



## **A STUDY OF STUDENTS' EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE ABILITY IN ENGLISH**

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### **ABSTRACT.**

Non-English students need specific efforts to improve their English ability. Each student has a different effort in learning English. The research aims to find out the kinds of students' efforts in improving their English ability and the dominant English skill practiced by the students. Besides, the level of students' effort is also investigated in this research. The subjects of this research cover 35 students in the first semester of the Faculty Of Public Health. Qualitative method was used in this research by semi structured interviews as the primary tools of data collection. The result shows that students' efforts to improve their English skills are varies. Students try to improve their ability in English aimed to the purpose of speaking or communication. The level students' efforts are categorized into the substantive effort.

**Keywords:** students' efforts, level of efforts

### **INTRODUCTION**

Learning and communication cannot be separated from each other. Language is a communication tool used by everyone in their daily life as a means to convey information and arguments to others (Rabiah, 2018). Both of them refer to language, especially English as a foreign language. In the education field, English communication has one of the stakeholders to support the learning process. These stakeholders include the students themselves and fellow teachers in English department and non English Department. English oral communication is not easy for foreign language students who seldom use it in their society (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013). Students are generally weak in English language learning found in many parts of the world especially in the countries where English is not spoken as the mother tongue. Students' weakness in English language learning is the result of the differences of social contexts, cultural environments; for example, the environments where the first and second or foreign languages learning take place (Hashemi, 2011).

Non-english students in Veteran Bangun Nusantara University got English subject in first semester and they must understand it as basic knowledge in their specific needs. The needs based on their vocation as an English for Specific Purposes, that is like English for medical studies, English for technician, etc. However, the chance to learn English on campus is very limited, the students need to be active learners not only within the classroom but also beyond the classroom. They have to have specific and personal efforts and be creative to evaluate themselves in achieving their skills by promoting independent learning beyond the classroom.

The students should be aware that the learning process in higher education is different from that in high school. In college, students are required to have a big responsibility over their learning, unlike in school the students are still dependent on the teacher. Students' perceptions of their own abilities are also linked to their learner autonomy (Henri et al., 2018). By taking responsibility for their learning during a lesson, students should become more independent in reasoning and exploring, thereby engaging in the teaching material more fully, leading them to understand the learning topic and enabling them to recall learned information in the longer term (Schmid & Bogner, 2015). Therefore, students need specific efforts to support and to improve their skills in learning English, especially for non-English students. Each student has different efforts in learning English to improve their English ability. The students' effort is the motivation process of actions and goals designed to achieve their needs. When student motivation is good, the learning achievement can be good as well (Yulia, 2013). Effort is a kind of behavior activity in the learning process. Students' efforts can be held in different ways, experiences and facilities, and they represent the condition and the background knowledge of the students. The students' efforts should be done everywhere; in schools or neighborhoods.

Students' efforts in improving ability in English are important to be investigated in order to know the steps and ways done by students as the real actions as an application for practicing English skills. There are some other researches that investigate foreign language learning effort of students in the context of English for Specific Purposes. The research conducted by Susanti found that students have good idea on efforts that they were applied and they are suggested to use independent learning approach, because it helps the students to be more focus, motivated, and enthusiastic in learning, especially in learning English. Besides, Ozer's research finding showed there was not a significant difference in noncompliance, procedural and substantive effort levels of the students. (Utami, n.d.) students used several kinds of effort to improve speaking skill in various college activities scale, and the aspect of speaking skill mostly developed by the students was comprehensibility. However, they have not identified those students' efforts into the level of students' efforts and the most dominant efforts done by students. This research investigates the students efforts to improve their English ability, the level of students' effort and then classify them into skills in English practiced by students in their daily activities. The implication of this research was to motivate the students to make some efforts to improve their ability in English.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign language learning effort can be defined as the investment of individual resources by students to learn a foreign language including in-class and out-of-class exertions and engaging students to fulfill the process of learning a foreign language ("Development and Validation of the Foreign Language Learning Effort Scale for Turkish Tertiary-Level Students," 2018). Learning effort is a multifaceted construct within the context of foreign language learning. Therefore, in the study, four dimensions of learning effort were taken into consideration as non-compliance, procedural effort, substantive effort, and focal effort. Non-compliance involves behaviors that hinder exerting effort in a foreign language classroom. Procedural effort involves endeavors for fulfilling the requirements specific to a foreign language classroom. Substantive effort refers to active involvement in learning a foreign language. Focal effort implies attentiveness in a foreign language classroom ("Development and Validation of the Foreign Language Learning Effort Scale for Turkish Tertiary-Level Students," 2018) Zimmerman and Risenberg (1997 in (Susanti, n.d.) defined learning effort as "the overall amount of energy spent in the process of studying", while Carbonaro (2005 in (Özer, 2020) stated that "the amount of time and energy that students expend in meeting formal academic requirements

