to answer the research questions was cut down to reduce the number of any potential irrelevant data.

3. Interpreting and representing, once the data has already coded into categories and reduced to avoid any irrelevant data, the last stage of the analysis was interpreting and representing. In this stage, the researcher interpreted the data that have been gathered so far and coded the data into a descriptive form. Afterward, the researcher related the finding with corresponding theory and resulted from the previous studies as well as representing the data through the tables that the researcher made.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Learning Strategies Performed by Some University Students who Have Passed TEP.**

According to Oxford (1990), there are six types of learning strategies which are memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies.

Based on the result of the interview; three participants use strategies that could be classified as memory strategies. For example, when asked the question “*Is there any strategy that you use when you are studying English?*”, participant 1 answered with,

*“I do not necessarily use strategy but I do tend to review my notes by making example of the*

*materials I learned today in another context to help me memorize the materials better”*

Participant 1 mentioned that they liked to make another example of what they have written during the class. For example, when studying grammar participant 1 explained that they would make several new sentences based on the formula that they just learned on the class to help them memorize the formula better.

Participant 4, on the other hand, mentioned that they like to make notes during the class because it helps them memorize the material better as shown in their answer,

*“If I do not take a note I will have trouble memorizing the materials. It feels like if at least my hand moved then I will memorize the materials better. So the movement of my hand also becomes reminder of the materials that I have written”*

What participant 4 mentioned, according to Kunasaraphan (2015), was known as muscle memories or employing action to trigger memories. In participant 3’s case, it was using the movement of their hand to help them memorize what they have written.

Aside from those two participants, participant 5 also mentioned a simple memory strategy which was reviewing notes at home to help refresh memories of the materials that have been learned.

The result of the interview also revealed that all participants used strategies that were categorized as the cognitive strategy in accordance of the definition used by Oxford (1990). The most used strategies in term of cognitive strategy that all participants used were the use of media to aid their practice. This can range from the most used media like music, movie, video, and book or the less used media like podcast, game, and social media.

Participant 3 explained that they like to use social media in their answer when asked: “Is there any media you used to aid you in your study?”,

*“I prefer to study by using social media where I followed and responded to the feeds of people overseas who write in English”*

Vanek, King, and Bigelow (2018) supported ESL students use of social media. They believed that constructing social presence through the use of social media can have the benefit on English learning as it resulted in rich, interactive learning experiences in a group.

Furthermore, participant 3, along with participant 2 and 4, admitted that they also have a habit writing unfamiliar words that they found in a novel or a historical book that they would translate later with either oxford dictionary or Google translate to increase their vocabulary.

Apart from the use of media and translate unfamiliar words with a dictionary, participant 4 also mentioned that

they like to summarize their notes as when asked the question “What you do with your notes?”, they answered,

*“I tend to review it and make a summary from it, although I usually only did it when I know there is a test tomorrow”*

Participant 5 believed that making a summary of their notes would help them comprehend the content of the notes better. Kunasaraphan (2015) also has mentioned taking notes and summarizing notes as a part cognitive strategy because it helped students to create a structure for input and output.

Incidentally, participants who used social media to aid them in their study also simultaneously used another strategy which was known as the social strategy. Oxford (1990) defined social strategy as strategies that involved interacting with others through the use of target language in either spoken form or written form.

Some participants were aware of how the use of social media allowed them to communicate and interact with English speakers or writers from the other part of the globe and has decided to take advantage of it. Participant 2 explained in their answer the importance of speaking to native speakers when asked: “Do you think exposure to English native speakers is important?”,

*“Of course, it helps improving our English skills. The more exposure you get, the better you might become”*

Al-Nawrasy (2012) shows in his study that students with English native speaker teacher showed better performance, especially in pronunciation English words. The finding supported the idea of interacting with native speaker helped improving English skills, especially pronunciation skill.

Another question that the researcher asked during the interview was “Do you have an ideal condition for studying?”, the purpose of asking this question was to find out if the participants also employed affective strategy in their study. Kunasaraphan (2015) described affective strategy as strategies that allow the students to manage their feelings, emotional reaction and anxiety.

