

Language Learning Strategies Used for Enhancing Reading Comprehension among Primary Year 6 ESL Pupils

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Abstract

There has been a huge transfiguration of English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching approaches in recent years. In view of this, the importance of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) is indisputable since 21st century teaching focuses on the learning process rather than the learning product. The ability to read is regarded as one of the most crucial skills to be mastered as it requires the readers to subconsciously interact with the writers through various cognitive and metacognitive strategies such as predicting, analysing, summarising, etc. This paper aims to shed light on the LLS employed by 60 primary Year 6 ESL pupils to master reading comprehension at a sub-urban school in Bintulu, Sarawak. Accordingly, Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Survey Questionnaire is adopted in this study to identify the LLS used by the said pupils as they learn to read in English. The data were then discussed and analysed quantitatively in descriptive analysis. Results of the study revealed that compensation strategy is the highly used LLS, while the cognitive related strategy is the minimally used LLS among primary Year 6 ESL pupils in improving their reading comprehension. Future research is suggested to extend the investigation of LLS used towards other language skills in determining the success criteria of an effective language learner.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies (LLS), English as a Second Language (ESL), Reading, Primary School Pupils, Successful Language Learners

Introduction

In this modern era of globalisation, English as a 'Lingua Franca' is being used extensively across the globe for various communication purposes; be it politics, business, education, medicine, etc. (Rao, 2019; Dawi & Hashim, 2022). Unlike the olden days, the use of English is no longer confined to the English world per se, instead its influence has increasingly expanded to the non-native speaking countries due to the globally competitive market. Subsequently, English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching and learning has caught

the attention of the public since English is a prerequisite to flourish in one field. In recent years, there has been a huge transfiguration of ESL teaching approaches, which is from teacher-centred to learner-centred approach (Ali & Zaki, 2019). Consequently, 21st century teachers started to shift their focus to the learning process instead of the learning product; which is where Language Learning Strategies (LLS) come into the picture (Al-Jarf, 2019).

Throughout the years, the rapid development of the education trend has brought about a paradigm shift from 'what to learn' to 'how to learn'; whereby the educators face no options but to implement copious language learning strategies in their teaching methods. It is notable to highlight that every individual has their own preferred learning styles. By analysing pupils' different intelligences, teachers can easily set the learning goals and design differentiated activities to cater their needs (Sener & Çokçaliskan, 2018). This notion is also supported by Alnujaidi (2018) as he claimed that LLS is a pivotal factor that could optimise ESL pupils' learning performance and influence their learning results. Therefore, when the teachers habitually practised LLS in the ESL classrooms, pupils would be given a freedom of choice to adopt their favourable learning styles and teachers can sort out the best teaching methods in the classroom.

As asserted by Ali and Razali (2019), reading skill is regarded as one of the strenuous language skills to be mastered by ESL pupils as it requires them to subconsciously interact with the writers through various cognitive and metacognitive strategies such as predicting, analysing and summarising. In view of this, many ESL pupils have been found struggling to read and comprehend simple sentences as they reach primary six in spite of learning to read since the preschool stage (Chua & Sulaiman, 2021). It might be due to the fact that many of them do not strategically plan their own learning goals in which successful language learners are more likely to employ LLS than the less successful ones. Bursali and Öz (2018) had specifically emphasised on the importance of self-regulation to achieve successful language learning in their study. A self-directed learner generally possesses high metacognitive skill which is their learning awareness; along with a precise goal, self-monitoring quality and high motivation to achieve success.

Hence, this study aims to shed light on the Language Learning Strategies (LLS) used for enhancing reading comprehension among primary Year 6 ESL pupils. Subsequently, two research questions are formulated as follows:

- i. What are the highly used language learning strategies among primary Year 6 ESL pupils in enhancing their reading comprehension?
- ii. What are the minimally used language learning strategies among primary Year 6 ESL pupils in enhancing their reading comprehension?

