

Language Learning Strategies Used by Year 5 ESL Students in Improving Writing Skill

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Abstract

The noteworthy feature that marks a huge distinction among language learners from all walk of life is Language Learning Strategy. Employing tailor-made strategies in acquiring a language skill is an essential attribute of a good language learner. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the most prevailing techniques from all the six Language Learning Strategies (LLS). The instrument applied in this study to amass data is a questionnaire which is adopted from Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford (1990). This questionnaire embodies all the six Language Learning Strategies (LLS), namely the Memory Strategy, Cognitive Strategy, Compensation Strategy, Metacognitive Strategy, Affective Strategy, and Social Strategy with the inclusion of statements which are germane to the respective strategy. The gathered data were analyzed using the descriptive statistics analysis method and the findings were tabulated. Based on the outcomes of the research, the participants prefer a vast assemblage technique from all the six Language Learning Strategies (LLS). As for the future study, the focus of the study can be directed towards the factors that affecting the preference over a particular language learning strategy.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategy, Writing, Students and ESL

Introduction

Language skills are required for individuals to appropriately express their thoughts toward others, and great interaction can only be achieved by mastering all four language skills which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Avelino et al., 2021). Therefore, language learners should focus further on language skills because they are the most crucial in improving both verbal and written communication skills.

Learners have been taught to write since they first learnt the English language, which is one of the abilities involved in the process of teaching and learning English. In classrooms, teaching and learning writing primarily concentrates on the topics of the writing, where educators and learners usually will be analysing a particular topic jointly or can be called as

brainstorming. In writing, one of the teaching styles is brainstorming. Brainstorming assists learners in creating new ideas. Furthermore, brainstorming is a method of developing topic-related views and will guide learners in concentrating more precisely on a specific thing that most suits the topic (Yulianti, 2018). Then, the analysed ideas mentioned during the class discussion will be presented in the learners' written work.

Although learners were being taught with writing skills at early age, but there are few reasons that makes the mastering writing skill process lacking in progress (Fareed et al., 2016). One of it is where ESL learners do not have the same prior knowledge as native English users, so it is harder for them to write effectively (Cole & Feng, 2015). Moreover, their knowledge on vocabulary is normally constrained. When if they do interact verbally and be acknowledged by body language but, writing is indeed a challenging situation for them since they try to explain themselves without using hand gestures. Learners who deal with two or more languages require additional work time outside the classroom, unfortunately they are often not used to such privilege. Due to the difficulties in writing skills, language learning strategies are required to assist learners in acquiring all of the capabilities necessary to improve their writing skills. Therefore, educators must keep up with the newest improvements in writing techniques and technology resources in order to explore the latest and innovative ways of teaching writing (Rao, 2019).

According to Chamot (2001), language learning strategies are procedures, techniques, methods, and behaviours which learners apply to assist them to understand and remember both language and information about the topic. Adding to this concept, Yulianti, (2018) stated that language learning strategies refers to processes and tools utilized by ESL learners to recognise and categorize language items by comprehending, acquiring, or preserving new skills by analysis and observation. The appropriate language learning strategies is critical in making sure that learners have the greatest and most effective ways of learning a language, especially a second language. Language learning strategies not just make language learning easier, but they also influence the process by having a huge impact on the progression of self-development to language acquisition (Little et al., 2017).

A strategy can be classified as either direct or indirect, according to (Oxford, 1990). Direct strategies are language learning strategies that work directly with the target language. Memory, cognition, and compensatory strategies are among the strategies offered. However, indirect strategies enhance and maintain language acquisition without incorporating the target language directly. Metacognitive, emotional, and social techniques are among the strategies available. Despite the wide range of language learning strategies, they all work together to help learners improve their language capacities.

Many people have talked about the role of language learning strategies, but not enough has been said about how language learning strategies helps Malaysian primary level English as a Second Language (ESL) learners learn effectively. Thus, the purpose of this research is to obtain a deeper knowledge of the critical function of language learning strategies in primary school ESL learners in improving writing skill. As a result of the findings, educators will be able to enhance and promote learners' preferred language learning approaches in intended to facilitate them improve and develop their writing skills.

