



NARRATIVE INQUIRY: AN ADVANCED USER'S STRATEGY TO SPEAK FLUENTLY IN ENGLISH

by

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Abstract:

Fluency in the target language is mainly perceived as the ultimate goal of language learning. Thus, exploring the factors contributing to fluency development is an initial attempt to best facilitate learners in developing their speaking skills. This study is intended to explore the stories of an Indonesian undergraduate student in learning English, particularly in developing his English-speaking mastery. Our research, therefore, addresses the following questions: (i) How is the advanced user's perception of language learning? Moreover, (ii) How did the advanced user build the strategy to speak English fluently? A Narrative Inquiry research design was conducted to elicit information about his English learning experience and strategy. An interview was conducted to gain data. His story constituted data, which were then transcribed and analyzed. The interview result indicated that extramural English and some affective factors contribute to his English fluency. Investigating this phenomenon gives us insightful information, especially for language learners who want to be successful in language learning. The findings of this study are also expected to help teachers improve their instructional design and practice.

Keywords: fluency; affective factors; extramural English; speaking skills; narrative inquiry

Abstrak:

Kefasihan dalam bahasa target terutama dianggap sebagai tujuan akhir pembelajaran bahasa. Dengan demikian, mengeksplorasi faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi pada pengembangan kefasihan adalah upaya awal untuk memfasilitasi peserta didik dalam mengembangkan keterampilan berbicara mereka. Penelitian ini dimaksudkan untuk mengeksplorasi kisah seorang mahasiswa sarjana Indonesia dalam belajar bahasa Inggris, khususnya dalam mengembangkan penguasaan berbahasa Inggrisnya. Oleh karena itu, penelitian kami membahas pertanyaan-pertanyaan berikut: (i) Bagaimana persepsi pengguna tingkat lanjut tentang pembelajaran bahasa? dan (ii) Bagaimana pengguna tingkat lanjut membangun strategi untuk berbicara bahasa Inggris dengan lancar? Desain penelitian Narrative Inquiry dilakukan untuk mendapatkan informasi tentang pengalaman dan strategi belajar bahasa Inggrisnya. Sebuah wawancara dilakukan untuk mendapatkan data. Kisahnya merupakan data, yang kemudian ditranskripsi dan dianalisis. Hasil wawancara menunjukkan bahwa bahasa Inggris ekstramural dan beberapa faktor afektif berkontribusi pada kefasihan bahasa Inggrisnya. Menyelidiki fenomena ini memberi kita informasi yang berwawasan, terutama bagi pembelajar bahasa yang ingin sukses dalam pembelajaran bahasa. Temuan penelitian ini juga diharapkan dapat membantu guru meningkatkan desain dan praktik instruksional mereka.

Kata kunci: kefasihan; faktor afektif; bahasa Inggris ekstramural; keterampilan berbicara; penyelidikan naratif

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INTRODUCTION

Fluency has become the goal of learning a language since Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged. Moreover, for most language learners, demonstrating a good or high level of English-speaking proficiency is the success of language learning. This situation relies on (J. C. Richards, 2008), who states that language learners often perceive their speaking proficiency level as a parameter of their language learning success. In line with this statement, near-native pronunciation indicates the success of language learning (Cook, 2013).

In a more specific setting, English-speaking mastery is a prerequisite for prospective teachers of English. English is the content knowledge that the teachers transfer to the students. In addition, English is used as the instructional language during language learning. Again, teachers' role as monitors requires them to identify learners' mistakes and errors and provide students with meaningful feedback (J. Richards, 2006). In other words, teachers are required to equip themselves with English-speaking abilities. Therefore, to facilitate the language learning process, the learners are encouraged to experience meaningful communication in the target language (J. C. Richards, 2015). The utmost of all is that English is no longer a foreign language when it comes to sharing studies in a research publication (Turmudi, 2020). Numerous classroom activities that best facilitate language learning are suggested, such as role-play, pair or group work, discussion, and project work (Kayi, 2006; J. Richards, 2006).

