

## Language Learning Strategies Used by Year 5 Urban National Primary School Students in Enhancing Reading Skill

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### Abstract

Language learning strategy is an important part of the learning process as it significantly influenced the effectiveness of language acquisition. Reading being part of the English language has its own set of strategies derived from specific preferences, skills, and language proficiency depending on the learners' composition. Consequently, these strategies shall be the determinants of the extent to which the English language proficiency could be further improved and explored on. The purpose of this research is to look into the reading strategies utilised by urban national primary school students. A quantitative research method employing a survey was used in this study. A questionnaire adapted from Andrew D. Cohen and Rebecca L. Oxford was used to collect the data from 35 Year 5 students in an urban school in Kuala Lumpur. The data is then analysed using descriptive analysis with table and frequency

count. The findings indicate that the language learning strategies (LLS) provide an overview of the most favoured reading strategies used by the Year 5 students. This will aid the teachers by providing fresh insights into acceptable reading practices that will attract the most interest from students as well as exposing them to the other reading strategies. On this foundation, while planning reading lessons, teachers can take into account the types of reading resources, activities, and the students' preferences.

**Keywords:** ESL Learners, Language Learning Strategies (LLS), Reading Skill, Primary School, Malaysia

### **Introduction**

Since English is the world's most widely spoken language, its significance cannot be understated. Due to technological advancements, the English language has become increasingly vital in a variety of fields, including medicine, engineering, and education, (Nishanthi, 2018). Considering English is not the native language of Malaysians, teaching English is an essential component that must be emphasised. However, according to research done by Yaccob and Yunus (2019), students become unmotivated when they are unable to grasp the subjects and activities presented in English classes. Students were discouraged and unmotivated by an outdated method of teaching English in and out of the classroom, according to Lie (2017). Azlan et al (2020) also mentioned a lack of interest and difficulty concentrating on their studies, highlighting challenges exacerbated by the COVID 19 virus's ever-changing nature in classrooms. It is also advised that teachers, in their role as facilitators, should assist and support students by offering appropriate learning strategies.

English is considered a second language in Malaysia, according to Article 152, and is obliged to be taught for eleven years, from Standard One to Form Five (Hashimah, 2008; Nazri, 2013), in (Dawi et al., 2021). Reading is a crucial skill in English studies since it provides as a bridge towards other skills that will assist pupils improve their writing and speaking abilities. According to Krashen (2007), a skilled reader will become competent in other abilities such as writing, speaking, and vocabulary acquisition. According to Sulaiman et al (2015), teachers should begin reading classes with enjoyable phonics lessons, then channel opportunities to apply the phonics skills all through the reading classes, demonstrating ability to comprehend of written passages using dictionary expertise, word identification, and better verbal skills, which are used to create the meaning of sentences. Other than that, these abilities are crucial for the students to be able to do self reading for knowledge and entertainment and they must achieve this level of competency by the end of Year 6. As a result, teachers employ a variety of language learning techniques to guarantee that the students will excel in reading.

This is where language learning strategies play a prominent role as these techniques are used to increase students' interest and enthusiasm for learning all of the language skills. There are three types of learning techniques, according to O'Malley et al (1990); cognitive, metacognitive and social techniques. He went on to say that goal-setting, monitoring, and self-evaluation are all part of metacognitive language acquisition. Cognitive language acquisition, on the other hand, is dealing with information, such as obtaining, determining meaning from context, using a dictionary, remembering data via memorization and repetition, and recalling it. Besides, activities that include cooperation between classmates and teachers are the key component of the social learning technique. According to Al (2012), an effective language learner is one who can select the optimal language learning technique

for themselves, as well as the ability to monitor their progress and self-consciousness. These helpful language learning strategies will help students improve their English reading skills by helping them comprehend the understanding of the message, guess vocabulary from the text, make generalisations from reading materials, find similar meanings for words, and identify the style of reading texts being written.

Students have the option to select the best reading techniques for them in order to reach the maximum degree of reading. This research, therefore, attempts to identify language learning strategies employed by learners in a primary urban school in Kuala Lumpur to enhance their reading skill. This study will respond to a specific research question: What are the most prominent language learning methods used by students to improve their reading skill in an urban primary school? The outcomes of this study will aid teachers in recognising language learning methodologies, especially in reading skill, for a specific set of students, as well as planning reading lessons that are regarded relevant to their students' requirements, interests, levels, and skills. Aside from that, this study will extend the pupils' horizons of the various option in other language learning strategies for their reading skills. Students interpret the reading process differently and face different challenges during the process according to their level of competency. This level of competency will influence their reading attitude (Braden, 2012). A better examination of the activities made by students when reading second language texts might provide insight into the students' preferred language learning techniques.