Research Objective

- To identify the most preferred strategy employed by the year 5 pupils in learning English Writing.

Research Question

- What is the most preferred strategy employed by the year 5 pupils in learning English Writing?

Literature Review

Writing Skill

Huy (2015) stated that writing is a predominant skill but it is also a challenging skill to master because it consists of the process of brainstorming, drafting, and revising. According to Rodsawang (2017), the learners face a variety of issues in their writing such as grammar, lexicon, phrasing, issues in writing styles and writing abilities. These are the writing challenges that most of the learners confront nowadays. Apparently, the learners should possess certain essential linguistic skill in order to write effectively.

Writing will be used for instructional practices, assessment purposes and language development. Kalipa (2014) claimed that writing should be taught in a stimulating way in order to achieve the higher level of pupil's satisfaction and long-term learning that lasts far beyond the end of our lessons. Ngubane (2020) also stipulated that writing should be taught in an interesting way to create a positive environment and an atmosphere of mutual respect. In this case, the different techniques or activities that the educators use to teach writing skills would help them to get the pupils' attention throughout the learning process. For the beginners, the educators should teach how to put the words together in order to learn the sentence construction. Hossain (2015) insisted that the learners need to practise the art of putting the words together in sentences to construct sentences with better sentence structure. When the learners know the connections between the words, they will be able to construct their sentences easily and correctly. Bahtiar (2021) stated that games offer a medium for learners to explore and learn information in a fun and interactive way. Aliasaa (2011) also mentioned that writing skills should be taught using interesting activities and efficient language learning strategies to make the learning more effective and fun. Thus, Chand (2014) asserted that language learning strategy plays a fundamental role in teaching and learning writing skills.

The Importance of Language Learning Strategies in Writing

According to Hardan (2013) language learning strategies refer to the process and practices that language learners intentionally apply to assist them to acquire or utilise a language efficiently. It also has been stated as the conscious choices and operationalizations by the language learners to assist them in conducting a variety of activities from the very beginning of the process of acquisition in order to higher their language competency. Gavriilidou (2010) stated that language learning strategy is the particular ideas or practices that an individual utilizes to enhance comprehension, learning, or retention of the incoming knowledge. However, Lavasani (2011) described language learning strategy as the learner's behaviors that help them acquire and monitor their second language acquisition. Hence, language learning strategy is defined in a variety of ways.

Hashim (2018) stated that there are numerous language learning strategies that a learner uses to aid in the acquisition of a new language. According to Hardan (2013) memorization, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies are the six classification of language learning strategy. Balini (2018) claimed that memorization

strategies are methods for better remembering, retrieving, and transferring knowledge for future linguistic usage. Memorization aids learners in remembering vital information gleaned through their studies. For example, when there is an information is needed in the future, these tactics assist the learner in retrieving the material. Moreover, Strakova (2013) mentioned that learners were given cognitive strategies to assist them in appropriately manipulating the issues that they face in acquiring target language by utilising all of the processes such as thinking, analyzing, and making conclusion. For instance, drilling method can be used to practise the language, and dictionaries can be used to search difficult words. Other than that, Shakarami (2017) stipulated that the learners are advised to use compensation strategies to compensate the lack of information in the chosen language caused by lack of vocabulary. Even if their vocabulary is minimal, compensation strategy enables the learners to write and speak in the target language. For instance, the use of verbal hints to guess, may compensate their lack of vocabulary. Next, Rahimi (2012) stated that learners use metacognitive strategies to assist them to organise their learning by focusing, organizing, preparing, and assessing their learning. This allows learners to take charge of their own learning. Learners will also be able to organize their learning strategies and modify them if they are ineffective. For instance, in this strategy they can review previously learned material and determine what to focus on ahead of time. Additionally, Parra (2010) asserted that affective strategies are tools for learners to effectively manage their feelings, attitudes, motives, and beliefs. Because they enable the learners to handle their emotions as this strategy have a significant impact on language development. For instance, learners may use rewards and praise to congratulate themselves on their accomplishments. However, according to Varisoglu (2016) social strategies are activities that learners actively participate in order to find opportunities to practise in a comfortable environment. These tactics are vital because language learning is a social activity that always engages other people. For instance, the learners may inquire for comprehension or truths, and collaborate with native speakers or peers to improve their target language's skills.

