

ESL Vocabulary and Translation Strategies Used by Year 6 Pupils

Ngu Sze Ling, Angela Bridget Swyny, Clara Die Mee Yieng,
Dayang Khalizah Awang Batu, Harwati Hashim

Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Corresponding Authors Email: harwati@ukm.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i6/13968>

DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v12-i6/13968

Published Date: 06 June 2022

Abstract

Learning vocabulary can be difficult, especially for non-native English students. It is critical that students are familiar with a variety of vocabulary learning strategies and find the one that suits them best. This paper is a study to investigate vocabulary and translation strategies used by 30 Year 6 pupils from two suburban primary schools in Sarawak, Malaysia. The items of the strategies used are based on Cohen and Oxford's Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey. Two main objectives of this study are: 1) to investigate the most used vocabulary strategies utilised by the Year 6 pupils to improve their English vocabulary; and 2) to identify the most used translation strategies employed by the Year 6 pupils when learning English as a second language (ESL). The data collected were analysed descriptively. The findings revealed that most of the pupils utilise the strategy of repeating the new vocabulary over and over again to memorise them. When it comes to translation strategies, majority pupils will strive to understand English but they will still convert it into their own target language when they hear it. Hence, this research had provided researchers with some insight on the Language Learning Strategies employed by the suburban primary school pupils.

Keywords: Young Learners, English as a Second Language (ESL), Cohen and Oxford's Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey, Language Learning Strategies, Vocabulary Strategies and Translation Strategies

Introduction

English is taught as a second language in Malaysian schools. However, it is unlikely to be the second language of the majority of Malaysian students, as their mother tongue and the national Malay language come first and English is frequently utilised as a third or fourth language by these students. The foundation of learning a second language is vocabulary, and without it, communication in the second language becomes more difficult (Rohmatillah, 2017). Pan and Xu (2011) mentioned that along with phonetics or pronunciation and grammar, vocabulary is one of the most important aspects of learning a foreign language. Furthermore, vocabulary serves as a foundation for language skills such as listening, speaking,

reading, and writing. It is difficult to achieve any level of language fluency without understanding the vocabulary.

Students from the suburban and rural areas made more language errors, resulting in their inability to communicate in the target language (Vrettou, 2011). The lack of exposure to Language Learning Strategies (LLS) is one of the causes of students unable to perform well in English (Griffiths & Oxford, 2014). LLS are essential and beneficial in learning English as a second language (ESL) and can assist ESL students in successfully enhancing their learning abilities. Language learners who are aware of their learning styles might experiment with a variety of language learning methods to find the one that suits them best. As a result, learners and educators will improve their language proficiency by selecting and adopting the best language learning strategies (Hanafiah et al., 2021). Given the importance of the English language today, more research is needed to identify how learners, particularly ESL students, master vocabulary to enhance their English proficiency. Therefore, the goal of this research is to discover the LLS that students employ when learning English as a second language.

The majority of pupils, particularly in suburban and rural areas, are unaware of the basic strategies used in learning vocabulary. In order to achieve proficiency in L2, ESL learners must have the knowledge of suitable vocabulary acquisition strategies that would have a favourable impact on their learning of the target language. Hence, the application of vocabulary and translation strategies by 30 Year 6 pupils from two suburban primary schools in Sarawak, Malaysia was studied in this study. The researchers anticipate that the findings of this study will help weaker pupils adopt the LLS practised by the Year 6 pupils in this study in order to improve their English language learning and proficiency. More future research on LLS, focusing on vocabulary, and their relationship to pupils' English proficiency is much needed.

Research Objectives

- 1) To investigate the most used vocabulary strategies utilised by the Year 6 pupils to improve their English vocabulary.
- 2) To identify the most used translation strategies employed by the Year 6 pupils when learning English as a second language.

Research Questions

- 1) What are the most used vocabulary strategies utilised by the Year 6 pupils to improve their English vocabulary?
- 2) What are the most used translation strategies employed by the Year 6 pupils when learning English as a second language?