The result of the interview revealed that most participants did have an ideal condition of studying. Participant 1, for instance, explained what kind of condition that they consider as ideal for studying,

*“I like to study when I am alone while listening to jazz music or music for studying or relaxing that usually can be found on YouTube”*

Participant 4 also shared the kind of situation that they found to be ideal for studying English,

*“I like it when there is no one while still accompanied by music, the light should be dim but not too much. I most prefer to study in scheduled spot as I cannot concentrate if there is another person with me”*

Most participants agreed that the presence of calming music help and the state of being alone help them to focus more on their study. Additionally, Benson (2001) mentioned that proper use of affective strategies could result in greater control over the outcome of one’s learning.

However, one strategy that most participants did not mention in their answer despite using the strategy unconsciously was the compensation strategy. As described by Oxford (1990), compensation strategy were strategies that students use for overcoming the lack of sufficient knowledge regarding the target language. When the participants were asked “What will you do if you encounter an unfamiliar word during your study?”, most of them would answer by either researching the meaning in Google or looking the meaning in a dictionary. But one participant, participant 5, answered the question differently,

*“First I will try to figure it out on my own, this is easier to be done when playing game or watching movie because of the visual aid. If I still cannot understand the meaning of the word then I will go looking its meaning on dictionary or Google translate”*

Participant 5’s answer indicated that compensation strategy was easier to be done when accompanied by visual media. Thus this can be inferred that the other participants also indirectly used compensation strategy when they were using visual media to help them in their study.

The researcher also found out through the interview that most participants did not apply metacognitive strategy because most of them could not give an answer to a question like “Do you have learning goal?” or “Do you schedule your own study time?”.

However, one participant managed to answer the question. Participant 2 responded to the question by explaining,

*“Because I am a rather moody person, I need to manage my time when I study so I do not lose my motivation. For example, I will study English for one hour then taking a break for half hour afterward before studying science for the next hour after taking a break”*

Participant 2 claimed that they have this habit because they were used to be homeschooled, so managing their study time was essential for them because they needed to plan ahead of their study’s schedule with their tutor.

Aside from setting up a goal and planning the study’s schedule, participant 2 also shown to be capable of self-evaluating, especially in regards to choosing the right media for them. For example, when asked how they study grammar, they answer,

*“At first I try to do questions on my sister’s book but turns out it did not make that much different. So, I try to download this interactive grammar app and honestly I am better in learning grammar from that app rather than the book”*

Based on the result of the interview and analysis, it showed that the participants used more than one category of strategies that Oxford (1990) defined in her book. Table 1 displayed the learning strategies which the students who managed to pass TEP with a high score in only a few attempts used to increase their skills in English. The table is divided into two columns; the first column is for the main strategy while the second column is for the chosen strategy.

**Table 1.** Learning strategy used by the students who managed to pass TEP with a high score in a few tries.

	Main Strategy	Chosen Strategy
1	Memory Strategy	Using muscle memories Applying the learned material immediately Reviewing the lesson notes at home
2	Social Strategy	Interacting with natives speakers
3	Affective Strategy	Listening music to decrease the stress level Studying alone to increase concentration and decrease anxiety Picking a comfortable location based on preference
4	Compensation Strategy	Using visual media to aid guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words
5	Cognitive Strategy	Practicing with the use of media like social media, podcast, or movie. Translating unfamiliar words with dictionary Taking notes during class or when reading a book Summarizing the notes
6	Metacognitive Strategy	Planning study’s schedule Setting up goals of study Choosing the most

	effective media based on self-evaluation
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Overall, the participants showed that they use all the strategies that Oxford (1990) mentions in her book, showing that it was better to use various learning strategies that supported each other instead of relying on single learning strategy to improve English abilities.

### **Test-Taking Strategies Performed by Some of University Students who Have Passed TEP**

Based on the data that have been gathered from the participants through interview and have been analyzed, the researcher found out that the students who were successful in passing TEP on only one or two attempts indeed used various test-taking strategies during the TEP test.

TEP was divided into three sections, listening, grammar and structure, and reading; thus, the researcher's questions centered on the strategies that the participants used during those sections.

When the participants were inquired about "*Do you have any strategies when doing listening section?*", most participants tend to simply answer by saying that they read the question and the answer choices before the audio recording started. However, participant 2 and participant 3 shared strategies that no other participant used.

