



**FROM LEARNING BEHAVIORS TO CONCORDANCE SKILLS
DEVELOPMENT: INSIGHTS FROM A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
ON ESL STUDENTS**

Article History:

Accepted May 2024;

Revised May 2024;

Approved June 2024

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Abstract:

With the growing importance of multilingual communication, effective language learning strategies become increasingly essential for ESL education. This research investigates the individual experiences and perspectives of ESL students to understand effective learning behaviors for developing concordance skills and the role of teachers in facilitating this process. Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach, 10 ESL students from a private university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, were selected through purposive sampling and interviewed. The study employed structured interviews and thematic analysis to gather and analyse data. The research revealed a strong preference for cognitive methods such as digital tools and social media among ESL students, emphasizing their appealing nature and convenience. Nevertheless, there is a cultural preference for accuracy rather than fluidity, which affects the use of compensation strategies. Furthermore, the study highlights the need of using affective strategies, emphasizing the requirement for a positive and captivating learning environment. Despite acknowledging the importance of teachers, barriers such as cultural communication norms and a fear of making mistakes hinder some learning methodologies. These findings highlight the significance of considering cultural and pedagogical factors in language instruction to establish inclusive and efficient learning settings. The findings are valuable for ESL educators, curriculum designers, and language instruction policymakers, offering insights into effective teaching strategies and student preferences in ESL education. By uncovering cultural and pedagogical factors that influence ESL learning behaviours, this study provides new knowledge and practical strategies to enhance concordance skills, contributing to the advancement of ESL education.

Keywords: Concordance skills, ESL students, learning behaviors, phenomenological study, teaching strategies

INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected global landscape, proficiency in the English language is paramount for effective communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries. English as a Second Language (ESL) education plays a pivotal role in equipping students with the necessary linguistic skills to navigate this diverse and dynamic environment. As such, ESL students must demonstrate mastery in concordance skills to actively engage in meaningful interactions, both in academic and professional spheres (Baker, 2012).

While ESL instruction encompasses various language competencies, the cultivation of concordance skills is of particular importance. Concordance skills refer to the ability to comprehend, produce, and utilize accurate and contextually appropriate language in diverse communicative contexts (Turobzoda, 2020). Mastery of these skills is essential for ESL students to effectively convey their thoughts with precision and fluency. However, the acquisition of concordance skills is not solely determined by language proficiency levels but also by the learning behaviors exhibited by ESL students (Oxford, 2013). Understanding the intricate relationship between these variables is fundamental for fostering language proficiency and enhancing concordance abilities among ESL learners throughout their educational journey.

Moreover, teachers play a pivotal role in shaping ESL students' learning behaviors and fostering concordance skills. Educators serve as facilitators, providing guidance, support, and feedback to students (Terrell & Brown, 1981). The instructional methods and pedagogical approaches employed by teachers significantly influence ESL students' learning habits (Farrell, 2022). Creating a positive and inclusive learning environment is essential for motivating ESL students and promoting successful language acquisition (Farrell, 2022).

While previous research has explored various aspects of ESL language acquisition, studies focusing specifically on concordance skills and learning behaviors remain relatively limited (Ginther & McIntosh, 2018). Existing literature has primarily focused on quantitative assessments of language proficiency and specific linguistic elements, such as subject-verb agreement (Nurjanah, 2017). While these studies offer valuable insights, they often overlook the subjective experiences and perceptions of ESL students regarding their language learning processes.

To address this gap, this phenomenological study seeks to explore ESL students' lived experiences and perspectives on effective language learning practices. By employing a qualitative approach, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the personal experiences of ESL students and the factors influencing their learning behaviors and concordance skills (Patton, 2002).

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the learning behaviors exhibited by ESL students in developing their concordance skills. Specifically, the research aims to explore ESL students' perceptions of their instructors' roles in facilitating the enhancement of their concordance skills. Through an in-depth analysis of ESL students' experiences and viewpoints, this study seeks to offer valuable insights into effective language learning strategies and pedagogical practices.

This phenomenological study holds significant implications for ESL education and language acquisition. By providing insights into ESL students' experiences and perceptions regarding language learning practices and concordance skills, this research contributes to the development of effective pedagogical approaches and curriculum design strategies. Educators can use the findings of this study to tailor their instructional methods and provide targeted support to ESL students, thereby enhancing their language learning experiences and outcomes. Additionally, this research adds to the broader understanding of ESL language acquisition by exploring the subjective elements that influence language learning processes. By shedding light on the lived

experiences of ESL students, this study enriches the existing body of literature on language acquisition and provides a foundation for future research in this field.