Svetlana (2013) stipulated that language learning strategies are vital because they enable engagement, self-directed participation, which is necessary for the enhancement of communication skills. Language learning strategies that are effective result in enhanced proficiency and self-confidence. The role of language learning strategies is crucial in teaching and learning writing skills. According to Zambrana (2020), learners may use language learning strategies to strengthen their communicative competence in writing. Chamorro (2017) stated that learners can acquire the manner of communicating thoughts and information through precise writing if they learn numerous phases of writing using language learning strategies. Furthermore, language learning methodologies, as previously stated, allow learners to gradually become more self-directed and competent. In order to enrich their writing skills, they should learn to initiate their own effort as stated by Ramzan (2021). It also broadens the horizons of their teachers by including many areas of the learners. For example, they do not just focus on cognitive growth; they also include metacognitive, social, and other aspects. More than that, Khazaleh (2020) language learning strategies frequently assist learners in being more aware of and flexible with their thoughts. Therefore, the role language learning strategies is essential in the teaching and learning of writing skill.

Methodology

This study aims to have a comprehensive insight into the research of LLS utilized by Year 5 ESL students. A notable contribution to the field of research is the analysis of preferred Upper

Primary level learners' selections of LLS by focusing on writing skills. Suggestions and solutions are not included in the research.

Research Design

The research design used in this study was a quantitative method. A quantitative data collection method was conducted to ensure no biasness is present in the research. Kabir (2016) states that the quantitative data collection method suits research which aims to observe and understand a current phenomenon. The researchers employed a quantitative design to ascertain their students' preferred Language Learning Strategy (LLS) to create more integrated and relevant lesson plans. A survey study was conducted to amass data among the year 5 pupils. These questionnaires were conducted via face-to-face interaction during the writing lesson.

Research Respondents

The survey was completed by 45 pupils from a national primary school in Johor Bahru. There were 22 males (48.9% of the total) and 23 females (51.1% of the total). The target sample consisted of 45 pupils enrolled in Year 5 at the upper primary school level at National Primary School in Selangor, Malaysia. The following figure 1 displays the percentage of the participants as below.

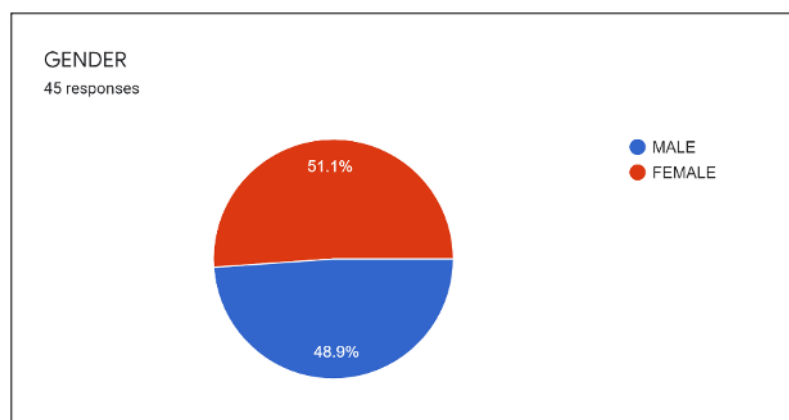


Figure 1 Percentage of Participants

Research Instrument

A survey gathered the data for this quantitative design through questionnaire. A survey is a quantitative research process that incorporates a questionnaire to investigate a population's traits, attitudes, behaviours, and views (Creswell, 2012). The researcher constructed 30 closed-ended statements adopted from Oxford's strategy Inventory For Language Learning (SILL) using a 3-point Likert Scale to collect and preserve data (Oxford, 2003). The study used Oxford's (1990) 7.0 edition of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which is usually acknowledged as the most reliable and recognised tool for identifying LLS (Lee, 2010). This questionnaire focused on the LLS on writing skill. The questionnaire was built to help find out the most and least preferred language learning strategies of Year 5 pupils in writing. The questionnaires were distributed manually to 45 pupils in class on 5th April 2022. Prior to giving the SILL, the pupils were required to complete a background questionnaire (a modified version of Oxford's Background questionnaire). The background questionnaire sought to ascertain the pupils' age, gender, estimated (self-rated) competency, and motivations for studying English. This assessment of the individuals' backgrounds is designed to clarify their learning behaviour. The statements were expounded in Malay to assist their comprehension

and avoid any misunderstandings. There are 30 statements altogether, whereby each LLS comprises 5 statements as below:

Table 1

Description of Statements based on the Strategies

Strategy	Statement
Memory strategy	1-5
Cognitive strategy	6-10
Compensation Strategy	11-15
Metacognitive strategy	16-20
Affective strategy	21-25
Social strategy	26-30

All the statements were then assessed on a Likert scale of 1-3 to indicate students' level of agreement or disagreement with each statement according to their own classroom experiences with LLS. For the Likert scale, emoticons such as happy, neutral, and sad faces were used due to the consideration of the level of pupils. Totally 30 questions were asked with 3 Likert scales (😊= Always, 😐= Usually, and 😞=Never). The Likert scale is as below:

Table 2

Description of the Likert Scale for the Statements of Language Learning Strategy

Emoticon	Description
😊	Always or almost always true of me.
😐	Usually true of me.
😞	Never or almost never true of me.

Data Analysis

The data from SILL were analysed to get percentages and frequencies for this study. The percentages and frequency counts were calculated using descriptive statistics.




Results

Memory Strategy

Table 3 below shows that the highest percentage received from the memory strategy.

Table 3

Findings of Memory Strategy

STATEMENTS	 (Always or almost always true of me)	 (Usually true of me)	 (Never or almost never true of me)
1. I use new English words in a sentence I learn in writing	51.1% (23)	40% (18)	15.5% (7)
2. I connect the sound of an English word and an image or picture of the world to help me remember the word.	37.8% (17)	48.9% (22)	22.2% (10)
3. I use flashcards to remember new English words so that I can use them in my writing.	24.4% (11)	44.4% (20)	31.1% (14)
4. I review English lessons often to enhance my memory of the words learned.	37.8% (17)	40% (18)	24.4% (11)
5. I physically act out new English words so that I can recall them in writing.	31.1% (14)	48.9% (22)	22.2% (10)

In this memory strategy, I use new English words in a sentence that I learn during writing activity at 51.1%. In relation to this, this notion is called as "productive vocabulary" refers to the words that students comprehend, can pronounce correctly, and can use effectively in writing (Susanto, 2017). It is the most preferred statement from the memory strategy. It is then followed by the statement of reviewing English lessons often to enhance my memory of words learned. Furthermore, 48.9% of pupils usually connect the sound and picture of the word to help them remember the word better, and they physically act out vocabulary so that they can recall them during the writing lesson. On the contrary, 31.1% of pupils never use flashcards to remember English words in writing. The Implementation of old school techniques such as the usage of flashcards and word cards could be a solid reason for its unpopularity among the research participants. This is further supported by Loague et.al (2018) who claim that today's native digitals are more likely to grasp language skills easily with the aid of technological devices. Thus, incorporating technology in language learning may assist the new generation to perform better in writing. Lastly, the remaining 24.4% stated that they never review English lessons frequently to enhance the words learned. Although reviewing English lessons can help learners to increase their memory retention (Nashruddin & Nurrachman, 2016), it is deniable fact that every individual has unique styles or strategies of learning a language. Ergo, the most preferred technique in the Memory Strategy is the frequent usage of learned words in writings.

Cognitive Strategy

Table 4 below shows the cognitive strategies used by the pupils in their learning writing.

