Language Learning Strategies Employed by Lower Secondary ESL Learners

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Abstract
Language learning in education has evolved over the years as students of various cultures and traditional backgrounds have been enrolled in language learning programmes as part of the education system. The English language is the second language of the Malaysian education system. The learners in the Malaysian education system cope with English language learning differently. The purpose of this study is to identify strategies used by lower secondary ESL learners to improve their English language skills. A survey was administered in a chosen secondary school in a suburban district. The survey used in the study was adopted and adapted from Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) version 7.0. The modified version consisted of 30 statements on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. The survey was conducted through an online google form. A total number of thirty Form 1 students have been selected through purposive sampling as respondents. The data collected then analysed with descriptive statistics using frequency and percentage counts. The findings portrayed that lower secondary ESL learners preferred metacognitive-related strategies over the other strategies. Thus, the findings could be useful for researchers to study suitable learning materials to cater to students who practice various learning styles in language learning.
Keywords: Language Learning Strategies, Secondary ESL Learners, English as a Second Language (ESL), Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

Introduction
English has established itself as a global communication language. According to Nga et al (2018), English is in high demand because it establishes a connection between science, technology, and mathematics. Moreover, nations and governments have spent a lot of money on enhancing the command of the English language, notably in the sphere of education. The goal is to improve the effectiveness of teaching and, as a result, the overall quality of education in non-native English-speaking environments (Saputra & Hadi, 2019).

So, learners who are learning a second or foreign language must establish some techniques to attain their objectives, which are referred to as Language Learning Strategies (LLS).' The English language learning strategies will help the students to learn better and eventually help them to improve their English language skills (Rubaai et al., 2019). Numerous studies have been undertaken on LLS since the mid-1970s, as they have been widely acknowledged as a critical component in several language acquisition theories. LLS research has attracted researchers from all over the world because it is one of the most important aspects of second language acquisition (Green & Oxford, 1995). This is aligned with Malaysia's present educational system which incorporates the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) into elementary and secondary schools. Mastery of LLS has also been addressed in the CEFR syllabus to enable students in mastering the second language. The existence of multiple language learning methods (LLS) has been an important feature in language acquisition due to the focus on the learners and learning (Saimi et al., 2021).

Recent studies have primarily focused on LLS among university students and upper secondary pupils (Rojalai et.al, 2021) and only a few investigations have been undertaken among lower secondary students. Thus, a study is needed to identify strategies used by lower secondary schools' students to improve their English language skills. The purpose of this study is to look into the language learning strategies used by Form 1 ESL students.

Literature Review
Good Language Learners and Language Learning Strategies
The paradigm shift in the field of language learning has started in the 1960s from teaching methods or strategies to the study of learners' characteristics and the effects on second language acquisition and it is called Good Language Learners (GLL) which is focussed on the learners. Then, in the 1970s until now, there has been a significant increase in the number of research on language learning strategies. Also, Rubin introduced the concept of Good Language Learners in the 1970s, which includes the ability to guess, willingness to communicate, seeking opportunities to practice and learn the language, having no reluctance to make mistakes, awareness of the use of word structures and meanings, and observing one's own and other speech ability. Apart from that, Rubin and Thompson (1982) also proposed the characteristics of good language learners that includes the 14 strategies in helping the students to be good language learners which includes the ability to organize the information, creativity and experimenting with it, learn to live confidently, use cues and use context in comprehending (Fithriyah & Yusuf, 2019). Additionally, in 1989, Oxford identified the strategies to be applied in good language learners in six classes; metacognitive, affective, social, memory, cognitive and compensatory. Finally, due to a shift in focus from teachers to learners, language learning has evolved from teaching approaches to language learning strategies.

There are many definitions proposed by researchers on language learning strategies. Based on the research done by Yaacob et al (2019); Fithriyah and Yusuf (2019); Aziz and Shah (2020); Melvina et al (2020); Hanafiah et al (2021); learning strategies are best defined by (Rubin, 1987; Oxford, 1990; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Cohen, 1998). According to early definitions by Rubin (1987, cited in Aziz and Shah, 2020), learners employ strategies to acquire knowledge or to carry out actions that help them achieve their goals. Meanwhile, Oxford (1990) defined learning strategies as instructional steps taken to enhance learning using

various methods and make learning more meaningful into new situations.To add, Cohen (1998) defines learning techniques as "the conscious awareness of one's own language learning procedures employed to attain the goal of developing one's knowledge and understanding of a targeted language.". However, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) proposed that LLS should encompass special thoughts or behaviours that learners use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information. This indicates that LLS can be either behaviour or thoughts. LLS benefits in comprehending and learning new information. O'Malley and Chamot (1985, cited in Yaacob et al., 2019) argued that there are no specific definitions of the LLS. He also specified that there are no rigid classification on any strategies regarding learning strategies and other types of strategies which are used in second language acquisition. Contrary to that, Oxford (1990) insisted that LLSs are when the learners are aware and consciously take an action for their own learning. Thus, as the definitions of LLSs have gradually change from focusing on linguistic or sociolinguistic competence to the processes and characteristics of LLSs, it can be defined that LLS is a number of practice or efforts that the learners applied intentionally in language learning to boost self-independent learning and enhancing enhance learners' language skills.