Participant 3 answered the question asked by the researcher by explaining,

*"I have been told before that in short conversation section; focus more on the second speaker rather than the first speaker"*

Additionally, participant 3 also mentioned,

*"When the instruction for the listening was being played, I work on the grammar questions as much as I can since I do not need to listen to the instruction especially since the instruction was being read twice"*

Most students, even most of the participants, would primary focused on one section at a time so the strategy that participant 3 used, working on grammar and structure section when the instruction in the listening section was being read, could be considered as unique. Participant 3 claimed that they have about two and a half minute or around 3 minutes to did as many grammar questions as possible before the instruction was finished being read.

Participant 2 also mentioned in their answer about a different strategy that they used during the listening section,

*"From my own experience, usually people said the main idea in the first or last sentence. So there is no need to pay close attention on the*

*middle part of the conversation"*

The answer suggested that during the conversation, it was better to focus on the first part or last part of the conversation rather than on the middle part.

The next section was the grammar and structure section. The section was divided into two parts; the first one was error-correcting while the second one was multiple choices. When asked if they have any strategies for doing the grammar and structure section, all of them almost have a similar answer. Participant 1 answered the question regarding the error-correcting part by saying,

*"First I read the whole sentence under my breath, and when I read the sentence and feel something is off on one of the parts of the sentence then I will investigate that part"*

Similarly, participant 3 also responded to the question with an almost similar answer,

*"I read the sentence carefully and if something feels off then I will feel it. It likes if a certain part feels off I feel like 'oh, this is the incorrect one'"*

The other participants also have a similar response, it could be concluded that when they faced the error-correcting part, all the participants tended to rely more on their grammatical knowledge by sensing if a particular part was felt off to them.

For the multiple choices part of the grammar and structure section, the participants have different strategies to handle this part, but some participants still shared the same strategies. For example, participant 1 and participant 3 shared the same strategy which as participant 1 described,

*"Because the form of the question which likes a mix and match form where the blank space can be filled with one of answers, I find the answer by reading the question while filling the blank space with one of the answers. If when I read it the sentence feels off or the chosen answer is not compatible with the rest of the sentence then the answer is wrong. I do it until I find the answer"*

Participant 1 and 3 used the strategy of reading the question while putting one of the answers in the blank space, creating a whole sentence that they then read carefully to determine whether the answer they picked was the correct one or not.

Participant 2, on the other hand, has a different approach when working on the multiple choices part,

*"If a question like that then better to see the structure first, if the subject is singular then use has or had, if the structure uses is or progressive then the answer should be similar. Basically analyzes the structure first and then sees the choices"*

Participant 2 preferred to use a strategy where they needed to analyze the sentence first to determine the grammatical aspects and structures before looking at the answers.

Furthermore, participant 4 also has a strategy that they used to aid them during this part. When asked about how they would do the multiple choices part, participant 4 answered with,

*“I translated the question and answers first into Indonesian completely before answering the question”*

Turning the question and answers into the mother tongue was a viable strategy that could be applied during this section to determine the correct answer, as it is similar in approach with the grammar-translation method.

Alternatively, participant 5 also offered a simple yet effective strategy that worked well with the above strategies. While participant 5’s method of handling the multiple choices are similar to participant 1 and 3, participant 5 also mentioned another strategy that the other participants have not mentioned yet,

*“If the question turns out to be too difficult then I will skip the question and will work on it later”*

The last section was the reading section and similar to the grammar and structure section, most participants agreed on one primary strategy when working on the reading section. Most participants read the question first before reading the reading passage. As participant 5 demonstrated in their answer when asked *“How you handle the reading section, especially with long reading passage”*,

*“I read the question and the answers first before reading the reading passage to find the answer”*

Most participants agreed with reading the question first because it saved their time. Coincidentally, most participants also combined this strategy with the skimming and scanning through passage strategy in order to find the answer and comprehend the passage faster.

Furthermore, participant 2 and 3 also brought up a good point by mentioning to use the reference in the question like looking for a specific word in line x and paragraph x to aid in finding the answer even faster

However, participant 3 also pointed up a good point in regards to the question concerning finding the main idea of the passage,

*“The question about main idea is the question that I did last so I worked on the other type of questions first like the question that asked for synonym. But when I was looking for main idea, I read the first sentence of each paragraph to find it”*

Since finding the main idea of the reading passage sometimes required the passage to be read several times,

working on the question that asked the main idea would save time and allow the other questions, which mostly could be solved by reading the passage once, to be solved first.