Table 4

Findings of Cognitive Strategy

STATEMENTS	😊 (Always or almost always true of me)	😐 (Usually true of me)	😞 (Never or almost never true of me)
I write new vocabulary often in my writing.	33.3% (15)	51.1% (23)	15.5% (7)
I use the English words I know in writing activity.	48.9% (22)	44.4% (20)	6.6% (3)
I write notes and messages in English.	35.5% (16)	46.7% (21)	17.8% (8)
I read English learning materials such as textbooks, newspaper and use the sentences into my writing.	31.1% (14)	48.9% (22)	20% (9)
I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	46.7% (21)	42.2% (19)	11.1% (5)




The most frequent cognitive strategies used by the pupils are I use English words I know in writing activity, 48.9%, followed by I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English, 46.7%. This shows that the pupils applied Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in their writing task. This is supported by Zulprianto (2012), the language learners can utilise translation to negotiate the meaning at their ease. On the other hand, most of the researchers regarded GTM an ineffective method to be used in class. In addition, 51.1% of pupils usually write new vocabulary often in their writing, followed by pupils who usually read English learning materials such as textbooks and newspapers and use the sentences in their writing, are 48.8%. However, 20% of the pupils who never read English learning materials such as textbooks and newspapers use the sentences in their writing. Other 17.7% of the pupils never write notes and messages in English.

Compensation Strategy

Referring to the table below, it shows the compensation strategies that the pupils used for their learning writing.

Table 5

Findings of Compensation Strategy




STATEMENTS	 (Always or almost always true of me)	 (Usually true of me)	 (Never or almost never true of me)
I guess to figure out new words.	31.1% (14)	46.7% (21)	22.2% (10)
If I am unable to think of an English word, I change a word or phrase with the similar meaning in my writing.	31.1% (14)	44.4% (20)	24.4% (11)
While writing, I think of the picture of an unknown word.	35.5% (16)	35.5% (16)	28.9% (13)
I use the dictionary to find the meaning of difficult words.	37.8% (17)	42.2% (19)	20% (9)
I translate the sentences from L1 to L2 in writing.	31.1% (14)	46.7% (21)	22.2% (10)

The frequent compensation strategies used by the pupils are 37.7% always use the dictionary to find the meaning of difficult words and followed by 35.5% of the pupils always think of the picture of an unknown word while writing. According to Takkac (2017), using dictionaries can serve as rich sources of information for individual learning, fostering learners' independence and autonomy. When they have dictionary skill, they could use the words in writing project and also the pupils do not bound to rely on the teacher for the definition and pronunciation of unfamiliar words. "31.1% of the pupils always guess to figure out new words, and, if they are unable to think of an English word, they change a word or phrase with a similar meaning in their writing. The more vocabularies they possess, the easier it will be for them to pick the relevant words. This evident based on Hanabi et al (2020), whom states that a word has multiple synonyms, but not all of them are applicable in the same context. On the other hand, the majority of the pupils sometimes figure out new words by guessing, 46.6%, followed by 46.4% of pupils who usually translate the sentences from L1 to L2 in writing. Nevertheless, some pupils never think of the picture of an unknown word while writing, 28.8%. Only 24.4% of pupils who never change a word or phrase with a similar meaning in their writing whenever they cannot think of an English word.

Metacognitive Strategy

Table 6 shows the metacognitive strategies used by pupils for writing lessons.

Table 6
Findings of Metacognitive Strategy

STATEMENTS	 (Always or almost always true of me)	 (Usually true of me)	 (Never or almost never true of me)
I gather and prepare the materials I need while I start writing.	33.3% (15)	53.4% (24)	13.3% (6)
I notice my writing errors and use that information to help me do better in writing	31.1% (14)	57.8% (26)	11.1% (5)
I have clear goals for improving my writing skill.	33.3% (15)	53.4% (24)	13.3% (6)
Before I write, I read about that topic, read a similar paragraph, prepare a draft or make sentences based on the topic.	44.4% (20)	40% (18)	15.5% (7)
I evaluate my own writing.	20% (9)	48.9% (22)	31.1% (14)

The most commonly used metacognitive strategy is before the pupils write, they read a similar paragraph on the related topic, prepare a draft and make sentences based on the topic. Cer (2019) stated that when people think about what they know and how and why they will use it, it is called metacognitive strategy. He mentioned that metacognitive strategy also helps pupils learn about the quality and structure of different literary types, thus, pupils know how to write in different ways depending on their purpose and topic, how to organise, style, contextualise, and use language, and how to practise and evaluate the whole process, which can help improve writing skills. The pupils are required comprehend meaning independently and in conjunction with the views of others. In addition, most pupils occasionally notice their writing errors and use that information to help them do better in writing. It is supported by Reindl et al (2020) who stated that reflecting on the error source and changing the underlying misperception should be easier with metacognitive tactics. In other words, pupils could do better in their writing if they could identify their own errors as well as correct them when writing. Followed by 53.4% of pupils who usually gather and prepare the materials before they start writing, as well as they also have clear goals for improving writing skills. On the other hand, the highest percentage is 31.1% of pupils never evaluate their writing.