established by their teacher and/or school”. In educational studies, the degree of effort is also taken into consideration. Besides, the quality of the time spent is much more important than the quantity when learning effort is taken into consideration (Didia in Ozer, 2020). Learning effort is divided into three categories by Carbonaro in Ozer (2020) as rule-oriented, procedural, and intellectual. Rule-oriented effort involves attending the classes and behaving appropriately and it indicates compliance to the norms and rules of the classroom and school. Procedural effort involves meeting specific class requirements and it indicates participating actively in classes, completing assignments, and submitting them on time. Intellectual effort involves thinking about and understanding the curriculum or course content critically and it indicates spending time and energy for studying and reviewing (Carbonaro in Ozer,2020).

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research uses qualitative research. Qualitative research as an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied (Aspers & Corte, 2019). The subjects of the research are first semester students of the Social Health Faculty in Veteran Bangun Nusantara University of Sukoharjo. Data were collected using questionnaires and by doing interviews with students. These questionnaires contain a list of statements that cover the kinds of activities done by students to improve their English ability. It can be used to identify the aspects of English skills that are mostly practiced and to measure the intensity of students’ activities and the dominant aspect of those skills.

The stages in the data analysis data reduction, data display, and conclusion. The data got from interviews and questionnaires were noted, edited, segmented, and classified based on the kinds of English skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing) and categorized into the level of effort. Then, the results of data reduction were displayed to get purposed information for conclusion drawing.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The researcher found the answers to the research questions based on data collection. The objectives of this research are investigating the students efforts to improve their English ability, the level of students’ effort and then classify them into skills in English practiced by students in their daily activities. The finding shows that the students’ efforts to improve their English ability are varies. There are some activities done:

**Tabel 1.** The students’ efforts

| <b>NO</b> | <b>ACTIVITIES</b>                      | <b>ENGLISH SKILL</b> | <b>LEVEL OF STUDENTS’ EFFORT</b> |
|-----------|--|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1         | Listening English song                 | LISTENING            | Substantive                      |
| 2         | Singing English song                   | SPEAKING             | Substantive                      |
| 3         | Reading English journal, article, blog | READING              | Substantive                      |

|    |  |           |             |
|----|--|-----------|-------------|
| 4  | Recording own voice in English then listen to it   | SPEAKING  | Substantive |
| 5  | Writing a story, letter in English   | WRITING   | Substantive |
| 6  | Joining English Seminar  | LISTENING | Substantive |
| 7  | Taking small notes, writing English vocabulary which are considered as difficult in a notebook.  | WRITING   | Substantive |
| 8  | Joining social media groups that consist of people from various countries. invite them to make a group call or video call so regardless their likes or dislikes all members have to use English. | SPEAKING  | Substantive |
| 9  | Trying to get used to writing caption, statuses, or comments on social media using English.  | WRITING   | Substantive |
| 10 | Trying voice chat, record voice, speak English at all times.   | SPEAKING  | Substantive |
| 11 | Inviting friends to use English when chatting casually outside the classroom   | SPEAKING  | Substantive |
| 12 | Making friends with people from different cultures   | SPEAKING  | Substantive |
| 13 | Inviting strangers to play online games in the same team, so strategy coordination must use English  | SPEAKING  | Substantive |
| 14 | Listening the audio in English, such as radio, music or podcasts   | LISTENING | Substantive |
| 15 | Joining a global random chat application that requires users to exchange messages using English  | WRITING   | Substantive |
| 16 | Changing the language settings on cellphones, laptops and other devices into English.  | READING   | Substantive |
| 17 | Talking a conversation in the mirror   | SPEAKING  | Substantive |