METHODOLOGY

The study takes place at an Islamic Private University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, known for prioritizing students' learning experiences and fostering a conducive environment for academic growth. This setting offers a diverse pool of ESL students with varying levels of language proficiency, making it ideal for exploring concordance skill development in a real-world educational context. The research is conducted over a three-month period, with data collection spanning two months (October and November 2023) and one month dedicated to analysis and verification.

The participants include ESL students from the 7th semester of the English Education Study Program, chosen through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of proficiency levels. Ten students are selected, five with a GPA of 3.5 or higher and five with a GPA below 3.5, to capture a range of perspectives and experiences related to concordance skill development. Participants' identities are pseudonymized to protect confidentiality.

Data collection primarily involves in-depth interviews with ESL students, allowing for an in-depth exploration of their experiences, perspectives, and learning behaviors. Interview questions are designed to align with the research objectives and encourage participants to elaborate on their strategies, challenges, and motivations for enhancing concordance skills. Interviews are recorded and transcribed for analysis, with handwritten notes and mobile devices used for data capture.

An interview guideline is developed to ensure consistency and relevance in the interview process. This guideline serves as a framework for conducting in-depth interviews with participants, allowing for flexibility to explore diverse perspectives and insights. The interview process is conducted in English, the medium of instruction for ESL students, to facilitate open communication and accurate data collection.

Data analysis follows a descriptive phenomenological approach, involving four essential steps: bracketing, horizontalization, clustering, and textualization (Greening, 2019). Transcribed interview data is analyzed using inductive coding to identify emerging themes and patterns within participants' experiences and perspectives. Regular discussions with the research supervisor ensure the accuracy and consistency of the coding process, while member checking and peer debriefing methods enhance the rigor and credibility of the research findings.

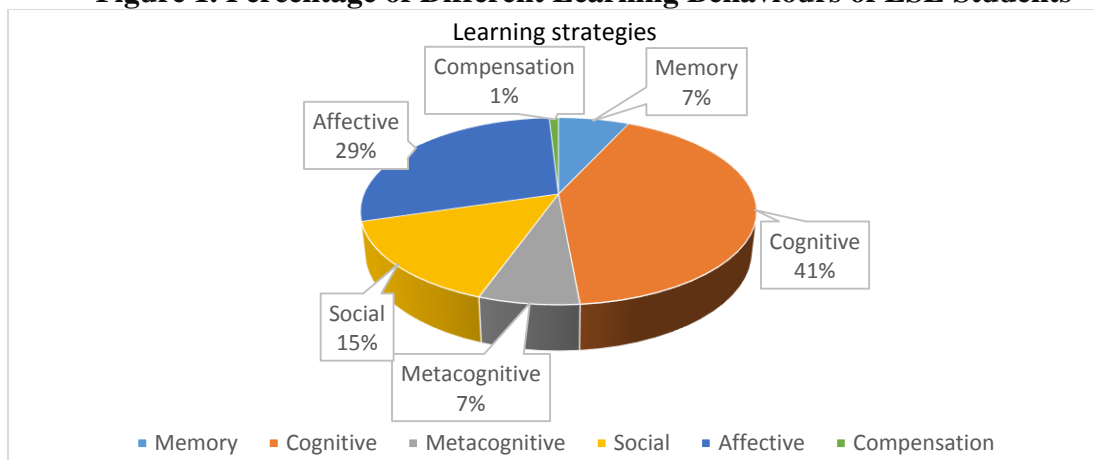
To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, member checking and peer debriefing techniques are employed. Member checking involves sharing preliminary findings with participants to validate the accuracy and relevance of their experiences, while peer debriefing seeks feedback from external experts to evaluate the research process and enhance the validity of the findings (Given, 2012). These measures contribute to the overall rigor and credibility of the qualitative phenomenological study, ensuring that the research outcomes accurately reflect the perspectives and insights of ESL students regarding concordance skill development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

ESL Students' Learning Strategies

The research identified six primary learning methods employed by ESL students: Memory, Cognitive, Metacognitive, Social, Affective, and Compensation strategies. These methods align with Oxford's (1993) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which categorizes language learning strategies into direct and indirect groups (Graham & Oxford, 1993). Direct strategies involve memory, cognitive, and compensatory techniques focused on mental processing, while indirect strategies include metacognitive, affective, and social techniques that support the learning process.