Affective Strategy

Table 7 shows the affective strategies used by students in writing.

Table 7

Findings of Affective Strategy

STATEMENTS	😊 (Always or almost always true of me)	😐 (Usually true of me)	😞 (Never or almost never true of me)
I feel happy when I produce error-free work.	66.7% (30)	26.7% (12)	6.6% (3)
I write down my emotions such as happy or sad in diary, whenever I produce a good piece of writing.	33.3% (15)	28.8% (13)	37.7% (17)
When I do well in my writing, I offer myself a prize or treat.	33.3% (15)	37.7% (17)	28.9% (13)
I encourage myself by saying "I can do this", "Keep going", and "Don't give up".	46.7% (21)	44.4% (20)	8.9% (4)
I talk to my friend about how I feel when I am doing the writing task.	26.7% (12)	60% (27)	13.3% (6)

The most common affective strategy used by pupils is that they feel happy when they produce an error-free piece of writing at 66.7%. It is followed by another affective strategy whereby 46.7% of pupils encourage themselves by saying "I can do this", "Keep going," and "Do not give up. It is followed by 33.3% of pupils always offer themselves a prize or treat when they produce a great piece of writing. Based on the study done by a secondary school, Nairobi, it's revealed that academic achievement is significantly influenced by students' self-motivation (Gbolli & Keamu, 2017). Additionally, the study also determined that the most successful method of motivating students is through the distribution of awards. This is further underlined by Abd Malik et al (2018), that intrinsic motivation of an individual can make them perform an activity out of curiosity, accomplish an assignment, and drive to contribute. Besides that, the results show that 60% of students sometimes talk to their friends about how they feel when doing the writing task. This is the highest among all the statements of sometimes. It is then followed by 13.3% of pupils writing down their emotions, such as happy or sad, in the diary. On the contrary, 37.7% of pupils never write down their emotions such as happy or sad in their diary, whenever they produce a good piece of writing. This is probably, writing diary has the potential to become excessively personal. Regard to that, the teacher may struggle to write remarks, or pupils may react negatively to the feedback they receive (Rana, 2018).

Social Strategy

Table 8 shows the social strategies employed by pupils in writing.

Table 8

Findings of Social Strategy

STATEMENTS	😊 (Always or almost always true of me)	😐 (Usually true of me)	😞 (Never or almost never true of me)
I always share ideas on writing with my friends.	35.5% (16)	57.8% (26)	6.6% (3)
I read the writings of my friends to get more ideas.	46.7% (21)	44.4% (20)	8.9% (4)
I ask my friends to give opinion on my writing.	24.4% (11)	60% (27)	15.5% (7)
I ask my teachers help to provide comments on my writing.	33.3% (15)	57.8% (26)	8.9% (4)
I am willing to discuss the writing task done by my classmates.	42.2% (19)	51.1% (23)	6.6% (3)

One of the frequent social strategies used by pupils is that 46.7% read the writings of their friends to get more ideas, followed by 42.2% of pupils who are willing to discuss the writing task done by their classmates. Collaborative learning is a widely practiced approach in the field of language learning (Bikowski and Vithanage, 2016). This response may highly point out that the pupils could produce a top-notch piece of written work when they share ideas by assimilating the information with their prior knowledge. In addition, the percentage of pupils who usually ask their friends to give opinions on their writing is at 60%, followed by 57.8% of pupils who sometimes share ideas on writing their friends and ask teachers help to provide remarks on their writing. The highest percentage is 15.5% of pupils never ask their friends to give an opinion on their piece of writing.

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