Classification of Language Learning Strategies
Since the 1970s, various studies have been conducted in the subject of LLS with the goal of refining the classification of LLS, with the Oxford classification being one of the most popular (Adan & Hashim, 2021; Hanafiah et al., 2021). On the other hand, the classification of language learning strategies, according to Oxford (1990), refers to the discipline of language learning that tries to improve learners' communicative ability.Thus, two types of strategies which are direct and indirect strategies are introduced. Direct strategies were examined in terms of language learning and mental processing. Memory, cognitive and compensation strategies are under direct strategies. When learners are able to overcome a knowledge gap and preserve a conservation, they are using the compensation mechanisms. Meanwhile, memory techniques refer to how knowledge is preserved, whereas cognitive strategies refer to how students make meaning of what they've learned (Oxford, 1990). Metacognitive, affective and social are under indirect strategies which support unintended language learning. Metacognitive strategies require the learners to self-regulate their own learning while the strategies concerning motivation, attitudes and emotional requirements are called affective strategies and the strategies which promote learners' social interaction in target language are social strategies (Oxford, 1990).

The most suitable language learning strategies can be applied by identifying learning strategies to learn the language that suits the learners' learning styles and preferences, hence the chances of becoming successful language learners are increased (Hanafiah et al., 2021). The teachers can utilize Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) to recognise the learners' learning styles therefore the best language learning strategies can be applied during the teaching and learning sessions. In the study done by Oxford and Burry – Stock (1995), a questionnaire which consists of a summative rating scale can be introduced to the learners to identify the most suitable language learning strategies and the questionnaire is based on the SILL which is known for its reliability and validity on collecting data regarding LLS. The SILL is based on the six LLSs which is memory, storing and recalling information, cognitive - understanding and producing the language, compensation is overcoming limitations in language learning, metacognitive refers to centring and directing

learning, affective narrows down to monitoring emotions, motivation and social is the cooperation skill in language learning. The SILL has imply a choice of five Likert-scale responses and the learners need to state their responses based on scale one to five for each question under the strategies (John et al., 2021). For that reason, the researchers applied the SILL questionnaire which is derived from Oxford (1990) version 7.0 for ESL / EFL learners as the instrument for data collection methods.

Methodology
Research Design and Instrument
This study is a quantitative research that embraced a survey questionnaire adopted and adapted from the Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) version 7.0. The research design could fulfill the purpose of this study which is to identify strategies used by lower secondary ESL learners to improve their English language skills. The questionnaire was made up of two main sections. The first section was on personal background and the second section comprises six sections of Language Learning Strategies. Section A is on Memory with 5 items, Section B is on the Cognitive with 9 items, Section C is on Compensation with 5 items, Section D is on Metacognitive with 5 items, Section E is on Affective with 5 items and Section F is on Social with 6 items. Each item was led by 5 points Likert Scale between a range of 5 to 1(5: Strongly disagree, 4: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 2:Agree, 1: Strongly agree) . Respondents read and rate the questions themselves.

Research Sampling
This research was conducted in one of the Chinese secondary schools in the Segamat District in Johor. The study consisted of 30 Form 1 ESL pupils with an average to excellent abilities. There were 7 males (23.3%) and 23 females (76.7%) in the sample. Purposive sampling technique is used for this study. The chosen respondents learn English as their second language and their mother tongue is Chinese.

Data Collection and Data Analysis
The survey was administered whereby the researcher distributed the questionnaire to all participants through an online Google Form. The researcher also supervised them throughout the poles to make sure that the participants answered all items in the questionnaires and completed them.The data collected then analyzed with descriptive statistics using frequency and percentage counts.

Findings
This study investigated 30 strategies preferred by form 1 secondary school students' language learning. The strategies are grouped into six groups which are memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social. The findings are presented in 6 tables regarding the percentage of respondents who voted "agree" and "strongly agree" for the Language Learning Strategies. The questionnaires analyzed provide evidence of metacognitive-related strategies being used more (above 60%) than the other strategies. The study found that metacognitive strategies are used the most, and compensation-related strategies are used the least among the students.

Table 1
Memory Strategies (percentage of agree and strongly agree)

Strategy	Percentage
1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	66.7%
2. I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them	70.0%
3. I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	66.7%
4. I use flashcards to remember new English words	50.0%
5. I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign	56.7%

Based on the result in table 1, 70% of the respondents prefer to use the memory strategy as a language learning strategy by using new English words in a sentence so they can remember them. The respondents also pointed out that they prefer thinking of relationships between what they already know and new things they learn in English (66.7%) and remembering a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used (66.7%). This proves that the respondents prefer relating the English words that they are exposed to with their existing schemata. Only 56.7% of respondents agreed to remembering new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign whereas 50.0% of them agreed to using flashcards to remember new English words.