Figure 1. Percentage of Different Learning Behaviours of ESL Students



Cognitive strategies emerged as the most frequently used among the students. These strategies include watching English films with subtitles, listening to songs, and utilizing self-learning tools like YouTube, Elsa Speak, and Duolingo. Additionally, students often engage in activities such as listening to podcasts and journaling their daily lives or past experiences to enhance their concordance skills. Conversely, listening to news in English is a less favored method for learning.

The second most utilized strategy is the affective method. Students reported higher engagement in class activities and assignments when teachers employed motivational techniques, created a positive classroom environment, and ensured that students felt at ease. The social approach is also significant, with many students using social media platforms such as Instagram, Omegle, and OmeTV to find conversational partners and practice their English collaboratively.

Traditional methods like memory and metacognitive strategies are less frequently employed. Most students relied on memory strategies during their high school years but found them ineffective over time. The compensation strategy is rarely used, with only one participant indicating reliance on existing knowledge to fill gaps without seeking the meanings of words or corrections for mistakes. The cluster analysis revealed that students employ a balanced mix of 50 direct and 51 indirect strategies to enhance their concordance skills. This suggests a comprehensive approach to learning, incorporating various methods to address different aspects of language acquisition.

Interestingly, students predominantly use non-digital methods over digital ones to improve their concordance skills. They focus on their teachers during class, engage in English-related classroom activities, and practice English with local or international friends. Methods such as rote memorization and the primary use of the Indonesian language in classrooms were deemed ineffective for language skill development.

The primary difficulties encountered by students are associated with sentence structure and concordance, particularly in constructing well-organized sentences and using correct verb tenses. Confidence issues, influenced by the fear of making mistakes, also present significant challenges. Additional obstacles include limited vocabulary, inadequate listening comprehension, difficulties in social interactions for finding conversation partners, and insufficient self-regulation skills.

To address these challenges, students predominantly rely on self-correction, using the internet to seek accurate usage examples and engaging in self-practice. Peer correction is also common, with students reviewing each other's sentence structures before verbalizing them. Teacher correction is the least utilized method, with only three participants seeking assistance from their teachers.

Role of Teachers and Preferred Teaching Strategies from ESL Students

The results of this study emphasize the crucial significance of teachers in facilitating the language acquisition process for ESL students. Most of the interviewed students demonstrated a deep recognition of the importance of their teachers or lecturers in shaping their English language proficiency. According to the majority of respondents, the teaching tactics and support offered by instructors have a substantial influence on learning outcomes. Nevertheless, an intriguing perception arises from the student feedback, as some pointed out the fluctuating significance of the teacher, depending on the particular teaching methods and strategies employed.

The responses provided by the students present a thorough and perceptive guide for teachers seeking to improve their teaching methods. One notable aspect is the substantial support for oral exams as an essential element of the teaching and learning process. One participant aptly captured this sentiment by stating, "Oral exams push us to articulate our thoughts in English, making us more confident and adept in expressing ourselves." The frequency with which students emphasized the significance of oral evaluations highlights their conviction in the effectiveness of this approach for improving and assessing communicative skills. Students favor ongoing and consistent oral assessment methods, acknowledging the oral exam as a valuable means of enhancing their performance. This observation evidences a shift from conventional assessment techniques that may heavily depend on written evaluations. The students' support for oral tests indicates their acknowledgment of the crucial role that spoken language plays in total language ability. This preference reflects the students' aspiration for an interactive and stimulating learning experience and their conviction in the significant impact of regular oral examinations in improving their English communicative skills. The request for periodic oral and written assessments demonstrates the students' concern about consistently checking and evaluating language skills.

A noteworthy observation that complements the students' preference for oral examination was also evident from their performance in research interviews, indicating a remarkable correlation between GPA score and oral proficiency. Contrary to common assumptions, students with higher GPAs showed a tendency to communicate less during research interviews conducted in English compared to those with lower GPA scores. This unexpected discovery implies that GPA scores may predominantly signify students' conscientiousness in fulfilling duties and assignments rather than functioning as a precise measurement of their comprehensive linguistic abilities. This

observation reinforces the cause for incorporating oral examinations, as students themselves advocate for assessing language proficiency beyond the limitations of written evaluations.

