

## The Effects of ACEJ Language Learning Strategies Toward Students' English Language Achievement

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**Abstract:** The main objective of the study was to examine the effects of language learning strategies through active, creative, effective and joyful learning toward the students' English language achievement. The study utilized a Quasi-experimental approach of the pre-test to post-test non-equivalent group design. The participants of the study comprised 181, year four students of elementary schools and three intact teachers. Language learning strategies through ACEJ approach were used on three experimental groups (n = 89) while three control groups (n = 92) were taught using non-active tradition method of teaching English. Data were collected using pre-test and posttest of English Language achievement test. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings showed significant differences in English language achievement scores between the experimental and control group through ACEJ learning.

**Key words:** Language Learning Strategies (LLS), Active, Creative, Effective and Joyful (ACEJ) learning, English language achievement, students, Malaysia

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### INTRODUCTION

Learning strategies are the thoughts and actions we engage in consciously or otherwise to learn new information. The goal of learning strategies is to help students to consciously control how they learn so that they can be efficient, motivated and independent language learners (Chamot *et al.*, 1996). Applied research on language learning strategies investigates the feasibility of helping students become more effective language learners by teaching them some of the learning strategies that descriptive studies have identified as characteristic of the good language learner (Rubin, 1981; Embi *et al.*, 2001; Griffith and Jordan, 2005).

An area of basic research in second/foreign language acquisition is the identification and description of learning strategies used by language learners and the correlation of these strategies with other learner variables such as proficiency level, age, gender, motivation and the like (Chamot and El-Dinary, 1999; El-Dib, 2004; Green and Oxford, 1995; Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995).

A number of researchers recently conducted have dealt with language learning strategies due to the improvement of the teaching techniques and achievement. Omid Okbari investigated the effectiveness of teaching vocabulary items through pictures and contextualization to elementary Iranian EFL students (Ling, 2008). Wu determined language learning strategies used at different

proficiency level (Nikovolta, 2008). Nikolova presented a critical overview of the current situation in English-teaching in public elementary schools in Japan. Their studies focus on authentic EFL learning environment to enhance student motivation to study English. Harris carried out a Quasi-experimental research in order to explore the impact on modern language performance and motivation of encouraging students to transfer language learning strategies across English and Malay language (Zainal, 2005). Zainil developed an Action-Function Method to teach learners of elementary school in Solok town in West Sumatra.

The main goal of teaching English at elementary school level in Indonesia is to have learners possess basic competence as follows: Chamot *et al.* (1996) to develop communicative competence of limited verbal language accompanying action of four language skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing in school context; Rubin (1981) to implant consciousness of the importance and role of English as a competitive language in global era. The objective of teaching English at secondary school levels (SMP/SMA) in Indonesia is to develop communicative competence in spoken and written English and to gain informational literary level through developing skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Having the mastery of these skills, learners are expected to possess the consciousness about the importance of English as one of the foreign languages and are able to be

competitive in the global era and also to improve the learners' understanding both in language and culture (BSNP, 2005).

Based on the observation on teaching English at the elementary school level in Riau province, it is discovered that more students are not motivated and interested in learning English. Many English teachers are unable to create various activities in teaching and learning process. This has led to students possessing negative attitude toward English. They do not develop to study English and they often leave class during English lessons.

According to Zainal (2005), some teachers teach English in real life situations, some others in artificial situations and others in both. Most of them target in large classes and only a few in small ones but on the whole they have not been successful.

Most of the students were passive language learners. They were shy to use English in real communication. They only paid attention to forms and rules when they communicated with others. Consequently, they fail in acquiring English (Zainil, 2004). The fundamental goal of English language at elementary school is to implant basic communicative competence in receptive and productive skills in English and to have positive attitude and motivation to learn English. More students still fail to master essential elements of the four basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Zainal, 2005).