Literature Review

Language Learning Strategies

In the learning process, learners did not realise that they have different learning strategies. Language learning strategies refer to the strategies or tactics employed by learners to increase or improve their language abilities such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary, according to (Mahalingam and Yunus, 2016). Mentioned in Lessard-Couston (1997), learning strategies has been defined by Weinstein and Mayer (1986) as a learner's actions and thoughts during the learning process that aimed to affect the encoding process.

Mayer (1988) later explained learning strategies as a learner's practices that are meant to impact how he or she processes information.

Learning a language also needs different strategies to master the language skills and components. Learning strategies are not the same for all learners due to different factors affecting their learning process. LLS is influenced by different factors, depending on the respective individuals (Lim et al., 2021). Language learning strategies have a number of definitions by scholars. In 1983, Tarone defined LS as an endeavour to improve linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language, with the goal of incorporating these skills into interlanguage competency (Lessard-Couston, 1997).

Meanwhile, Rubin (1987) mentioned that LS are methods that aid in the development of the learner's linguistic system and have a direct impact on learning. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) came with other definitions from their study where strategies are specific attitudes and ideas which are used by an individual to help them understand, study or retain new knowledge or information (Lessard-Couston, 1997). Another definition by Scarcella and Oxford (1992) mentioned in Oxford (2003) that learning strategies are how students utilise criteria, behaviours, procedures, or tactics to improve their own learning, such as seeking out discussion partners or providing themselves incentive to face a tough language task.

As a conclusion, language learning strategies can be defined as ways, techniques or processes that involve learning and affect the learners to understand and develop their language skills. Learning strategies may differ based on gender, family background, age and effect of environment factors.

Types of Learning Strategies

From Oxford's point of view (1990), language learning strategies' goal is to improve the communicative competence that lead to categorization of learning language strategies. The language learning strategies are divided into two different types; mainly direct strategies and indirect strategies. Memory strategy, cognitive strategy and compensation strategy are examples of direct strategies. Meanwhile, metacognitive strategy, emotional strategy and social strategy are examples of indirect strategies. Direct strategies entail the use of language in a precise way whereas indirect strategies do not involve using the language (Oxford, 1990). From the scholars, metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social strategies are common among them. Metacognitive strategies are used to explain the processes that involve planning, thinking, setting goals and monitoring the production of language to regulate their learning. Cognitive strategies are more to mental steps or strategies that are used to manipulate, analyse or synthesise the learning materials such as translation, repetition, note taking, guessing, clarification and contextualization. Social strategies can be explained as activities that make learners highly engaged using the target language to increase their social and interactions with others.

Vocabulary Strategies

Vocabulary strategies refer to the methods and procedures used by learners to learn vocabulary effectively (Nie and Zhou, 2017). Undeniably, pupils use various language learning strategies to help them to learn vocabulary and improve their own learning. Language learning strategies are pivotal since they are tools for active and self-directed learning.

Learners can create, manage, select and use vocabulary learning strategies that enable explicit learning (such as recalling words with flashcards for the purpose of purposefully acquiring language skills and knowledge) and implicit learning (such as extensive reading for the purpose of increasing one's language skills and knowledge). According to Al-Khresheh and Al-Ruwailli (2020), learners show a tendency to prioritise vocabulary learning strategies over all other strategies.

Translation Strategies

Translation is a common strategy used in vocabulary instruction (Syafrizal and Haerudin, 2018). Translation strategies are applied when there is a translation process from English language into their mother tongue (L1) to enhance pupils' comprehension. Undeniably, learners utilise translation strategies frequently as a learning strategy to help them strengthen their English skills and solve language problems as mentioned by (Aktekin and Gliniecki, 2015).

Past Studies on Language Learning Strategies

There are numerous studies done to identify the language learning strategies by children. In 2006, Pinter had revealed that 10- and 11- years old children can use their cognitive strategies by thinking logically, able to organise their ideas and focus to complete cognitive tasks widely. They are also able to evaluate themselves on their thoughts and learning processes (Doro and Habok, 2013).

Bayuong et. al (2019) found that most of the respondents used listening and translation strategy more in their language learning in a study among 30 year 6 pupils in a rural primary school. The respondents used limited speaking strategies because they felt that it is not suitable for them because of their limited language use. From the findings, the language teachers in primary school can identify the teaching strategies and approaches that suit the learners.