Although numerous studies and practices related to the best way to teach speaking are continuously conducted (Abu Bakar et al., 2019; Krebt, 2017; Namaziandost et al., 2020), the language learners in our classrooms still demonstrate a massive difference in speaking proficiency level as evidenced. Language teachers should acknowledge this situation as usual because language learners in one classroom typically vary in background knowledge, learning styles, and language learning motivation. This is supported by Richards (2015), who states that learners may have very different needs, interests, learning styles, and reasons for learning English, even if they are in reasonably homogeneous classes.

In addition, developing fluency appears to be more challenging as several factors are involved. In the context of foreign language teaching and learning, speaking itself is perceived as the most anxiety-provoking activity by language learners (Brown, 2004). A study by

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Mukminin & Arif (2015) reported that the students felt anxious when speaking English because of a lack of vocabulary and grammar, fear of negative responses and being evaluated, low self-esteem to speak in English, and teacher-centered style. Similarly, (Daud et al., 2019) reported that social, linguistic, and personal factors contribute to speaking anxiety. Thus, it is essential to highlight that speaking anxiety potentially makes English Foreign Language (EFL) learners feel reluctant to speak in the target language.

Besides speaking anxiety, motivation is also positively related to one's willingness to communicate in the target language (Asmalı, 2016; Fallah, 2014; Wu & Lin, 2014). This means students with solid motivation were more willing to communicate in English. Additionally, a study by Jamil et al. (2013) found that motivation indirectly influenced Malaysian learners' willingness to communicate in the target language. They claimed that the reason behind the result was that Malaysian students studied English solely to pass the exam instead of to satisfy the communicative purpose. From these findings, it can be inferred that students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation will affect how they perceive the importance of participating in English-speaking activities, ultimately influencing their speaking skill development.

Responding to the findings above, it can be inferred that achieving an advanced speaking level appears to be challenging for language learners, particularly those from non-English speaking countries. As they might not see the urgency of speaking English, their goal of learning English might be manifested into other skills. Based on this situation, there is a need to encourage students' intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation will make the language learners engage in enjoyable and satisfying activities (Noels et al., 2003).

In line with intrinsic motivation, extramural English also plays a significant role in developing foreign language skills. Extramural English means that the language learner comes in contact with language outside the classroom, and this contact is initiated by the learner himself (Snoder, 2019). For example, a study (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012) revealed that gamers outperformed non-gamers in comprehension skills and vocabulary mastery (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). Likewise, extramural English activities like gaming and watching TV in the target language are related to vocabulary scores (Jensen, 2017; Warnby, 2022). Language learners should be exposed to extramural English for comprehensible input.

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Extramural English may take any form besides games or watching TV in the target language. According to Sundqvist & Sylvén (2016), watching music videos, series, or films, listening to music, reading blogs, newspapers, magazines, or books, surfing English websites on the internet, reading/writing/speaking/listening/interacting in real life or online, and playing video/digital games (online or offline, on one's own or with others) can be regarded as extramural English activities.

Given the abovementioned situation, it feels different and catches our attention when one of our students can outperform other students in speaking, whereas they attend the classroom with the same activities, tasks, and atmosphere. This one student's performance in speaking English is distinctively outstanding compared to his classmates in terms of fluency and accuracy. By referring to the qualitative aspects of spoken language used by the Common European Framework of References for Languages or CEFR (Goullier, 2006; Robbani et al., 2023), this student can be classified into range C1 as he can express his ideas clearly, fluently, and spontaneously in English using various and wide ranges of vocabulary and rare grammatical errors.

This situation yields many questions, and the one that possibly arises is, "What makes him so different from others?" There are many reasons for this situation. This may happen due to early age English exposure (Shahini & Shahamirian, 2017), affective variables like attitude and motivation (Zeinivand et al., 2015), or other factors. However, we only know the exact answer if we allow him to share his journey in learning English.