A difficulty that most students would encounter during the reading section was if there was a word that they did not know what the meaning was. Most participants suggested the same thing when asked about how they overcame this problem. Participant 2 responded to the question by suggesting a strategy that was also used by the other participants,

*“We need to go back to the sentence the word came from, analyzing the words after and before to determine the meaning of the word in the question”*

In other words, participant 2 suggested a guessing strategy by using the words after and before the target word to guess its meaning.

Table 2 displayed the test-taking strategies which the students who have passed TEP with a high score in a few attempts used to help them during TEP. The table was divided into two columns; the first column was for the main strategy while the second column was for the chosen strategy.

**Table 2.** The test-taking strategy used by the students who have passed TEP with a high score in a few attempts

	Main Strategy	Chosen Strategy
1	Listening Strategy	Reading the answers before the audio plays to guess the context of the audio
		Taking minimal notes to sort the conversation and highlight keyword
		Paying attention to the first sentence or last sentence muttered in the conversation
		In short conversation section, focus on the second speaker
		When the instruction for the listening part is being read by the audio, do as many structure and reading questions as you can to save more time
2	Structure Strategy	Reading the whole sentence while carefully analyze the choices to see which one feel off



		Analyzing the answers one by one while also checking its compatibility with the question
		Analyzing to try to recognize the formula before answering
		Translating the sentences and the choices into Indonesian first
		Working on the easier question first
3	Reading Strategy	Reading the question first before reading the text
		Guessing unfamiliar words meaning by reading the words after and before the unfamiliar words
		Scanning and skimming through the passage
		Read each first sentence of the paragraph to find the main point of the reading passage
		Using the reference on the question (sentence in line 1 or words in paragraph 4) to find the answer faster
		Do the question about main point of the passage last

As shown above, there were various strategies that participants used to overcome the problems that they encountered.

Based on the result, it was shown that while some participants used similar strategies to the strategies described in Phillips (2001) and Pamela (2013) respective books, not all of them used the strategies similar that were shown to those books. Some strategies like working on another section while the listening instruction was being read or working on easier question first were developed in response to the condition of the test, showing that creating a suitable strategy based on the test's environment was also a viable way to response to the test's difficulty.

Moreover, as described by Heffeman (2006), keyword and contextual strategy would assist students during the test. However, as shown on the table, most strategies like paying attention to the first sentence or last sentence muttered in the conversation, reading the answers before the audio plays, and using the reference on the question to find the answer faster were keyword strategies while

only a few strategies like guessing unfamiliar words meaning by reading the words after and before the unfamiliar words and reading the answers before the audio played were contextual strategies.

It was clear from the result of the interview that students who passed the TEP in a few attempts preferred keyword strategies rather than contextual strategies. Nevertheless, the fact that the participants still utilized those two types of strategies to aid them during test were in line with what Hefferman stated.

**CONCLUSION**

There were various learning strategies and test-taking strategies that students can choose and use to improve their English skills as well as to aid them during the test. Despite the vast varieties of strategies to choose from, some students still have some troubles in choosing the strategy that will be effective in helping them, either in increasing their English ability or in helping them pass a test effectively. As proven by the researcher's observation on students' achievement on TEP, despite already learning English for years, some students still fail to pass the TEP presumably because of their ineffective learning and test-taking strategy or because they did not even have any of those.

However, some students did manage to pass TEP in only a few attempts with a significant score. The result of this study showed that those successful students did not only manage to employ various strategies to help them during the test, but also to improve their English abilities. In terms of learning strategies, the strategies that the students use were not limited to a single category as most of them used more than one category or even all categories. The top three chosen strategies that used by the students were cognitive, metacognitive, and affective strategies. In terms of test-taking strategies, the students used different strategies for each section based on their current ability, even using the simplest strategy such as working on an easier question first or doing the question that asked the main idea last. Moreover, they also employed strategies before and after the test; showing that test-taking strategy encompasses more than just the strategy that was utilized during the test.

**Suggestion**

Based on many theories such as the one Dooden (2015) made, there are other aspects that also influence the students chosen strategy aside from their level of proficiency; like the type of students' learning style. This aspect will affect mainly the students' learning strategies as the style that they prefer and help them comprehend the materials better will affect their chosen learning strategies. For example, those who prefer auditory style

will receive information better when using media such as podcast rather than those who prefer a visual style. A further study about whether students' learning style do affect their achievement in the TEP's context is also required. The aim of the study is to narrow the students' options regarding the strategy that effective for them since this study has provided example of strategies that are used by some successful students in the context of TEP.

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