### **Literature Review**

#### *Language Learning Strategies (LLS)*

Initially, Oxford (1989) defined Language Learning Strategies (LLS) as behaviours that learners used to make successful, self-directed and more entertaining language learning. Even so, a year later, Oxford (1990) broaden the characterization of LLS as distinct actions appropriated by learners to ease the learning process in terms of speed, enjoyment, self-directedness and transferability to different new situations. These two definitions of LLS emphasized learners' autonomy that can be manifested on multiple levels, something which can be used in facilitating the mastery of the targeted language (TL). On the other hand, many other scholars, in due course, focused their attention on learners' awareness as LLS stimulates the processes of both the learning and the usage of language. Hence, the definition of LLS was instead fine-tuned to emphasize the cognitive aspect of LLS. O'Malley and Chamot (1990), as well as Macaro (2003), defined LLS based on learners' cognitive processes such as special thoughts and behaviours that give assistance to learners' comprehension and retention of newly discovered information. Okada et al. (1996), for instance, also asserted that LLS improved the process of cultivating the behaviour of noticing, storage and retrieval countenance of the TL. This in turn supported the description of LLS by Cohen (1998) as a conscious process determined by learners. It was these notions that imposed the preliminaries for the classifications of strategies.

With the actuality of the classification of strategies, Oxford (1990) propounded that LLS should be divided into direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies involved memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies. Alternatively, indirect strategies focused on metacognitive, affective and social strategies. These were also put forward by O'Malley and Chamot (1990), who differentiated between metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies. As mentioned by Oxford (1996), learners who avail themselves of

memory strategy were most likely inclined towards learning through the employment of images and categorization as it helped with the retention and recall of learned knowledge. As another option, learners who favoured cognitive strategies, preferred recording, practising and evaluating experiences (Tiing et al., 2021). In the same manner that learners who opted for the compensatory route, commonly indulged in speculation and tactics that utilised rephrasing to acquaint learners with new information. Conversely, Alzubi et al (2019) mentioned that metacognitive learners valued tasks with self-monitoring, concentration and intricate planning. It was because learners were able to reap the advantages as it enhanced their ability to recall, perceive and synthesise learned information. LLS that elaborated on affective strategy, mostly direct learners' self-encouragement and positive behaviours in learning the TL (Avelino et al., 2021). Therefore, learners of affective strategy will be more comfortable with proactively conversing and forming connections during tasks.

Namaziandost et al (2020) made a point of certain strategies which were believed to be superior over the other unsuccessful ones. However, as revealed by Ellis and Sinclair (1989), it was imperative for learners to have both awareness and consistent reflection towards factors that affect their learning strategies. As cited by Adnan et al (2021), many factors may influence the utilisation of LLS as it fluctuated from age, gender, individual preferences, culture differences and proficiency levels. There were several past studies that attested to learners' successful awareness and ubiquitous recognition of factors affecting language learning. According to Bayuong et al (2019), motivation played a significant factor in the usage of LLS. Motivation will effectively direct learners' behaviour in using learning strategy as they have the passion and perseverance to achieve their language learning objectives. In another study by Othman et al (2022), older learners with scientific discipline in education portrayed their inclination towards metacognitive and cognitive strategies over social and affective approaches in language learning. Similarly, a study conducted by Gaoat et al (2022), found out that indigenous learners of a minority group also preferred using cognitive skills such as realising their own preferred learning styles and needs as well as organising accomplishments in language learning tasks in reducing their English Language Anxiety.

In addition, as reported by Tiing et al (2021), male learners have metacognitive tendencies in learning vocabulary whereby they would spend some time learning vocabulary every day, will use various strategies to learn new vocabulary and have a clear goal in vocabulary learning. With regards to the factor of learners' preferences in LLS, Atmowardoyo and Sakkir (2021) entrenched the belief of learners' behaviour change to the inclusion of choosing suitable materials and learning media such as Webtoon, Wattpad, Instagram and Mangadex as part of the language used strategy to improve their reading skills. Learners' preferences do prevail in influencing the usage of LLS in learning a language skill to a certain extent. However, like many other studies mentioned previously, the cognitive strategy was still often used to consolidate a language skill mainly due to learners' level of proficiency. As specified by Tomak (2022), higher than average proficient readers tend to use strategies that engage the in-depth analysis of text structurally and meaningfully to learn the TL. In this context, these learners identify synonyms and different structures used in the text for understanding. The distinctiveness of strategies was critically highlighted here because of their role in language learning. For this reason, the effectiveness of LLS was solely dependent on how learners made use of the materials and strategies.