As an attempt to describe the situation in our classroom, it is unquestionably necessary to elicit information on how the advanced user perceives English learning and how he develops his English-speaking strategies. Therefore, we considered conducting a Narrative Inquiry Research. The findings are expected to provide insightful information for us, the language teachers, and especially for language learners who want to be successful in language learning. This study is intended to explore the stories of an Indonesian undergraduate student in learning English, particularly in developing his English-speaking mastery. The research questions to address are as follows:

1. How is the advanced user's perception of language learning?
2. How did the advanced user build the strategy to speak English fluently?

METHOD

Design

Narrative inquiry is the best qualitative research design for this study as it allows the participant to share his experience developing his English-speaking fluency. In narrative inquiry, researchers explain people's lives by gathering and retelling stories about their experiences and their interpretations of the meaning of those events (Marguerite G et al., 2010).

Participant

The participant of this study is an undergraduate student at an English Language Education Department in Indonesia. He was in his third year when he was being interviewed. He is chosen based on his achievements in the classroom and extracurricular activities. The primary consideration in choosing him is that his English proficiency is higher than his peers. He always obtained an A score in speaking class. This can also be seen in his participation in the English Debate Club. Recently, he was nominated as one of the best speakers in the National University Debating Championship (NUDC) in the region and became a semifinalist in the NUDC amongst regions. As the participants in the study were intentionally selected based on those specific criteria, purposive sampling was applied.

Instrument

To collect the data, the researchers agreed to use an interview guide. The interview guide consisted of several questions. For example, the initial question asked about the participant's first exposure to English. Following this question, the participant was asked what he liked about English, why he learned English, and what obstacles he used to encounter during the learning process. Lastly, he was asked about his perception of the English learning process and what skills in English he enjoyed the most. The interview guide is used to maintain consistency among interviewers. The guide is also used to point out facts and stories the participant will reveal.

Data collection technique and analysis

As required for ethics in research, before collecting the data, the participant had been fully informed about the aim of the research. He was also informed about the secrecy of his identity and how the data would be analyzed and processed. After that, the participant was

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interviewed, and some follow-up questions were asked during the interview. His story constituted data, transcribed, analyzed, and categorized into themes after the data had been confirmed, evaluated, and deemed sufficient by the researchers' team as triangulation to ensure its credibility and validity. The researchers then implemented Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyze the data. This analysis method was chosen to make sense of a life ordeal and explore how individuals make sense of their personal and social lives. This method also emphasizes the significance that participants assign to a particular experience (Smith & Osborn, 2004). Last but not least, the current article employs an offline automatic citing called using Mendeley Desktop (Turmudi, 2020) to secure the in-text-citation and list of references.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The advanced user's perception of language learning

The first research question determines the advanced user's perception of language learning. After the whole interview session, the participant was asked about his perception of language learning at school to confirm if it helped him shape his English development. Interestingly, he stated that language learning at school does not appear to enhance his English skills as he felt that he could comprehend the materials given at school. Also, it was confirmed that he preferred speaking to writing in English.

Excerpt 1:

"... learning at school... for me, it does not help because the assumption is that I already know how this works. So, maybe for other students, it helps, but for me, it does not help, sir..."

Excerpt 2:

"hmm... in comparison to writing... I think I prefer speaking to writing."

His perception of language learning is inseparable from his experience, which is retold below.

Extramural English exposure

Another part of this research investigates how advanced users build strategies to speak fluently in English. The initial inquiry was about the participant's first experience being exposed to English. The interview result showed that the participant's first exposure to

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English started at the kindergarten level. Interestingly, it is not from formal learning at school. Instead, he was exposed to English while watching television (TV). After school, his routine was watching TV. At that time, he watched a lot of Television Channels such as Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, and Disney. The programs were mainly in English voice-over, and it is depicted in the interview below:

Excerpt 3:

"I was exposed to English in grade 1 of primary school. Hmm... I think... It was even earlier when I was in kindergarten. After school, I usually spend my time watching TV programs like Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, and Disney. At that time, the programs I liked were using English voice-over."