Literature Review

Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

Every individual is gifted with the ability to learn a new language. English is not different from any other languages in the world, thus can be acquired with the correct means. Nonetheless, learning a new language, particularly a second language is not an easy task as it requires constant practices, continuous exposure and effective strategies to achieve certain language targets (Adan & Hashim, 2021). Basically, Learning Strategies (LS) refers to something used by the learners to facilitate their own learning. It is in line with Cohen's (1995)

proposition where he defined LS as common approaches and specific actions taken to accomplish a learning goal. Throughout the years, many studies have distinguished the term Learning Strategies (LS) from Language Learning Strategies (LLS) in which LS generally refers to approaches in assisting the learners to learn whereas LLS is geared towards the process of learning in acquiring a certain language (Chien, 2010).

LLS has been one of the most researched topics pertaining to language learning since the 1970s. Oxford (1990) stands out among the vast of researchers by recounting LLS in a more detailed and comprehensive manner; in which she had divided LLS into two prime groups; namely Direct Strategies and Indirect Strategies. She then further categorised Direct Strategies into smaller units such as Memory (used for retrieving facts and information), Cognitive (used for comprehending language input and output) and Compensation (used for smart guessing on a new knowledge) as well as Indirect Strategies into Metacognitive (used for planning and evaluating own learning), Affective (used for managing emotions) and Social (used for cooperative learning). Later, Oxford (1999) further narrated LLS as specified actions taken by the pupils to create enjoyable, self-directed and productive learning experiences which are interchangeable to new situations that arise. To sum up, LLS refers to approaches, strategies and techniques to support the learners in acquiring a new language successfully.

Teaching Reading in ESL Context

Reading is considered the cornerstone for every ESL learner who intends to master the English language. As a matter of fact, it is an essential way for pupils to obtain information related to their fields of study (Mundhe, 2015). Often, a pupils' academic performance mirrors his/her reading abilities. If one fails to read, he/she is unlikely to comprehend the material; let alone appreciate the beauty of the knowledge. In many circumstances, non-native English speakers often found it hard to express certain ideas in spite of being fully aware of the meanings that they intend to convey. It is normally due to the lack of exposure in terms of language and culture. Hence, reading has become the life-saver for second language learners as it exposes them with limitless vocabularies and generous context to replace the learning experience that they never receive as the native speakers in the first place. It indirectly supports them to fully understand and learn the language more effectively (Rojalai et al., 2021).

In many situations, ESL pupils will face difficulties in understanding numerous words as they read a text; be it formally written reports or informal factual stories. It is unlikely that the pupils need to search for the dictionaries every time they face a new word. Therefore, it is important that they make intelligent guesses on the meanings of the words based on the context of their reading text. Subsequently, it is supported by Hashim et al (2018), where they claimed that it is critical for the learners to possess a basic degree of knowledge and understand the context presented throughout the reading text, or else they will eventually risk misinterpreting the whole meaning. In light of this, this notion is closely associated with 'compensation strategy' which refers to guessing the meanings of unknown items by dividing them into specific components and using their knowledge of the constituent parts; followed by adding them up again to eventually get a big picture of the text.

All things considered, compensation strategies is indeed a valuable reading strategy in the ESL contexts as it trains them to be accountable learners by making smart guesses; aside

from not demolishing their reading pleasure along the way (Shakarami et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the fact that cognitive strategies are considerably important in mastering reading skill is hard to ignore; which is in line with Aziz and Shah (2020) where they stated that cognitive strategies are amongst the most renowned reading strategies among second language learners. Similarly, Sartika et al (2019) also supported the notion by claiming that the most common strategy adopted by poor learners was cognitive strategy which included tasks like repeating, rehearsing as well as imitating the language.