In another LLS study to find the strategies used by Year 6 pupils in a primary school in Selangor that enhance reading found that they used different strategies while reading and understanding the text. More than half respondents used to read more than once to get more understanding of the text. Some of the respondents also agreed that picture helps the pupils to guess the content of the text (Rojalai et al., 2021)

Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this study is to investigate and identify the most and least preferred vocabulary and translation strategies utilised by Year 6 pupils in two suburban primary schools located in Sarawak, Malaysia. A quantitative research design was used to collect the findings. A quantitative study is one that collects numerical data and analyses it using mathematical approaches to explain phenomena (Suran & Yunus, 2016). In this study, data were collected through the use of a survey questionnaire.




Research Instrument

The study utilised Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey to gather information. This survey tool is constructed by (Cohen and Oxford, 2002) . The demographic section and the statement section were the two primary sections of the questionnaire. The demographic

section of the questionnaire primarily focuses on the gender and location of the participants' school because the participants are similar in primary level and English proficiency. It is further divided into two parts, Part A and Part B, for the statement section. Part A consisted of 9 statements focusing on vocabulary strategy while part B consisted of 7 statements focusing on translation strategy. All of the statements were rated on a Likert scale with 3 emojis. Each emoji of the Likert scale was defined as follow:

Table 1

Likert Scale Emoji description for each language learning strategy statement

Likert Scale Emoji	Description
 3	Really describe me
 2	Somewhat like me
 1	Isn't like me

Research Samples

The researchers employed purposive sampling which involved 30 Year Six pupils from Sarawak's national and national-type primary schools. 15 pupils which comprised 7 boys and 8 girls from each school were selected. Apart from that, the pupils all lived in suburban areas, making them a homogeneous bunch.

Data Collection Method

This study was carried out with a quantitative approach, and the results were presented as quantitative data. The information was gathered through an in-class questionnaire. During the English Language lesson, the researchers distributed the questionnaire. The information was acquired after the participants had completed the questionnaire.

Data Analysis Method

The results of the most and least used language learning approach were studied in a descriptive study. Asún, Rdz-Navarro and Alvarado (2016) claimed, descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation are appropriate for use on a sequence of combined questions that evaluate a certain trait on a Likert scale. As a result, the survey questionnaire's results were analysed using SPSS Version 26 for descriptive statistics such as percentage, frequency and mean.

Findings and Discussion

A total of 30 Primary 6 pupils with 16 female participants and 14 male participants from 2 different suburban schools were purposely selected as the participants for this study. The socio-demographic profile of the participants in this study is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Socio-demographic profile of participants

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	16	53.3
Female	14	46.7
School		
SK A	15	50.0
SK B	15	50.0

Table 3 below shows the vocabulary strategies employed by Primary 6 learners in accordance to the mean score. The mean scores are listed in descending order, with the highest mean of frequency at the top followed by the lowest mean of frequency at the bottom.

Table 3

Vocabulary strategies with frequency, percentage and mean score

Rank	Item	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)	Mean
1	7	15	50.00	2.47
2	8	13	43.33	2.37
3	2	10	33.33	2.13
4	4	10	33.33	2.10
5	1	7	23.33	1.77
6	6	7	23.33	1.73
7	5	6	20.00	1.70
8	3	3	10.00	1.50



Figure 1: Mean score for each strategy in learning vocabulary

In Table 3 and Figure 1, the data obtained shows that when learning vocabulary, most of the Year 6 pupils (50%) in both schools will go over the new words several times at first. Then, 43.33% of the pupils will remind themselves about the words learned earlier. On the other hand, to memorise new words, 33.33% will match the sound of the new words with the sound of words that they know or make a picture of new words in their mind whereas 23.33% will group the words by type such as nouns, verbs and adjectives or write the new word on a card. Only 20% will write the new word in a sentence and 10% will use rhymes to remember new words. From here, we can see that Year 6 pupils are mostly using the method of rote memorisation. They seldom employ any techniques to aid in the memorisation of new words. Once pupils have progressed from the word level to the phrase or sentence level, pupils will use translation strategies to learn English. Table 4 and Figure 2 below shows the ranking of translation strategies used by the participants.