The participant continuously did this routine so that he was exposed to English at a very early stage and for very long durations. This repeated exposure also made him accustomed to spoken forms of English. He also mentioned some programs he enjoyed watching, and those programs were using English voice-over.

Excerpt 4:

"There were some programs like Victorious, Drake and Josh, Sam & Cat, iCarly, Big Time Rush ... and I looked forward to it every afternoon."

His liking of the programs above also exposed him to the spoken forms of English, the way native speakers utter their language, various usage of idioms, and knowledge of slang, which were partly acquired through his TV-watching activities. However, he did not engage in other English-related activities besides watching his favorite programs. Thus, it can be concluded that watching English voice-over programs is his only exposure to English.

Excerpt 5:

"At that time, there were no other options except watching TV for entertainment. My parents were not at home often due to work, and I was not allowed to do many outside activities. Because of this situation, my parents kept me inside the house by allowing me to watch TV."

While watching TV, he did not care a lot about the utterance. He did not attempt to find the meaning of the words he missed. He just focused on watching. He also informed us that sometimes he mimicked the dialogue while watching TV. Finally, by the end of primary school, or around six years later, he understood most of the English conversation on the program without reading subtitles.

Excerpt 6:

"Hmm... I did not care about the utterance. I just kept watching it. When I watched the program, I just watched it. I did not focus on the utterance. I got it as a joke if the utterance was added with a laughing effect."

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Excerpt 7:

"When I was in grade 6 or grade 7 of Junior High School, I felt like I could understand the utterance without the subtitles."

Around six years later, as technology developed, he had access to the internet. He started watching YouTube videos. Although he found Interest in YouTube, especially on video game streaming channels, he still watched his favorite channels on TV.

Excerpt 8:

"When I was in grade 5 or 6, my parents allowed me to use my handphone. Therefore, I started to explore YouTube and found some interesting video game streaming channels. Although I watched some videos on YouTube, I kept watching my favorite programs on TV."

It can be inferred that extramural English exposure is crucial to this point. When the participant of this study listened to the language used in the channel, he picked up the language unconsciously. This situation refers to the second language acquisition process.

Intrinsic motivation, willingness to speak English, and free-anxiety situation

As time passed, most of his favorite programs no longer appeared on TV. Furthermore, the remaining programs he liked were dubbed in the Indonesian language. At the same time, he found YouTube to be more appealing to watch, so he preferred watching YouTube to watching TV. His favorite channel on YouTube was about gaming.

Excerpt 9:

"Most TV programs I used to enjoy did not show on TV anymore, and If I'm not mistaken, the remaining programs shown on TV were already dubbed in Indonesian language, like SpongeBob on Nickelodeon had started using Indonesian dubbing. It is like... hmm... I just became less excited about it. So... I decided to look at YouTube... and YouTube was starting to be fun to watch. I have found channels that I like. I followed, and I subscribed to it. So... I stuck to YouTube from there."

The researchers were curious why he felt less excited about Indonesian dubbing and decided to confirm it. Interestingly, this situation was uncomfortable as he did not get used to Indonesian dubbing for his favorite program.

Excerpt 10:

"For me, it is not pleasant to hear. I started to watch it in English, and when it was dubbed in Indonesian, it felt unusual."

At this point, the researchers focus on retelling the story of his new experience on YouTube. While studying in Junior High School, he enjoyed YouTube, primarily video gaming. At the same time, he made new friends with the same interests. In this session, he was asked the first time he used English as a communication tool.

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It was confirmed that he and his two close friends sometimes used English when talking. It was not only on the gaming forum but also in real life. The topic is usually related to their daily life and something viral on the internet.

Excerpt 11:

"I had some close friends in Junior High School, and we usually played games together. During playing, we usually used English. There were many gamers from other countries on the forum, so we had to use English."