In Malaysia, reading skill is one of the fundamental components in CEFR-aligned curriculum; aside from listening, speaking and language arts (Curriculum Development Division [CDD], 2021). Under the latest syllabus, each language skill is no longer being taught individually as demanded by the previous KSSR modular system, instead they are embedded in between the lessons and taught interchangeably with one another to produce all-rounded English language learners. Indirectly, it reflected the government's noble efforts, as aligned with the second shift in Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) by putting the emphasis on pupils' bilingualism as pupils are expected to communicate efficiently in both Malay and English language by the end of their school years (MOE, 2013). Nevertheless, a growing number of research regarding ESL pupils' reading challenges have revealed the bitter truth that many ESL pupils struggle to read for simple comprehension and one obvious factor is closely related to the reading instructions adopted in the classroom (Ali & Razali, 2019). Hence, there is an urgency for every ESL educator to diversify their reading strategies that appeal to the majority of the pupils' learning styles (John et al., 2021). This is to ensure that their pupils' reading proficiencies are at par with the expected levels.

Good ESL Language Learners

The concept of LLS is often related to the good traits of a successful language learner. According to Sykes (2015), different ESL classroom environments and teaching strategies might work best for one but not to the others under different circumstances. Nonetheless, a good language learner will go the extra mile by making adjustments to fulfil the demands of the classroom setting and eventually develop his/her preferable learning style throughout the learning journey (Cook, 2013). As the researchers trace back the history tree of LLS, Rubin (1975) seems to be the earliest person who manifested a deep interest in the idea of good language learners; in which she described them as active problem solvers, uninhibited learners; effective communicators; excellent strategy users as well as self-performance evaluators.

As suggested by O'Malley et al (1985), second language learning is principally guarded by effective learning strategies as compared to first language acquisition which is inherited through family backgrounds and surroundings. Consequently, it is significant for every ESL learner to possess certain positive traits in transforming oneself into a successful language learner. First and foremost, self-motivated learners will be able to overcome the upcoming challenges in second language acquisition as the confidence has surpassed the learning anxiety. It is in line with Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis whereby he put forward that the acquired competence of second language would be achieved as the learners' mental block diminishes along the learning process.

Apart from that, a good language learner is expected to own a considerable amount of metacognition which is often associated with the awareness of various learning strategies in regulating his/her own learning (Bursali & Oz, 2018). By having the realisation of their own strengths and weaknesses, the learners can compensate for their shortfall by making further improvements in the future. All in all, it is only by taking into account the interaction of all proposed Language Learning Strategies (LLS), the learners will then be able to decide which strategy suits them best in actualising their learning goal in second language acquisition.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed quantitative research design using survey. The data collected was to examine what are the highly used and minimally used Language Learning Strategies among primary Year 6 ESL pupils in enhancing their reading comprehension.

Research Sample

In this study, the researchers applied the purposive sampling technique to select the research sample. A total of 60 pupils from a primary sub-urban school in Bintulu, Sarawak were selected to investigate the Language Learning Strategies (LLS) used for enhancing reading comprehension among primary Year 6 ESL pupils. 28 of them were male participants (46.7%) and the other 32 participants were female (53.3%). There were two classes for that particular year, with 30 pupils in each class. Generally, the pupils had intermediate to advanced levels of proficiency in English. Besides, they learn English as their second language in school.

Research Instrument

A survey questionnaire, adopted from the Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0 was utilised to contemplate the frequency of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) used for enhancing reading comprehension among the research participants. It was modified to a simpler version to meet the pivot of the study on reading comprehension, which comprised 18 statements that were divided into six parts, known as memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social. Substantially, the questionnaire items were classified and arranged according to a five-point Likert scale where the pupils had to select the responses that best describe themselves.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The questionnaire was distributed and administered during the face-to-face English language lessons in school. The respondents were given plenty of time to answer the questionnaire and it was collected right away after they had responded. Subsequently, the data collected was analysed with descriptive statistics using frequency counts, percentages and mean scores to identify the highly and minimally used LLS in enhancing their reading comprehension.