**Objectives and research question:** The main objective of the research was to examine the effects of language learning through active, creative, effective and joyful learning strategies toward students' English language achievement after conducting a Quasi-experimental research for four months at elementary schools in Pekanbaru, Riau, Indonesia. The objectives were as follows:

- To determine whether there were significant differences on students' English pre-test mastery between experimental group and control group
- To determine whether there were significant differences on students' English post-test achievement between experimental group and control group
- To determine whether there were differences of the students' English pre-post test achievement on experimental group

#### **Hypothesis**

**HO<sub>1</sub>:** There were no significant differences of students' English language pre-test scores between experimental group and control group.

**HO<sub>2</sub>:** There were no significant differences of students' English language post-test achievement scores between the experimental group and control group.

**HO<sub>3</sub>:** There were no significant differences in the English language achievement of five pre-test and post-test domains of listening, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar for the experimental group.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research was a Quasi-experimental study using the pre-test and post-test non-equivalent group design. Subjects were not randomly selected and assigned (Gay and Airasian, 2003; Haslam and McGarty, 2003) but used existing intact groups that were of equivalency' (Campbell and Stanley, 1963). This design was selected for this study because of the following factors:

- The administrative constraints in random selection
- It is not realistic to conduct the study in true experimental design due to the complexity of human behavior and language behavior, Quasi-experimental design can reflect what happens in the real life settings without any disruption in the educational set-up
- The results of quasi-experimental research as Bryman (2001) argues is still compelling and particularly prominent in evaluation research studies
- The use of intact classes in Quasi-experimental designs could reduce the threat of Hawthorne effect that can often result when subjects are randomly selected and assigned to conditions for the cooperative lesson periods (Wan, 2003)

There were two sets of the subjects of the study. The first set was 181, 4th year students of three elementary schools located in three sub-districts in Pekanbaru, the capital city of Riau province, Indonesia. They were categorized into three levels: A, B and C on the basis of school accreditation and were classified into six intact groups, three Experimental Groups (EG) and three Control Groups (CG). The second set of subjects consisted of three participants (teachers) who had volunteered to teach the experimental groups using the Active, Creative, Effective and Joyful (ACEJ) learning approach.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**HO<sub>1</sub>:** There were no significant differences of students' English language pretest scores between experimental group and control group.

An independent t-test was conducted to determine any significant difference between pretest mastery achievement means of experimental and control group. The result of pre-test composite mastery for both experimental and control groups without considering students' group or school category was analyzed by using independent sample t-test and presented at the Table 1. Table 1 presents the findings as follows:

There were significant differences between listening pre-test of experimental group (mean = 6.45 and SD = 1.46) and listening pre-test of control group (mean = 5.49 and SD = 1.51) in which t-value = 4.747 with  $p < 0.05$ . For other sub-skills, there were no significant differences between reading pretest of experimental group (mean = 5.90 and SD = 1.31) and reading pretest of control group (mean = 5.57 and SD = 1.27) in which t-value = 0.737 with  $p > 0.05$ .

There were no significant differences between writing pretest of experimental group (mean = 4.94 and SD = 1.89) and writing pretest of control group (mean = 5.00 and SD = 1.70) in which t-value = -210 with  $p > 0.05$ . There were no significant differences between vocabulary pretest of experimental group (mean = 5.02 and SD = 1.78) and vocabulary pretest of control group (mean = 4.71 and SD = 1.56) in which t-value = 1.270 with  $p > 0.05$ .

There were no significant differences between grammar pretest of experimental group (mean = 4.83 and SD = 1.74) and grammar pretest of control group (mean = 4.47 and SD = 1.58) in which t-value = 1.475 with  $p > 0.05$ . There were no significant differences between total pretest of experimental group (mean = 27.14 and SD = 6.41) and total pretest of the control group (mean = 25.15 and SD = 6.19) in which t-value = 1.468 with  $p > 0.05$ .