### Reading Skill Strategies

Reading is an interactive activity in which readers utilise their reading abilities to produce a clear interpretation of a text. Effective reading skills are important skills that have garnered a great deal of attention in terms of improving students' reading abilities. Reading is also defined as an active process of getting the connotation from textual materials (Anderson et al., 1985). It necessitates the coordination of numerous connected sources of data. Wixson et al (1987) then defined reading as the procedure of meaning production that takes into account the prior knowledge of the readers, their textual descriptions, and the reading setting. Looking at reading strategies, Baker and Brown (1984) described them as deliberate and cognitive tasks that students engage in and implement during reading to help them develop and sustain meaning. Trabasso and Bouchard (2002); Pressley (2006) believed that reading strategies are purposeful acts that readers participate in before, while, and even after reading in order to derive true gist of the text. They are specific practices that being employed by readers to encourage proactive, proficient, and deliberate reading. Moreover, readers employed a range of reading strategies and were cognizant of when, why and how to implement them during the reading process. The efficacy of readers' reading strategies is related to their language abilities (Shen, 2003; Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). According to numerous studies, readers with high competency strive to interpret a text using global approaches (Kletzien, 1991; Zhang & Wu, 2009) meanwhile readers with lower skill try to grasp a text by employing approaches that are ineffective (Gan et.al., 2004; Zhang & Wu, 2009). It could be highlighted that the reading strategies vary according to the reading proficiencies of the learners.

Many researchers and experts in the field of reading have expressed their opinions about reading skill in ESL during the last few decades. The emergence of a substantial number of reading models resulted from the existence of an amalgamation of viewpoints. The studies done on reading skill has expanded beyond the models of reading to include the techniques that are required to reach the reading goal. This is because researchers argue that a lack of studies done on reading strategies and the shortage of appropriate reading strategies are the main factor that contributes to the increased challenges in reading comprehension (Garner, 1987). Hence, it is critical to alleviate some of the previous studies which are pertinent to this study. In one of the previous studies, Su (2001) looked at the impact of reading practices on students' reading abilities which then revealed that the readers' reading strategies are quite beneficial in improving their reading abilities. According to the findings in a research done by Song (1998), it was found that specific reading strategies are important aspects of boosting reading comprehension abilities among learners. This study also suggested that explicit approach training should be included in foreign language reading. On the other hand, Malcolm (2009) looked at the reading strategies' awareness whereby the results of data analysis from a questionnaire completed by 160 participants revealed that metacognitive reading strategies were often utilised by the learners. It can be seen that the learners with low proficiencies are prone to using translation strategy more than the others whereas the learners with higher proficiencies are less likely to utilise this method.

According to Cziko (1980), higher proficiency ESL learners rely on syntactic, semantic and discourse clues whereas the lower proficiency learners focus on a strategy that evaluates the orthographic characteristics of text words. In another study, Park (2010) found that while

reading the real expository or technical writings in English, students used metacognitive strategies frequently. Nonetheless, when they are exposed to English-language narratives, this intensity decreases. Additionally, this research discovered that the more reading strategies were engaged, the greater the potential for reading comprehension. In addition, Omar (2014) conducted a more recent study that looked into the online reading practices in general rather than focusing on any specific demographic factors. This study shows that the supportive strategy was used the least whereas the problem-solving strategy was used the most. It can also be deduced that according to his research, the participants were average strategies users.

### Methodology

The research design employed in this study was a survey research design. This study aims to investigate the reading strategies utilised by urban national primary school students in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. This study involved 35 Year 5 students with varying levels of English proficiency who came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. The researcher utilised convenient sampling whereby only one Year 5 class was selected from the school. The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions that focus on reading skill in the English language and were distributed online through Google Form. The questionnaire was adapted from the Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey (Cohen & Oxford, 2002). The items are structured by using simple sentences to accommodate different types of respondents with varied proficiencies. Descriptive analysis has been employed and the data is then tabulated into frequency counts and percentages.

### Findings and Discussion

This study has investigated the language learning strategies utilised by the students to improve their reading abilities. Table 1 showed the frequency and the percentage of each language learning strategy for reading skills according to three categories. The first category is for those who have been utilising the strategy and wish to continue doing so; the second category belongs to students who have not used the strategy but are interested in trying whereas the third category is for those who believe that the strategy is incompatible with their learning preferences. Descriptive analysis was conducted to analyse the reading strategies trend among the Year 5 students.