Findings and Discussion

Within this segment, the findings of the survey accorded to reading strategies preferred by ESL learners were described. This study examined both direct and indirect strategies in primary school students' language learning. The result was obtained from face-to-face English language lessons in school. Strategies preferred by participants will be further

provided and discussed to respond to the research aims and the research questions. The results revealed that compensation strategies are the strategies participants used the most while cognitive strategies are the least.

Table 1

Mean score of each reading strategies preferred by ESL learners

MEMORY STRATEGIES		
No.	Specific Strategies	Mean Score
1.	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	3.28
2.	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	3.03
3.	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	3.38
COGNITIVE STRATEGIES		
No.	Specific Strategies	Mean Score
4.	I read for pleasure in English.	2.23
5.	I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.	2.32
6.	I make summaries of information that I read in English.	2.52
COMPENSATION STRATEGIES		
No.	Specific Strategies	Mean Score
7.	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	4.00
8.	I read English without looking up every new word.	3.95
9.	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	3.75
METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES		

No.	Specific Strategies	Mean Score
10.	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	3.32
11.	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	3.10
12.	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	3.15

AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

No.	Specific Strategies	Mean Score
13.	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	3.48
14.	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	2.95
15.	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	3.40

SOCIAL STRATEGIES

No.	Specific Strategies	Mean Score
16.	I practice English with other students.	3.00
17.	I ask for help from English speakers.	3.17
18.	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	2.80

Pinpointing on the prior research question of the research, Table 1 illustrates that the participants are prone towards using the language learning strategies in a specific order. They favoured to employ compensation strategies (M = 3.90), followed by affective strategies (M = 3.28), memory strategies (M = 3.22), metacognitive strategies (M = 3.19), social strategies (M = 2.99) and lastly cognitive strategies (M = 2.36). Firstly, it can be seen that the highly employed strategy in enhancing pupils' reading comprehension is compensation strategy. Based on Table 1, the majority of participants used compensation to learn and improve their reading comprehension in English. The results were aligned with the study by Shakarami et al (2017); Haida et al (2018) in which guessing meaning under the compensation strategies is the highest.

Rendering to Oxford's (1990) explanation, the strategy used is considered high if its mean value (M) is between 3.5 and 5.0, medium for mean values between 2.5 and 3.4, and low for values between 1.0 and 2.4. Accordingly, the value figure for use of compensation strategies revealed here is considerably high. Hence, the results suggested that the compensation strategies are among the most utilised strategies amongst participants in enhancing their reading comprehension skills. As stated in Table 1, the most employed compensation strategy is item 7, "*to understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses*" in which it shows the mean score (M = 4.00), followed by item 8, "*I read English without looking up every new word*" (M = 3.95), whereas the least compensation strategy used is item 9, "*I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English*" with a mean score (M = 3.75).

Pertaining to item 7 under compensation strategy, "*to understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses*", the data showed that the majority of respondents employed word guessing strategy in dealing with unfamiliar words to improve their reading comprehension skill. In view of this, as the pupils come across new vocabularies, they will tend to make intelligent guesses on the meanings based on the reading context. This is in line with Hashim's et al. (2018) study where they believe that word guessing techniques by clues and contexts are helpful to improve the readers' comprehension in the long run. Thus, it can be deduced that by making intelligent guesses, language learners are able to skilfully guess a word's meaning by using surrounding words as non-linguistic and linguistic hints. Therefore, compensation strategies permit the learners to be accountable for their own reading process; thus, becoming the most used strategy in enhancing their reading comprehension (Shakarami et al., 2017).

In the same way, a mean score of (M = 3.95) of the respondents utilised the strategy by reading without searching for every new word. This is most probably because the learners applied the strategy of skimming and scanning as well as looking at the context of the sentence itself. Accordingly, they used skimming and scanning methods as well as looking at the context of the phrase itself, to infer the meaning of certain unfamiliar terms. In the same way, as explained by Oxford's (1990), in using the linguistic clues strategy, learners use linguistic understanding of suffixes, prefixes, and syntactic arrangement to guess for definitions. In short, it is fundamental for the pupils to have a certain layer of information and understanding towards the context to avoid mistakenly comprehending the meaning of the whole context (Hashim et al., 2018).