**HO<sub>2</sub>:** There were no significant differences of students' English language post-test scores between the experimental group and control group.

An independent sample t-test was conducted to determine any significant difference between post-test

achievement scores between the experimental and control groups. The result of post-test achievement scores for both groups are presented in Table 2. Table 2 shows the findings as follows: Significant differences were found between listening post-test of experimental group (mean = 7.34 and SD = 1.85) and listening post-test of control group (mean = 6.73 and SD = 1.02) in which t-value = 2.760\* with  $p < 0.05$ . Significant differences were found between reading post-test of experimental group (mean = 7.58 and S = 0.91) and reading post-test of control group (mean = 6.55 and SD = 0.83) in which t-value = 7.937\* with  $p < 0.05$ .

Significant differences were found between writing post-test of experimental group (mean = 7.43 and SD = 1.22) and writing post-test of control group (mean = 6.35 and SD = 1.06) in which t-value = 6.339\* with  $p < 0.05$ . Significant differences were found between vocabulary post-test of experimental group (mean = 7.61 and SD = 1.02) and vocabulary post-test of control group (mean = 6.43 and SD = 1.14) in which t-value = 7.280\* with  $p < 0.05$ .

Significant differences were found between grammar post-test of experimental group (mean = 7.15 and SD = 1.25) and grammar post-test of control group (mean = 6.11 and SD = 0.80) in which t-value = 6.668\* with  $p < 0.05$ . Significant differences were found between total post-test of experimental group (mean = 37.11 and SD = 4.40) and total of control group (mean = 32.17 and SD = 3.68) in which t-value = 9.223\* with  $p < 0.05$ .

**HO<sub>3</sub>:** There were significant differences of students' English language pre- post-test scores of five sub-skills of experimental groups.

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to determine significant differences between pre-post test scores of the experimental groups. The results of pre-post test achievement scores for the experimental groups are presented at the Table 3. Table 3 shows the findings of pre-post mastery scores as follows:

Table 1: Pre-test results between experimental and control groups

Sub-skills	Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value
Listening	EG	89	6.45	1.46	179	4.747*	0.000
	CG	92	5.40	1.51			
Reading	EG	89	5.90	1.31	179	1.737	0.084
	CG	92	5.57	1.27			
Writing	EG	89	4.94	1.89	179	-0.210	0.834
	CG	92	5.00	1.70			
Vocabulary	EG	89	5.02	1.78	179	1.270	0.206
	CG	92	4.71	1.56			
Grammar	EG	89	4.83	1.74	179	1.475	0.142
	CG	92	4.47	1.58			
Total	EG	89	27.14	6.41	179	1.468	0.144
	CG	92	25.15 (5.43)	6.19 (5.03)			

$p < 0.05^*$

Table 2: Post-test result between experimental and control groups

Sub-skills	Groups	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value
Listening	EG	89	7.34	1.85	179	2.760*	0.006
	CG	92	6.73	1.02			
Reading	EG	89	7.58	0.91	179	7.937*	0.000
	CG	92	6.55	0.83			
Writing	EG	89	7.43	1.22	179	6.339*	0.000
	CG	92	6.35	1.06			
Vocabulary	EG	89	7.61	1.02	179	7.280*	0.000
	CG	92	6.43	1.14			
Grammar	EG	89	7.15	1.25	179	6.668*	0.000
	CG	92	6.11	0.80			
Total	EG	89	37.11	4.40	179	9.223*	0.000
	CG	92	32.17 (7.42)	3.68 (6.43)			

$p < 0.05^*$

Table 3: Pre-test and post-test scores on five sub skills of the experimental group