|    |   |            |             |
|----|---|------------|-------------|
| 8  | Listening to Podcasts   | LISTENING  | Substantive |
| 9  | Using a little bit English conversation in my daily life with my friends  | SPEAKING   | Substantive |
| 20 | Watching movie without subtitle and singing western song  | LISTENING  | Substantive |
| 21 | Reading and diligently look at the dictionary and memorize new vocabulary   | READING    | Substantive |
| 22 | Memorizing the names of objects, animals, fruits  | VOCABULARY | Substantive |
| 23 | Knowing the difference between adjectives and noun, because these words are always related to everyday English                | VOCABULARY | Substantive |
| 24 | Learning tenses, memorizing tenses to distinguish the use of verb   | TENSES     | Substantive |
| 25 | Memorizing English verb   | VOCABULARY | Substantive |
| 26 | Joining English course  | LISTENING  | Substantive |
| 27 | Creating a learning group   | SPEAKING   | Substantive |
| 28 | Reading English books   | READING    | Substantive |
| 29 | Watching English language movies, Foreign film  | SPEAKING   | Substantive |
| 30 | Adding English songs to the list of songs that must be listened to. At a minimum, repeating the same song three to four times | LISTENING  | Substantive |
| 31 | Trying to speak using the English   | SPEAKING   | Substantive |
| 32 | Doing my homework on time   | Enrichment | Procedural  |
| 33 | Submitting my homework on time  | Enrichment | Procedural  |
| 34 | Carrying out the assigned in-class tasks.   | Enrichment | Procedural  |

### **The kinds of students' efforts**

Those activities were done by non-English students as the efforts to improve their ability in English. In the process of the learning activities, every student has different efforts in learning English. It was influenced by the interest, motivation, need, and also the difficulties in learning listening, speaking, reading, and also writing as English skills that must be mastered well. Students

are different in their facilities, experiences, ways, and their background knowledge in learning English. They need specific efforts to support their skills in English as a foreign language and it can be practiced anywhere and anytime. By analyzing the students' activities, it can be categorized whether the efforts refers to certain English skills and the students' activities can also be categorized into high or low effort. The results are listed below.

**a. Improving Listening skill**

There are seven activities, all of them are categorized as low effort. They used several kinds of media to listen to English songs, namely podcasts, English news. Joining English seminars/webinars are also did for understanding Listening from native speakers. They pay attention to the way of learning listening effectively not only to the content of the speech, but also to the way it is pronounced. Listening is the most important thing in learning any language because the mastery of listening can understand many words. By practicing listening, we can improve the vocabulary, pronunciation, accuracy, the use of certain phrases in various spoken contexts. Therefore, practicing listening can be done by it listening to music, TV, movies, radio, etc in English. Moreover, students add English songs to the list of songs. They make rules for themselves that they must listen and then repeat the same song three to four times. In addition, the students try to find some learning English websites while browsing in the library and use an index or database (computer, card catalog, etc) to find the audio of English materials. They also try to watch English movie without subtitles by paying attention to the English-language films and appreciate the dialogue without glancing at the subtitles too often.

**b. Improving Speaking skill**

There are many kinds of activities done by students for improving speaking skills. The activities can be categorized into high efforts because they try to ignore their shyness and need to be brave to practice regularly and intensively. They practice speaking by starting from simple words. Those efforts can make them familiar with the English language. They try to practice English in their daily life, like recording their voice or trying voice chat, frequently speaking using English. Besides, they join social media groups that consist of people from various countries and also invite them to make a group call or video call so regardless their likes or dislikes all members have to use English. They do that because it is the easiest way to check the words that have learned each week without looking at the material. Good grammar is meaningless if students never practice it in a conversation. Most people find it difficult to start a conversation in English because they are not used to make communication. Therefore, it is important to practice English frequently in daily life.