Table 1

*Frequency/ Percentage of each language learning strategy*

Language Learning Strategies		Frequency/ Percentage (%)		
		I use this strategy and I like it	I've never use this strategy but am interested in it	This strategy doesn't fit for me.
1	Read as much as I can in English.	18 (51.4%)	14 (40%)	3 (8.6%)
2	Try to find English language materials to read for fun.	20 (57.1%)	10 (28.57%)	5 (14.3%)

3	Search for reading material in English that is at or close to my level.	15 (42.8%)	16 (45.7%)	4 (11.4%)
4	Plan ahead of time how I'll read the text, keep track of my progress, and then double-check my understanding.	12 (34.3%)	12 (34.3%)	11 (31.4%)
5	Skim a text to get the main idea and then read it back to check understanding.	13 (37.1%)	13 (37.1%)	9 (25.7%)
6	Re-read dialogues and short stories until I understand.	18 (51.4%)	8 (22.9%)	9 (25.7%)
7	Concentrate on the text's layout, particularly the headings and subheadings.	15 (42.8%)	12 (34.3%)	8 (22.9%)
8	Make ongoing summaries while reading the text.	19 (54.3%)	9 (25.7%)	7 (20%)
9	Predict what will happen next.	23 (68.6%)	8 (22.9%)	4 (11.4%)
10	Use hints from the reading text to guess the meaning of words.	25 (71.4%)	5 (14.3%)	5 (14.3%)
11	Understand the word in my first language with the help of a dictionary.	17 (48.6%)	10 (28.6%)	8 (22.9%)
12	I use an English-English dictionary to search for the meaning of the words.	9 (25.7%)	17 (48.6%)	9 (25.7%)

Table 1 depicts twelve distinct language learning strategies employed to improve the Year 5 students' reading abilities which are adjacent to the remarks by Trabasso and Bouchard (2002); Pressley (2006) who stated that effective reading strategies should encompass learners' participation before, while, and after reading. These strategies could also cater to the diversified students within the class, as mentioned by Adnan et al (2021), gender, individual preferences, culture differences and proficiency levels could affect the preferred learning strategies. There are six most common strategies each with the participation of more than half of the participants that were used to develop reading skills. It could be interpreted that the most common strategy that the students utilised is by guessing the meaning of words using clues from the reading text (71.4%). This suggests that nearly all Year 5 pupils are aware of the strategy and use it in their daily routine.

As second language learners, the participants learn by guessing the meaning of words based on the context of the text. This allows them to deduce the meaning of words without checking the dictionary. Predicting what will happen next in reading a text construct is the second most utilised strategy by the participants (68.6%) followed up by selecting English items to read for fun as the third most employed by the participants (57.1%). Apart from engaging their cognitive skills, the participants appear to be more inclined in using reading strategies that include imagination and fun-based experiences. The other three strategies that were found to be popular among Year 5 students are reading as much as possible, re-read texts to improve understanding of the context, and reading while concurrently summarizing the key points each receiving slightly more than half participation (51.4%, 51.4%, and 54.3% respectively). These strategies were categorised as the cognitive strategies by O'Malley and Chamot (1990); Macaro (2003); Tiing et al (2021); Baker and Brown (1984), and were proven to be able to

improve comprehension and sustain learning which is further supported by (Okada et al., 1996).

Surprisingly, the least utilised strategy by the participants (25.7%) is the one that received the highest interest for future use (48.6%). About half of the participants appear to be enthusiastic about utilising an English-to-English dictionary as a means to improve their language learning abilities in reading. This may be beneficial to the students since they will not only learn the meaning of the words but the structures as well as their application in complete sentences. The next most appealing strategy for students is to look for English reading material that is at or near their levels (45.7%) even though they have not used it previously. This might be due to the fact that materials that suit their level are mostly comprehensible and relatable, thus promoting interest among the learners (Bayoung et.al., 2019). This would help to suffice their learning as it serves as a more casual learning activity. Another interesting fact is that despite almost half of the participants did not undertake reading as much English material as possible as part of their routine activity, a significant portion of them (40%) are actually interested in exploring this strategy. This is probably due to the strategy being the most accessible, requiring the least amount of preparation, and most notably easily integrated into their current routine.

A third of the participants (31.4%) on the other hand experienced difficulty in metacognitive strategies (Alzubi et al., 2019; Ellis and Sinclair, 1989), involving planning ahead their reading activity followed by performing self-reflective analysis to supplement their learning. This strategy by far is the least favored among the Year 5 students probably owing to the extensive process of the strategy. On top of that, using an English-to-English dictionary to find out the meaning of the words was among the least popular strategy used by the participants to enhance their reading ability (25.7%). This is most likely linked to their nature since the participants prefer to look up the term that offers definitions in their mother tongue language in order to make sense of the meaning of the words. According to Malcolm (2009), this particular group of students is categorised as low proficiency learners as they are inclined towards the use of translation strategy in order to enhance their reading skill. Another two strategies that shared the same perspective as least favored by the Year 5 pupils are skimming through and re-reading materials to enhance understanding of the context of the text which is perhaps too tedious for some of them.