Tests	Mean	N	SD	df	t-value	p-value
Pre-listening	5.82	89	1.370	88	-16.220*	0.000
Post-listening	7.97	89	1.320			
Pre-reading	5.90	89	1.310	88	-11.467*	0.000
Post-reading	7.58	89	0.915			
Pre-writing	4.94	89	1.890	88	-13.837*	0.000
Post-writing	7.43	89	1.220			
Pre-vocabulary	5.02	89	1.780	88	-13.628*	0.000
Post-vocabulary	7.61	89	1.020			
Pre-grammar	4.83	89	1.740	88	-14.662*	0.000
Post-grammar	7.15	89	1.250			
Pre-total	26.51	89	6.410	88	-21.579*	0.000
	(5.30)					
Post-total	37.74	89	4.400	-	-	-
	(7.55)					

p<0.05\*

Significant differences were found between listening pre-test (mean = 5.82 and SD = 1.37) and listening post-test of the experimental group (mean = 7.97 and SD = 1.32) in which t-value = -16.220\* with p<0.05. Significant differences were found between reading pre-test scores (mean = 5.90 and SD = 1.31) and reading post-test scores of experimental group (mean = 7.58 and SD = 0.915) in which t-value = -16.220\* with p<0.05.

Significant differences were found between writing pre-test scores (mean = 4.94 and SD = 1.89) and writing post-test scores of the experimental group (mean = 7.43 and SD = 1.22) in which t-value = -13.837\* with p<0.05. Significant differences were found between vocabulary pre-test scores (mean = 5.02 and SD = 1.78) and vocabulary post-test scores of the experimental group (mean = 7.61 and SD = 1.02) in which t-value = -13.628\* with p<0.05. Significant differences were found between grammar pre-test scores (mean = 4.83 and SD = 1.74) and grammar post-test scores of the experimental group mean = 7.15 and SD = 1.25) in which t-value = -14.662\* with p<0.05.

Significant differences were found between total pre-test scores (mean = 26.51 and SD = 6.41) and total post-test scores of experimental group mean = 37.74 and SD = 4.40 in which t-value = -21.579\* with p<0.05. The main objective of the study was to examine the effects of language learning strategies through active, creative, effective and joyful learning approach toward the students' English language achievement.

The findings of the study indicated that there were significant effects of experimental groups using ACEJ learning approach. The overall mean scores of post-test achievement of five sub-skills (learning, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar) and total showed that there were significant differences between sub-skills post-test of experimental groups and post-test of control groups with p<0.05. In addition, composite mean score of the post-test of experimental group is 7.42 and SD = 4.40 while control group is 6.43 and SD = 3.68 in which t-value is 9.223 and with p<0.05.

The results indicated that subjects in the experimental group showed significant improvements in the English language achievement composite and post-test mean scores (from 5.43-7.42) with mean increase 1.99. On the other hand, the results of the control group in the English language achievement composite showed minimal changes in the post-test mean scores (from 5.03-6.43) with mean increase 1.44. It could be stated that the increase of the composite and sub-scales mean scores for the experimental groups were due to significant effects of language learning strategies through the ACEJ learning. The last finding of the study dealing with pre-test and post-test subskills scores of the experimental group demonstrated there were significant effects using paired sample t-test analysis. There were significant differences between total pre-test scores (mean = 26.51 and SD = 6.41) and total post-test scores of the experimental group (mean = 37.74 and SD = 4.40) in which t-value = -21.579\* with p<0.05.

Thus, it could be stated that the treatment using ACEJ learning approach appeared to have a substantial and positive effects on the overall English language achievement and its subskills for the pre-post test scores of experimental groups.

### CONCLUSION

The findings indicate the effectiveness of ACEJ approach and the need to optimize the usage of ACEJ modules in teaching English language. Further implementation of this learning module with more differentiated sample groups should be conducted. The findings indicated that the increase in English language achievement can be attributed to the positive strengths of meaningful learning whereby students learn through various modalities such as auditory, body kinesthetic and using affect. Teacher training curriculum focusing on reading, writing, vocabulary and listening should integrate the approach of ACEJ in teaching English. Further improvement of the ACEJ Model from feedback received can be implemented to increase teacher professionalism.

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