Excerpt 12:

"The first time I used English was around junior high school when I met close friends who could speak English. So sometimes we used English... and usually talked about our daily life and something booming on the internet."

The study participant was also asked about his first time talking to foreigners. It was found that the first time he had informal conversations online was during Junior High School, and at Senior High School, he had conversations with foreigners as an interpreter.

Excerpt 13:

"I had online conversations with foreigners in the lobby of online games. There was an open voice chat feature, and we usually talked about games, some new trends on the internet, or memes... In high school, the teacher asked me to become an interpreter for an extracurricular program. There were foreigners from Denmark, and they had a tree planting program."

He was asked about his perception of the interlocutors' English proficiency level in the game forum, and he said that it varied. He found that some people with low English proficiency were in the forum, but they managed to use English to share about games.

Excerpt 14:

"There were many people on the game forum, and I found that many did not speak English very well, as non-native English speakers did. However, we could not avoid speaking English since we talked about games and the internet."

An affective factor, intrinsic motivation, plays a significant role during his journey. He enjoyed many TV programs on Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, and Disney and watched them every afternoon. However, since most of the programs were not shown on TV anymore and the rest were dubbed in Indonesian, he lost interest in watching TV. At that moment, he shifted to video gaming on YouTube. His actions are a manifestation of intrinsic motivation.

This shifting also happened regarding his attachment to playing computer games. The participant stated that he was fond of story-driven games. It is a storytelling game in which players collaborate to make an impromptu story. Each player frequently controls a different

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character or people as the story develops. These kinds of games require players to read passages provided by the games to advance to the end of the story.

Excerpt 15:

"I usually play story-driven games... RPGs can be sometimes, ... there are also genres like fighting games with a story..."

The participant mentioned that he loves to read and reveal many aspects of the games. This way, he unconsciously increases his reading skills and his vocabulary mastery. He also acquired a passive understanding of riddles and puzzles delivered in English through reading passages within the games.

Excerpt 16:

"...the game has many quests to complete... sometimes there are parts where the dialog is usually made deliberately ambiguous because it usually wants to set up a plot twist. Sometimes, if it is a playthrough for the first time, there might be confusion. What does it mean? However, I did not expect it because the event was random. So, when the "build up" used in the ambiguous moment was revealed, it was like this... so, there was no difficulty in understanding the language but the story."

Additionally, his affection for gaming aligns with his choice of YouTube channels, which are mainly about game streaming. As mentioned above, he also joined gaming forums to gather information regarding his game. These two activities, in the end, enhance his proficiency even more.

Another effective factor captured in this study is a willingness to speak English. This affective factor emerges due to the free-speaking anxiety situation. People with similar interests can easily connect through web communities as the internet develops faster. As experienced by the participant, the web community offers opportunities for people worldwide to experience informal and enjoyable communication about games and internet stuff. This situation is perceived as a free or less anxious situation.

At the same time, the web community or game forum conditioned the members to use English. As the participants in the web community come from all around the world, they cannot avoid using English to communicate. Although the members of the game forum have various levels of English, they managed to use English to share and respond to exciting information. This allows them, primarily the study participants, to develop their productive skills. However, willingness to speak in English emerged in a free-anxiety situation.

Discussion

The first intent of the present study is to gain information on how the advanced user perceives English learning. Based on the findings above, the participant mainly acquired English, which was not learned. This can be seen in his statements that he received no assistance acquiring English. He just continuously watches TV, streams YouTube, plays games, and communicates in online forums. Being involved in these activities intensively makes him unconsciously develop his English proficiency.

His experiences in acquiring English, thus, make him biased toward formal English learning at school. He stated that the learning process did not significantly help his mastery because he had acquired every aspect through his experiences. This finding corroborates a previous study by Shahini and Shahamirian (2017), who reported that the participants perceived that formal learning in the classroom did not affect their fluency. This is because the range of discourse the students can be exposed to outside the classroom is more expansive than in the classroom (Krahnke & Krashen, 1983).

