Chapter I
Introduction

1.1 Background

English is an International language that is used worldwide. The current status of English as an international or global language is underpinned by its wide use in a range of fields such as education, politics, diplomacy, international trade and industry, commerce, science and technology, the media, information technology, popular culture, and communication (Crystal, 2003a: , Huda, 2000: 68, Jenkins, 2003). In educational field, English is used as a medium of instruction in some schools and universities in some parts of the world, with subjects such as management, information, technology and the humanities.

The above factors, and the large number of speakers who use English worldwide, can be considered to be valid reasons for English language special status in Indonesia. In line with this, observers on the use of English in Indonesia (among others Dardjowidjojo, 2003: 32, Huda, 2000: 65-66, Renandya, 2000: 116, Simatupang, 1999: 64) have seen it as potentially serving a number of important purposes, for instance as a means of international communication in practically all fields of works.

From the above explanations, it can be assumed that English ability has become one of significant factors in winning the very tight competition of getting a job in this globalization era and it is believed that people who are fluent in English would tend to earn better jobs in the corporate world because they would have a skill to communicate better with people from other countries (Jenkins, 2010; Seidlhofer, 2004).

University graduates are then expected to master English, especially to become fluent in English speaking skill as, among others, a means of international communication. The importance of being fluent in speaking English is relevant to Nunan's study (2000: 39) which revealed that mastering the art of speaking is the single most important aspect of learning a second and a foreign language, and success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language.

Unfortunately in many areas in Indonesia, based on the information from the Educational Board (as cited in Kompas, 2009), the university students' ability in English especially speaking skill is still considered to be low. Many EFL students find it difficult to develop their speaking ability (Petersen, 2010). Even so, there are a few students who seem to find it easy to develop their speaking skill. Their ability in developing speaking skill is probably the result of employing appropriate language learning strategies. The employment of language learning strategies seems necessary for the language learners because speaking the new language often causes the greatest anxiety among other language skills (Oxford, 1996: 164).

The above notion, which suggests that employing appropriate language learning strategies would help students to develop their speaking skill, is consistent with some studies conducted by a number of researchers (among others O'Malley, Chamot, Russo and Kupper, 1989, as cited in Chamot, 1993). These researchers have studied the outcomes of language learning strategies that were taught to English as second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) learners in numerous different tasks, including vocabulary, listening, and speaking tasks. And, the outcomes of the studies revealed that language learning strategies were primarily benefit for the speaking task (Chamot, 1993: 12;

Bialystock, 1978: 42). Furthermore, Rubin (1975 as cited in O'Malley and Chamot, 1993: 3) and Oxford (1990: 16) mention that there are direct strategies (such as memory strategies) and indirect strategies (such as social strategies) that affect language learning to develop their English skills (the discussion about these strategies will be elaborated in Chapter II of this study).

However research concerning language learning strategies to develop speaking skill still receives a little attention in Indonesian EFL context. Therefore, this study aims to investigate language learning strategies to develop speaking skill used by university students; the students are categorized as high, middle, and low achievers. The study will also focus on figuring out the reasons why they employed those strategies. The focus on these topics is considered important to reveal the relationship between language learning strategies and English proficiency.

1.2 Research Questions

In line with the focus of the study, this study attempts to address the following research questions:

(1) What learning strategies are employed by high achiever, middle achiever, and low achiever students in mastering speaking skills?

(2) Why do they employ those strategies?

1.3 The Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study are:

(1) To investigate the language learning strategies employed by high achievers, middle achievers, and low achiever students in mastering speaking skills.

(2) To reveal the reasons why they employed those strategies.

1.4 The Clarification of Terms

In this study, there are several terms that needed to be clearly defined in order to avoid misunderstanding and ambiguity. The definitions of the terms in this study are as follows:

(a) Language learning strategies are specific actions or techniques that learners use to assist their progress in developing second or foreign language skills (Oxford, 1990).

(b) Speaking strategy is the tools for active, self directed involvement needed for developing L2 communicative ability (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

(c) The speaking strategies in this research are not automatically attached to every high achiever, middle achiever, and low achiever student in mastering speaking skills in general but the strategies that were being used by these students by the time they were at their levels when this study was being conducted.

(d) The students participating in this study belong to generally the same level of English proficiency in reading, structure, and listening. They gained their paper-based TOEFL scores around 400-450. However concerning speaking skill, their proficiency levels were different. High achiever students were the students who got their speaking mid-term and final-term tests scores 5 (excellent) - 6 (outstanding), middle achiever

students were those who got their speaking mid-term and final-term tests scores 3 (good) – 4 (very good), and low achiever students were those who got their speaking mid-term and final-term tests scores 1 (below average) – 2 (average).

1.5 The Scope of the Study

This study was conducted to investigate language learning strategies employed by high, middle, and low achiever students in mastering speaking skill as well as the reasons why they employed those strategies.

A number of researchers (Rubin, 1975; Oxford, 1990; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Silberstein, 1994; Mikulecky and Jeffries, 1996; Grabe and Stoller, 2002; Nunan, 2003) have put forward some language learning strategies. However, this study focuses on language learning strategies developed by Oxford (1990) since it includes everything that second/foreign language learners need to be intelligent learners (Wu, 2008). Meanwhile, the elaboration of Oxford's and others researchers' learning strategies will be elaborated in Chapter II of this study.

As mentioned earlier, the study focuses on language learning strategies to enhance speaking skill developed by Oxford (1990). The strategies can be categorized as Direct Strategies and Indirect Strategies (Rubin, 1975; Oxford, 1990). Oxford (1990) elaborates that direct strategies include: (1) memory strategies (creating mental linkages, applying images and sound, reviewing well, and employing action); (2) cognitive strategies (practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning); and (3) compensation strategies (overcoming limitations in speaking); while, indirect strategies include: (1) meta-cognitive strategies (centering learning, arranging and planning

learning, evaluating learning); (2) affective strategies (lowering anxiety, encouraging oneself, and taking emotional temperature); and (3) social strategies (asking questions, cooperating with others, and empathizing with others).

1.6 The Significance of the Study

With regard to the significance of the study, this research has the potential to give implication to the theory, educational practice, and professional practice.

Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the literature on language learning strategies to develop speaking skill which still receives a little attention in Indonesian EFL context.

Based on the fact that many EFL students find it difficult to develop their speaking ability (Petersen, 2010), practically this study would provide these students with the information related to appropriate language learning strategies in developing speaking skill. By using the information provided in this study, it is hoped that the students will gain their self direction. Relevant to this, some researchers (among others Oxford, 1990: 10; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990: 182) believe that self directed students would gradually gain confidence, involvement, and proficiency in speaking ability.

Professionally, the result of this study would provide some information to the EFL teachers, so that it is hoped that EFL teachers could support their students' success in developing the students' speaking skill. This is relevant with Oxford's theory (1990: 10) which indicates that by understanding their students' learning strategies, the teachers would enable the students to become better learners by encouraging their students to take greater self-direction in learning a language.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the introduction of the study which was followed by the research questions and the purpose of the study. This chapter has also put forward some clarification of terms, the scope of the study, and the significance of the study. The next chapter is about the theoretical foundation that relates to language learning strategies (LLS) in developing speaking skill.