Table 2

*Other strategies utilised by the students*

<b>I use other reading strategies such as _____</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>1</b> Read song lyrics	10
<b>2</b> Read comics and storybooks	6
<b>3</b> Read subtitles of movies and YouTube videos	4
<b>4</b> Read Instagram caption	1

In a subsequent section, the participants were asked to state additional personalised language learning strategies they utilised to improve their reading ability. The section is not compulsory for the participants but they may put their own thoughts into it and are not limited to a single answer. Among the ideal language learning strategies employed by the students include reading song lyrics, reading comics and storybooks, reading the subtitles of



any movies or YouTube videos as well as reading Instagram captions. This is relevant to the findings by Bayoung et.al (2019) who mentioned that students are more positively engaged in learning if it involves materials that they are passionate about and intrigues their interest to explore. In this study, the Year 5 students are more inclined towards the socio-affective strategy given that they are well exposed to the social media age and virtual interactions. This could serve as an addition to the study done by Othman et al (2022) whereby the older learners do seem to prefer metacognitive and cognitive strategies whereas the younger learners are leaning towards the social and affective approach.

Table 2 displays that reading song lyrics appear to be the most viable strategy among the students with ten documented responses. This might be due to the fact that students enjoy listening to music and they read the lyrics to fully comprehend the songs. Another notable reading strategy that the students utilised is reading comics and storybooks which recorded six responses. As with listening to songs, some other students prefer reading entertaining comics and books. Four students indicated that reading subtitles of movies and YouTube videos are an important element of their reading strategy while there is only one response mentioning that reading Instagram captions is beneficial as a reading strategy. This discovery could be utilised by the teachers to incorporate learning material that entices the learners through socially and affectively engaging interactions. This, in return, will promote positive behavioural change as mentioned by Atmowardoyo and (Sakkir, 2021).

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the study showed that the majority of the Year 5 participants commonly used the strategy that includes guessing the meaning of words using clues from the reading text (71.4%). Besides, many documented responses by the participants preferred reading song lyrics as the most viable personalised strategy to improve reading skills. This implied that the participants were well aware of their learning strategy as they were able to use this cognitive strategy either consciously or unconsciously during their reading tasks. Moreover, the participants' personal preferences in choosing their reading strategy were very prevalent in the study. As the participants rather enjoyed listening to music, they usually took the initiative to read the song lyrics as a way to comprehend the meaning of the songs. On the other side of the spectrum, it was denoted that the least used strategy by the participants was utilising an English-to-English dictionary as a means to improve their language learning abilities in reading (25.7%). Most likely due to participants settling upon using their mother tongue to make sense of the meaning. In terms of the documented response, personalised strategy such as reading Instagram captions was not considered to be a popular strategy used by the participants.

This study heavily connoted that identifying the learners' LLS will be able to ameliorate the acquisition of the L2 in an ESL setting. On the account of different factors affecting the learning strategies. This was greatly supported by Ellis and Sinclair (1989), as it was imperative for learners to have both awareness and consistent reflection on factors that affect their learning strategies. These factors may include learners' personal preferences, level of proficiencies and learning needs. As advocated by Samat and Hashim (2019), teachers should ensure that the teaching and learning process meets the needs of learners' individuality and differences. Moreover, Namaziandost et al (2020) pointed out there will be certain strategies that were believed to be superior over the other unsuccessful ones. Hence, teachers should

have the wisdom in choosing appropriate LLS for their learners. Equally, teachers should also know how to guide learners to plan and use LLS of their choice, taking into account the classification of strategies to further master the ESL skills.

For future research, the researchers can focus on the LLSs for all four language skills including grammar and vocabulary to obtain commensurate data on LLS among Malaysian English language learners. Since this research was focusing only on upper primary participants in a primary school, there is a need to extend the focus to lower primary school participants whereby their exposure to English was still elementary. This was to make sure that an in-depth understanding of the factors affecting LLS can be made which will be beneficial for ESL teaching practices in Malaysian Primary Schools. Overall, the findings of this study are by no means an immeasurable benefit to the language teachers in primary schools. This study will help them to ensure their teaching approaches accommodate the needs of the learners. Aside from that, this research also will make sure there will be sustainability in the Malaysian education system as no learners were left behind in the system due to its constant focus on changing different LLS with the passage of time and learners' differences.

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