Furthermore, it seems that he did not learn how to write correctly. This has happened because he mainly enhanced his receptive skills and polished his speaking skills through chat forums, which were actually in the spoken form of language but delivered in written form. He also mentioned that he prefers to speak rather than write. Teachers should recognize that if students perceive formal classrooms as less challenging, they might have less motivation to improve their skills.

Meanwhile, concerning his English-speaking fluency, which is questioned in research question 2, extramural English exposure plays a pivotal role. In this study, TV programs, YouTube channels, and online game forums are found to be his extramural exposure to English. Extramural English exposure serves as comprehensible input to those exposed (Jensen, 2017; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). At the same time, the extramural English exposure allowed the use of the language as the study participants were connected to people from around the world through an open voice chat feature and web community forum. This appears to be the best answer to his fluency in speaking and the wide range of vocabulary he uses.

From this finding, language learners must be exposed intensively to English. The best way to get involved in English appears to be extramural English. Extramural English

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exposure may take any form. According to Sundqvist & Sylvén (2016), some typical extramural English are watching music videos, series, or films, listening to music, reading blogs, newspapers, magazines, or books, surfing English websites on the internet, reading/writing/speaking/listening/interacting in real life or online, and playing video/digital games (online or offline, on one's own or with others).

However, knowing various types of extramural English exposure is not the only way. Most importantly, language learners should know what type of exposure they enjoy the most so that they will spend quite a lot of time with it. As depicted in the interview, the participants looked forward to their favorite program every afternoon and spent much time on it. Furthermore, as he enjoyed playing games, he participated in the game forum and interacted with other gamers. This voluntary involvement is derived from his intrinsic motivation. This finding aligns with (Avello et al., 2019) and (Fajt, 2021), who reported that extramural English is related to EFL learners' motivation.

As found (Fajt, 2021), extramural English is associated with intrinsic motivation and willingness to communicate in the target language. Extramural English is a free-speaking anxiety situation that best allows EFL learners to use English. The participant perceives extramural English exposure, like game forums, as enjoyable. In other words, it is a free-anxiety situation to use English as the members of the forum only focus on the content they share, like gaming and internet stuff.

Overall, this phenomenon is best described by referring to a set of principles for teaching and learning language proposed by Nation & Newton (2009) named **MINUS**. The **MINUS** refers to **M**eaningful and relevant language, maintaining **I**nterest through various activities. This can be extramural English activities, avoid overloading learners with too much New language, provide plenty of comprehensible input or **U**nderstanding and not pushing production, and creating a stress-free environment.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The findings of this study successfully revealed the participant's perception of English language learning and his strategy to achieve high proficiency. First, his current proficiency

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level developed during early exposure to English made the participant view the learning process in the classroom as just an obligatory process and was not meaningful to him. He feels good enough at English and can master the materials. Second, the experiences gained by the participant from extramural English activities since childhood answer his fluency as those activities benefitted him a lot in acquiring English intensively. Thus, we can point out that extramural English exposure at an early age can help a learner acquire language faster and better.

Implication

Regarding the advanced user's perception of language learning, teachers should always reflect on and improve their teaching practice. In other words, teachers should be more creative in designing the materials. Perhaps teachers should incorporate technology in teaching practice or exploit various types of extramural English so that students will enjoy the learning process in the classroom. More importantly, the teacher must challenge the high achiever students with different activities or assignments suitable to their level or needs.

Furthermore, if language learners want to be successful in language learning, it is strongly suggested that they get involved in extramural English activities besides merely relying on formal classrooms. As extramural English may take many forms, language learners must find the type of extramural activities they enjoy the most so they can spend much time on them.

Limitation

Although this study has successfully described the role of extramural English on foreign language development, there is still a need to explore the types and the time spent on extramural English. Therefore, for future studies, it is strongly suggested that various extramural English activities that language learners highly favor be explored and how extramural English activities can be incorporated into the language learning process in the classroom.

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