Students also commonly favor interactive methods of learning that prioritize practical activities, which help to enhance self-confidence. Respondents consistently expressed the efficacy of hands-on approaches, with one student noting, "Engaging in practical activities like presentations and group discussions helps us apply what we learn. It boosts our self-confidence by turning theoretical knowledge into practical skills." Implementing a more engaging teaching approach includes interactive lessons, personalized education, and spaces for open dialogue regarding their challenges. Many participants exhibited a need for teachers to consistently inspire them to participate in presentations and class activities, using various approaches to create an environment that promotes skills development and boosts confidence. The importance of building an enjoyable learning atmosphere is also apparent, as students requested teachers to uphold a cheerful attitude, provide motivational speeches, and foster a supportive culture within the classroom. It highlights the influential effect of positivity that promotes student engagement and ease.

The students' desire for a thorough, engaging, and tailored language learning experience is evident through their repeated requests for complete immersion in English-only classes and a conscious emphasis on teaching language structure. A student articulated this perspective, stating, "The teacher becomes more influential when lessons are interactive and tailored to our needs. It is not just about what they teach but how they teach it." These suggestions demonstrate a preference for participatory teaching methods that target both the cognitive and affective elements of language learning. These strategies encompass continually motivating students to deliver presentations in front of the class, creating chances for sharpening skills, and enhancing self-assurance.

Furthermore, gender-based disparities in interview responses contribute a further layer of intricacy to the results. Male students demonstrated a particular ability to provide pragmatic and experientially-based responses, highlighting a unique method of expressing their ideas. Contradictorily, female students exhibited a tendency to offer responses that were in line with general expectations. The disparity in response patterns based on gender prompts consideration of probable variations in communication styles and preferences among male and female pupils. It implies the necessity of a customized teaching method that considers various learning and communication styles, promoting an inclusive atmosphere that responds to the distinct abilities and preferences of every student. This finding also highlights the significance of considering many aspects when assessing language proficiency and creating teaching methods that align with the varied experiences and communication styles of students.

Moreover, the suggestion for interactive and participatory classes corresponds to the students' preference for a more intimate teacher-student connection. These activities, such as ice-breaking sessions and brainstorming, help build a more inclusive learning environment. The approach seeks to encourage students to actively participate in English conversation during class sessions, taking into account their particular proficiency levels. A student evidenced this preference expressing, "Interactive lessons build a connection between us and the teacher. It makes me feel comfortable to share and discuss ideas openly." Recognizing the importance of teaching language structure emphasizes its critical role in language learning, promoting the need for a more complete approach to grammar and structure instruction. Finally, the demand for customized feedback and recognition of student work underscores the significance of constructive direction in the learning process.

Discussion

This study identifies the cognitive method, including using digital tools like YouTube and Duolingo, as the most popular learning strategy among ESL students. This preference aligns with the findings of Rismayana (2017) and Phusum (2006), who reported that ESL students often utilize digital tools due to their accessibility and interactive nature. Digital tools offer dynamic and engaging content, making learning both enjoyable and practical, which resonates with today's tech-savvy generation. The 2020 Trend Report from Global Web Index says that Indonesians spend 3 hours and 18 minutes daily on social media, while people from other parts of Asia Pacific spend 2 hours and 8 minutes daily. Indonesian students' extensive use of the internet, as highlighted in the 2020 Global Web Index report, further supports this trend.

Contrastingly, the compensation method is less favoured, possibly due to the traditional emphasis on accuracy in language learning environments. This finding is consistent with previous studies, indicating that the cultural focus on correctness may discourage the use of compensation strategies. However, Charoento (2017) observed a higher utilization of compensation strategies among Thai students, suggesting cultural differences in error tolerance and instructional approaches between Indonesia and Thailand. These discrepancies underscore the importance of context-specific research in understanding language learning behaviors.

The significant use of the affective method, which highlights the motivational role of a positive classroom environment, corroborates findings by Hakim (2022). This approach emphasizes the psychological aspects of learning, where supportive environments foster student interest and motivation. Similarly, the growing trend of using social media for language learning, as seen in the use of platforms like Instagram and Omegle, supports the notion that language is a social tool best learned through real-life conversations.

Non-digital methods, such as paying attention to teachers, participating in class, and practicing with peers, remain crucial for developing concordance skills. These methods provide immediate and practical language application opportunities, underscoring the importance of the classroom environment and direct interaction. This finding aligns with Alioon & Delialioğlu (2019), who emphasized the significance of social and communicative aspects in language learning. The preference for context-based learning over memorization reflects a shift towards more dynamic and meaningful engagement with the language.