**c. Improving Reading skill**

Many activities done by students focus on improving reading skills. In their daily life, they change the language settings on their mobile phone. It can make language learning process faster because it makes the mind accustomed to interpreting a sentence, phrase and utterances based on certain context. They also practice reading books, blogs, journals, articles, and etc in English so they can learn more about grammar, tense, and sentence structure. They said that the more often students read the vocabulary in English, the more students will be familiar with the language.

**d. Improving Writing skill**

Activities undertaken as a student effort can be categorized as writing improvement by trying to get used to writing captions, statuses, or comments on social media using English. In doing writing, especially for formal writing, grammar skills must be needed and formed

systematically. Writing will help learn English vocabulary more quickly than just reading. Besides, taking a little note is also practiced by the students if they come up with a new vocabulary that they don't know what it means or what they hear casually. Writing is a challenge in itself for most Indonesians. However, with a little will and discipline, everyone can get used to it.

**e. Other efforts**

Other actions are also practiced by students as the effort to improve their ability in English. They take advantage of social media for learning English by selecting Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter account setting in English and also by playing English games. They think that there are some of the easiest ways to improve their English language skills. Some of them join immersion club by taking English learners in an environment that uses English. Moreover, they use social media to make friends with people from different cultures. They also try to learn by observing everything around them.

**The dominant English skill practiced by the students**

Based on the result of the questionnaire, the researcher found that the students did some activities to improve their English ability. The activities were done in order to achieve a better understanding in English. Those activities are referring to one English skill integrated into other skills. Based on previous research, the use of classical guidance and counseling experiential learning model gave opportunity for students to deliver their ideas related with the problems in reading interest, and then, being solved together through critical thinking (Sutarti, 2017). The other research (“The Efforts to Foster Students’ Skill in Making Questions through Thinking Tool (Question Matrix) Development,” 2019) found that Question Matrix had helped the students in making questions. The use of proper media and learning technique are also the efforts to improve English ability. However, the basic skill in English must be concerned in practicing English. The students think that everything around them can be used as media for improving the ability in English.

Based on the list activities. Students try to improve their ability in English aimed to the purpose of speaking or communication. They want to be able to communicate in English fluently so they try many efforts to produce proper spoken language. Students must assume for their learning and achievement outcomes in order to become learners strategies (Rowe & Rafferty, 2013). Besides, some students focus on Listening as the effort to improve their ability in English. Listening plays a significant role in daily communication and educational process (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Listening to music and watching films are the actions that are easy and interesting to be done by everyone. It is a receptive skill so the students do not need to produce language to do these, they receive and understand it. In addition, the other students focus on writing as the efforts in improving English ability. The students think that writing skills is difficult to practice. The students are able to express their ideas and their opinions and follow the flow of thought in written language (Pratiwi & Arianti, 2019). Besides, some students want to improve their English ability by practicing and training vocabulary and tenses. Vocabulary learning is an essential part in foreign language learning as the meanings of new words are very often emphasized, whether in books or in classrooms (Alqahtani, 2015)

**The level of students’ effort**

The findings of the study reveal that the level of students’ efforts is categorized into substantive effort. They take active involvement in learning and it indicates spending extra time to

prepare or study for exams as well as working hard at school. Preparing well for exams, reviewing the topics covered and to be covered, practicing from various sources, reading books, watching movies, having conversation with foreigners as out-of-class activities, revising assignments if getting suggestion to do any corrections, consulting for advice on how to improve English, and volunteering for extra homework assignments assist students to engage in English (the foreign language) continuously which results in high achievement in exams (Özer, 2020)

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, the researcher can draw a conclusion that the students' efforts to improve their English skills are varies. The students try to improve their ability in English aimed to the purpose of speaking or communication. They want to be able to communicate in English fluently so they try many efforts to produce proper spoken language. Besides, some students focus on Listening as the effort to improve their ability in English. Listening to music and watching films are the actions that are easy and interesting to be done by everyone. It is a receptive skill so the students do not need to produce language to do these, they receive and understand it In addition, the other students focus on writing and reading as the efforts in improving English ability. The students think that both skills are difficult to practice. Besides, some students want to improve their English ability by practicing and training vocabulary and tenses. The level students of efforts is categorized into substantive effort. They take active involvement in learning and it indicates spending extra time to prepare or study for exams as well as working hard at school.

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