Table 4

Translation strategies (What I do when I translate) with frequency, percentage and mean score

Rank	Strategy	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)	Mean
1	3	18	60.0	2.47
2	2	13	43.33	2.37
3	1	9	30.0	2.1



Figure 2: Mean score of translation strategy when doing translation

Based on the data shown in Table 4 and Figure 2, 60% of the pupils translate parts of the English language that they heard into their own language to help remember it. 43.33% translate when reading to make sure they understand it and only 30% plan what they want to say or write in their own language and translate it into English. These three data indicate that pupils were using direct translation when learning English. Once they hear, see or write in English, they will try to translate it in their own language so that pupils can at least grasp the main meanings that a person wishes to convey. Table 5 and Figure 3 below shows the ranking of translation strategies used by the participants to think in the new language, English.

Table 5

Translation strategies (What I do to think in the new language) with frequency, percentage and mean score

Rank	Strategy	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)	Mean
1	2	16	53.33	2.37
2	1	12	40.00	2.28



Figure 3: Mean score of translation strategy when thinking in the new language

As shown in Table 5 and Figure 3, 53.33% of the pupils try to understand English without translating it while 40% will put their own native language out of their mind when they learn English. It can be seen that pupils did try to put an effort to think in English and only applied translation strategies when needed.

Implications and Conclusion

English is not an easy language to master. From the findings above, it is clearly seen that majority pupils are still learning vocabulary via the conventional method of rote memorisation and quite dependent on their mother tongue when they learn the English language. Therefore, as English teachers, we should provide opportunities for the pupils to learn and master English vocabulary in a fun, meaningful and purposeful way which adheres to the curriculum principle (Ministry of Education, 2022). Besides that, to encourage pupils to use English, teachers can maximise the use of English in the class. Sometimes, a bilingual approach might be needed in the teaching and learning process especially when giving instruction and explaining word meanings. However, the first language should only be used by the teachers as a teaching aid. As for the pupils, they should always attempt to apply the vocabulary learnt rather than just studying it for the sake of learning it. They should not be overly reliant on their native language because this will be evident in their speech and writing. Good competency in the first language is a bonus for them yet should not have much influence on their English learning.

To conclude, the ability to communicate in English is determined by the vocabulary knowledge of second and foreign language students. Though expanding one's vocabulary is important, it can be difficult for non-native English speakers and when it comes to language, each learner has their own unique way of learning. To make use of their different learning styles, teachers should know the teaching strategies and approaches used so that learners will have a high motivation in English acquisition. It is recommended that ESL teachers pay more attention to vocabulary and teach students numerous ways for improving their vocabulary mastery besides helping them choose the most effective strategy that will help them develop their vocabulary as language learning and mastery are enhanced with the employment of language strategies (Dawi and Hashim, 2022). ESL students, on the other hand, must be conversant with a variety of vocabulary learning strategies, both in terms of determining the meaning of words and storing them in long-term memory. Finally, future researchers should look into the implementation of vocabulary translation and vocabulary learning strategies in a broader context, as well as their usefulness in terms of students' vocabulary mastery and its relationship to language proficiency.