Table 2
Cognitive Strategies (percentage of agree and strongly agree)

Strategy	Percentage
1. I say new English words several times.	43.3%
2. I try to talk like native English speakers.	60.0%
3. I use the English words I know in different ways.	63.3%
4. I start conversations in English.	46.7%
5. I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.	53.3%
6. I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	46.7%
7. I try to find patterns in English.	53.3%
8. I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand	53.3%
9. I try not to translate word-for-word.	43.3%

Table 2 specifies the statements and the percentage of respondents who voted "agree" and "strongly agree" for the cognitive based Language Learning Strategies. The cognitive section includes 9 statements namely: 1) I say new English words several times (43.3%), 2) I try to talk like native English speakers (60.0%), 3) I use the English words I know in different ways (63.3%), 4) I start conversations in English (46.7%), 5) I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English (53.3%) , 6) I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English (46.7%), 7) I try to find patterns in English (53.3%), 8) I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand (53.3%) and 9) I try not to translate word-for-word (43.3%). The most used cognitive strategy is "I use the English words I know in different ways."

Table 3
Compensation Strategies (percentage of agree and strongly agree)

Strategy	Percentage
1. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	23.3%
2. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	30.0%
3. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	20.0%
4. I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	43.0%
5. If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing	66.7%

Table 3 indicates the percentage of respondents who voted "agree" and "strongly agree" for the compensation-based Language Learning Strategies. The highest voted compensation strategy is "If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing" (66.7%). The respondents prefer using words with the same meaning if they could not think of the words in the English language. On the other hand, the least preferred strategy is "I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English" (20%).

Table 4
Metacognitive Strategies (percentage of agree and strongly agree)

Strategy	Percentage
1. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	63.3%
2. I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	83.3%
3. I look for people I can talk to in English	70.0%
4. I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	66.0%
5. I think about my progress in learning English	73.0%

As presented in table 4, the highest preferred metacognitive-based strategy by the respondents is to pay attention when someone is speaking English (83.3%). Respondents give importance to understanding the gist of a conversation when someone is using the language. Respondents also agree on thinking about their progress in learning English (73.3%). The least preferred strategy is "I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English" (63.3%). This could be due to the environment in which the respondents grow up with Chinese language as their mother tongue.

Table 5
Affective Strategies (percentage of agree and strongly agree)

Strategy	Percentage
1. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	53.3%
2. I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	80.0%
3. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	60.0%
4. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English	53.3%
5. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	56.7%

Table 5 shows that the highest voted affective-based strategy is "I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake" (80%). Respondents' response shows that they make an effort to learn the language even though they aren't comfortable with the language usage. Only 53.3% of respondents agreed to "I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English" and "I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English".

Table 6
Social Strategies (percentage of agree and strongly agree)

Strategy	Percentage
1. If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	63.3%
2. I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	70.0%
3. I practice English with other students.	63.3%
4. I ask for help from English speakers.	63.3%
5. I ask questions in English.	43.3%
6. I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	66.7%

The data gained have shown that a number of 70% of respondents use the strategy of asking English speakers to correct them when they talk as their strategy to improve language. 66.7% respondents believe that they try to learn about the culture of English speakers to learn the English language effectively. The next preferred strategy which has the percentage of 63.3% is the strategy of "If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again" and "I practice English with other students".

Hence, the study proves that learners use language learning strategies to improve their command of language. The data depicts that the learners have almost the same preferences and choices in using the language learning strategies. It is proven that the respondents use all categories of language learning strategies as O'Malley et al (1985) has discussed. Even though the respondents preferred different types of language learning

strategies as in memory-based, cognitive-based, compensation-based, metacognitive-based, affective-based and social-based, there are some strategies that are given extra attention among good language learners. The learners use multiple categories of language learning strategies for the language skills that they need to master. As the involved respondents are good language learners, they are quite aware of the strategies that they prefer to use in order to learn the English language effectively.

Implications and Conclusion

This study focused on the highly used and minimally used language learning strategies among Form 1 ESL learners in improving their command of English language. According to the data collected, it can be inferred that students use the metacognitive-related strategies (above 60%) more than the other strategies. The percentage ranged between 60% to 85% whereas the compensation-related strategies are used the least among the students (ranged between 20% to 67%). This research has shown that learners are aware of their learning process. The students know and are clear about what they seek for the betterment of their English language skills. The use of metacognitive strategy revealed that the learners used it intentionally and unintentionally.

The findings of this study aids in enforcing the usage of language learning strategies in classrooms. Educators may adapt the SILL questionnaire to identify and cater the students' needs in order to provide a better learning environment for the students. Educators also may adapt and adopt the learning strategies which are divided in six elements to prepare their lesson in a meaningful way as well as cater students of various learning styles. The implementation of LLSs without considering the students' needs might not be a successful learning process (Dalila & Harwati, 2021). Moreover, for future research, researchers may use the SILL questionnaire to find out the learning styles of students of various races and mother-tongues. This is mainly because the usage of L1(mother tongue) among students affects the learning styles of L2(second language etc English). Furthermore, researchers could also study suitable learning materials to cater students who practice various learning styles in language learning. To conclude, this study aids teachers and stakeholders in understanding their L2 learners and assists them in mastering the language with the usage of appropriate and suitable language learning strategies.

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