Students' disfavour towards the use of the Indonesian language in the classroom highlights the need for an immersive English-speaking environment. This immersion is crucial for effective language acquisition, as consistent exposure to the target language enhances learning outcomes. This aligns with the theory of Krahnke & Krashen (1983), which posits that language acquisition is more effective with continuous and intentional exposure.

The complexity of sentence structure in English presents significant challenges for Indonesian ESL students due to syntactical differences between Indonesian and English. The transition from context-dependent Indonesian to the fixed word order in English requires significant syntactic adjustments. Arfanti (2014) and Gu (2011) highlighted the difficulties Indonesian students face in shifting from implicit to explicit communication, emphasizing the need for explicit education and practice in pragmatic skills.

Cultural factors, such as the tendency to avoid losing face, may also contribute to students' fear of making mistakes. This cultural aspect can hinder students' willingness to take linguistic risks, impacting their confidence and language learning outcomes. Understanding these cultural influences is crucial for developing effective teaching strategies that address these challenges.

The preference for engaging and confidence-building educational settings indicates a desire for more practical and interactive language learning experiences. This finding aligns with the emphasis on the importance of continuous language exposure for linguistic development by encouraging teachers to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their abilities (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which highlights the role of positive reinforcement in fostering a favourable learning environment.

The preference for oral assessments over traditional written evaluations indicates a shift towards recognizing the importance of spoken language in overall language competency. This perspective supports Lantolf & Poehner (2011) dynamic assessment principles, advocating for more interactive and adaptable evaluation approaches. This shift suggests a need for teachers to adapt their assessment methods to better align with students' evolving expectations and understanding of language acquisition processes.

A significant limitation of this study is its focus on Indonesian ESL students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader global context. Future research should include diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds to provide a more comprehensive analysis of language learning behaviours. Additionally, reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias; hence, incorporating diverse data sources, such as classroom observations or longitudinal assessments, could offer a more holistic understanding of ESL students' learning behaviours.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this phenomenological study delves into the learning behaviors of ESL students in an Islamic Private University in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, shedding light on strategies to enhance concordance skills and the pivotal role of teachers in this process. The findings underscore a preference for cognitive techniques, including the use of digital tools and social media, reflecting a broader trend towards interactive and contextual language learning. Despite this, cultural influences that prioritize accuracy over fluidity are evident, impacting the utilization of compensation strategies. Additionally, the study highlights the growing recognition of affective methods, emphasizing the importance of a favorable learning atmosphere in language acquisition. Moreover, the inclusion of non-digital techniques, such as engaging with teachers and participating in English-centered activities, underscores the importance of real-life application and social interaction in language learning. However, various obstacles, such as the traditional emphasis on linguistic accuracy and cultural norms that discourage linguistic risks, pose challenges to effective language acquisition. Addressing these obstacles requires innovative pedagogical approaches that consider cultural nuances and prioritize students' diverse needs and preferences, ultimately fostering engaging and supportive language learning environments.

The suggestions and implications drawn from this research offer a comprehensive roadmap for enhancing the ESL language learning experience. Implementing culturally tailored approaches in language instruction involves conducting a thorough cultural evaluation of student groups to understand their communication patterns and preferences. Educators can then incorporate culturally related content and foster open discussions to create a nurturing and cooperative learning atmosphere. Recognizing the cultural focus on accuracy, language classes should prioritize accuracy while also encouraging a fluid learning process through activities that promote fluency, such as open discussions. Employing a dual approach ensures a well-rounded learning experience. Given the impact of digital tools and social media, teachers should actively include these resources in the curriculum to create dynamic and captivating content that resonates with students' preferences for technologically advanced educational experiences.

To accommodate diverse learning preferences, teachers should diversify teaching methods, incorporating visual aids, hands-on activities, and multimedia resources to cater to different modalities. Emphasizing consistent exposure to English, teachers should create immersive classroom environments with minimal use of the native language, implementing immersion activities and projects to challenge students' language skills. Adopting a Supportive Correction Approach, teachers should provide constructive support and correction while maintaining a balanced and welcoming feedback system to enhance student motivation and participation. Language education institutions should reconsider evaluation techniques, integrating frequent oral exams to comprehensively evaluate students' communication abilities beyond written evaluations. Encouraging cross-cultural studies can deepen understanding of the complex interaction between cultural, educational, and individual factors influencing language learning strategies, leading to more context-specific and effective teaching methodologies. By implementing these recommendations, educators and language learning institutions can adapt to the evolving needs of ESL students, fostering a more effective and culturally engaging language learning environment.

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