Thereafter, Table 1 also indicates the strategies and mean scores for the least employed cognitive strategy amongst the participants. Conversely, the results were in contrast with the findings from Aziz and Shah (2020) as well as Sartika and Santihastutiin (2019) in which they stated that cognitive strategies are typically found to be the most popular strategies among language learners in learning to read. According to Sartika et al. (2019), the most common strategy adopted by poor learners was cognitive strategy that included tasks like repeating, rehearsing and imitating the language. However, this paper has made a shocking discovery; whereby the least employed LLS strategy is cognitive strategy. For instances, the statement in item 4, "*I read for pleasure in English*" portrays a mean score of (M = 2.23) whereas the most cognitive strategy used is item 6, "*I make summaries of information that I read in English*" with a mean score (M = 2.52). The item 5, "*I first skim an*

English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully” also has a relatively low mean score, which is (M = 2.32).

As mentioned earlier, the findings reveal that cognitive strategies are the most underused strategies as the participants learn reading comprehension. In this case, the results proved that the participants hardly ever read for enjoyment in which the mean score shown is (M = 2.23) and also less intention to comprehend the context of the reading after skimming the context with a mean score of (M = 2.32). It is aligned with Krashen's (1982) proposition on his affective filter hypothesis whereby second language learning will be difficult to achieve as learners build up a mental language block along the learning process. Similarly, the participants struggled to make a summary of the text based on their understanding after they had completed the initial reading. This is due to the fact that they could not comprehend the context and they found it difficult to understand the meanings beyond their knowledge zone. Eventually, they tended to simply skim the context; leaving all question marks and queries expanding in their mind. For this reason, it will be challenging for them to make recap of the texts as they cannot truly understand the whole message of their reading. Kendeou et al. (2014) also conveyed the opinion that readers who are weak in making summaries undoubtedly struggle to comprehend all but the easiest texts, since they are unable to identify important links that provide comprehensibility to their text depictions.

Previously mentioned, the least favoured strategy is the cognitive related strategy. In this context, cognitive strategies are psychological strategies the learner uses to make sense of learning. The majority of the young language learners still have limited language knowledge which restricted them to manipulate the language material in direct ways. In more serious notes, they probably found it hard and ended up losing interest in learning the language when they were asked to receive and reorganise the information to develop stronger schemas. This may have been a reason why cognitive strategies are the least favourable among the young participants. In the same way, when a young reader is repeatedly not successful in understanding texts that he or she has read, this indicates reading challenges at the processing level. These challenges can bring about themselves in various ways: failing to recall the main points of a story, failing to respond to inferential and literal inquiries, failing to accomplish the actual reading of the text and feeling demotivated to proceed (Kendeou et al., 2014). Thus, cognitive strategies are the least favourable among the young participants.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study elucidated the Language Learning Strategies (LLS) employed by primary Year 6 ESL pupils in mastering reading comprehension. The findings of the study indicated that compensation strategy is the highly used LLS, while cognitive related strategy is the minimally used LLS in improving their reading comprehension. Therefore, it serves as a reference for ESL educators to be more aware of the pupils' favourable LLS. Given that English is the requisite language in this globalised 21st century, LLS acts as the adjuvant in increasing learners' motivation to learn the language.

Meanwhile, it is notable to highlight that there is no one man's job in the field of education, especially in the process of acquiring a language. Hence, both the educators and learners need to be acquainted with the broad array of LLS and explore which strategies work best for their learners and themselves respectively. All in all, this study provides a new insight

to aid educators in assisting their pupils to apply satisfactory LLS in enhancing their reading comprehension. It is recommended that prospective researchers can extend the investigation of LLS used towards other language skills such as listening, speaking and writing in determining the success criteria of an effective language learner.

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