References

- Aktekin, N. C., & Gliniecki, A. U. (2015). ELT students' beliefs about and strategy use of translation. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching (IOJET)*, 2(1): 12-24.
- Al-khresheh, M., & Alruwaili, S. (2020). An Exploratory Study on Vocabulary Learning Strategies Used by Saudi EFL learners. *Journal of History Culture and Art Research*, 9(2): 299-302. <https://doi.org/10.7596/taksad.v8i4.2316>
- Asún, R. A., Rdz-Navarro, K. & Alvarado, J. M. (2016). Developing multidimensional likert scales using item factor analysis: The case of four-point items. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 45(1), 109-133. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0049124114566716>
- Bayuong, P., Hashim, H., & Yunus, M. (2019). Identifying Language Learning Strategies Used by ESL Learners in A Rural Primary School. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 8(3): 151-165. DOI:10.6007/IJARPED/v8-i3/6311
- Cohen, A., & Oxford, R. (2002). *Language strategy use survey*. Minneapolis, MN: Centre for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, University of Minnesota.
- Dawi, D. A., & Hashim, H. (2022). Preferred Learning Strategies among Malaysian Primary ESL Learners. *Creative Education*, 13(3): 941-951. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2022.133062>
- Griffiths, C., & Oxford, R. L. (2014). The twenty-first century landscape of language learning strategies: Introduction to this special issue. *System*, 43(1): 1-10. DOI: 10.1016/j.system.2013.12.009
- Gürsoy, E. (2013). The development of a children's inventory for Language Learning Strategies (CHILLS). *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 3(7), 263-272 DOI: 10.5901/jesr.2013.v3n7p263
- Gürsoy, E., & Eken, E. (2018). Identifying Children's Language Learning Strategies: Turkish Example. *Porta Linguarum*, 30, 43-56. DOI: 10.30827/Digibug.54037.
- Hanafiah, A. D., Kadir, F. A., Kamaruddin, S. M., Hussin, S. N. L., & Hashim, H. (2021). Language Learning Strategies Employed by Successful Language Learners. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(6), 1363-1378.
- Hardan, A. A. (2013). Language learning strategies : A general overview. *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences*. 106(2013) 1712-1726. DOI: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.12.194
- Lessard-Clouston, M. (1997). Language Learning Strategies: An overview for L2 teachers. *The Internet TESL Journal*. 3. 1-16.
- Lim, T. M., Sze, D. W. L., Raki, D., Lim, L. M., Sani, S., & Hashim, H. (2021). Year 6 Pupils' Language Learning Strategies in Learning English Grammar. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(4), 1196-1209.
- Mahalingam, K., & Yunus, M. M. (2016). Good language learners and their strategies: An insight. In *Proceeding of ICECRS*. 359-366. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21070/picecrs.v1i1.504>.
- Mayer, R. (1988). Learning strategies: An overview. In Weinstein, C., E. Goetz, & P. Alexander (Eds.) *Learning and Study Strategies: Issues in Assessment, Instruction and Evaluation* (pp. 1-22). New York: Academic Press.
- Ministry of Education Malaysia. (2022). *Standard Curriculum Document (DSKP) Year 6*. Putrajaya: Ministry of Education Malaysia.
- Nie, Y., & Zhou, L. (2017). A study of vocabulary learning strategies used by excellent English learners. 4: 101-106. DOI:10.24104/rmhe/2017.04.02010

- O' Mallet, J. M., & Chamot, A. (1990). *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*. California: Newbury House Publisher.
- Pan, Q., & Xu, R. (2011). Vocabulary teaching in English language teaching. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies*, 1(11), 1586-1589.
- Rohmatillah, R. (2017). A Study on Students' Difficulties in Learning Vocabulary. *English Education: Jurnal Tadris Bahasa Inggris*, 6(1), 75-93.
- Rojalai, A., SUSAIE, J. S., BALARAMAN, L., MANOHARAN, S. R., MUSTAFA, Z., & HASHIM, H. (2021). Language Learning Strategies Used for Enhancing Reading Skills Among Year 6 Pupils of A Primary School in Selangor. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(6), 1186-1195
- Rubin, J. (1987). Learner strategies: Theoretical assumptions, research history and typology. In A. Wenden & J. Rubin (Eds.), *Learner Strategies and Language Learning* (pp. 15-29). Englewood Cliffs, NJ. Prentice Hall.
- Suran, R. D., & Yunus, M. M. (2016). A survey on student's learning styles and strategies in a rural secondary school in Meradong district. *International Conference on Education Universitas Negeri Malang 2016*. 767-778.
- Syafrizal & Haerudin. (2018). The implementation of vocabulary building strategy in teaching English vocabulary to young learners. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 5(1): 40-48
- Vrettou, A. (2011). *Patterns of Language Learning Strategy Use by Greek-Speaking Young Learners of English*. Ph.D. Thesis, Thessaloniki: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.
- Weinstein, C., & Mayer, R. (1986). The teaching of learning strategies. In M.C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, 3rd Edition (pp. 315-327).