

Language Learning Strategies Used by ESL/EFL Learners: A Systematic Review (2019 – 2023)

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i12/20148> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i12/20148

Published Date: 24 December 2023

Abstract

Language Learning Strategies (LLS) have been studied and proposed by numerous scholars for decades since the 1970s to help ESL and EFL learners improve their English language skills around the globe. However, most researchers employ a quantitative approach by conducting cross-sectional studies to investigate the frequency of LLS use among L2 learners. More attention should be paid to the factors affecting the use of LLS. This review investigates the most and the least frequently used LLS utilised by current ESL and EFL learners to enhance their language skills. Thirty-two articles were carefully selected out of 348 from Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and Google Scholars databases, from 2019 to 2023, for final consideration. The findings confirmed that metacognitive strategies, a component of the indirect category, were the most preferred by ESL and EFL learners.

On the other hand, both memory and affective strategies were the least employed by the group, as mentioned earlier by learners. These strategies belong to direct and indirect classes, respectively. The leading focus group in the bulk of the studies was university learners compared to the primary and secondary students. Hence, this finding implies the need for more studies to be carried out in the latter fields, including elementary school and professional individuals, to provide a better understanding for all. This review aims to illustrate the recent trends in the LLS domain to the stakeholders in the educational sector, which in turn could help them apply the relevant pedagogical approach in teaching ESL and EFL learners. More studies should be carried out in different settings and by employing more qualitative methods since digitalisation in the education field is becoming increasingly prevalent.

Keywords: Strategy Inventory in Language Learning (SILL), Language Learning Strategies (LLS), ESL Learners, EFL Learners, Second Language (L2)

Introduction

The term "English as the world's lingua franca" refers to the language as a primary medium of communication among various nationalities on the global stage. The dominance of English

as the international language took part in the late 19th until the early 20th century when the UK was the centre of the Industrial Revolution around 1760 until 1840. Due to the disintegration of the British Empire later, the United States of America emerged as the new global leader in the second part of the 20th century, thus solidifying the status of English as the global language until now (Salager-Mayer, 2005).

The spread of English as the global language, primarily from political, social and economic perspectives, promotes the teaching and learning of it worldwide. While many countries recognise it as a second language, frequently due to historical and cultural variables, other nations adopt it as a foreign language. When someone whose mother tongue is not English lives in a nation where English is the official language, they are said to be studying and using English as a second language (ESL). These people learn English because they need it for their daily routines, education, and employment in the English-speaking world. Meanwhile, studying and using English by people in nations where it is not the primary or official language is known as English as a foreign language (EFL). English is taught as a topic in various settings, and students may utilise it mainly for particular purposes like travel, international communication, or academic endeavours.

The amount of exposure to and immersion in an English-speaking environment that ESL and EFL learners get varies. ESL students usually benefit from regular exposure to English in their everyday activities, which often promotes more authentic language learning. In contrast, EFL students may have few chances to communicate in English outside the classroom; thus, they need more meaningful language teaching and practice. English proficiency has become increasingly important for personal and professional growth in both ESL and EFL situations in a globalised society.

Language Learning Strategies

Generally speaking, language learning strategies refer to various techniques and approaches used to acquire proficiency in a new language. These strategies aim to optimise the learning process and enhance language acquisition. They include active engagement with the language through listening, speaking, reading, and writing and using mnemonic devices, such as flashcards or memory aids, to improve vocabulary retention. Other effective strategies involve immersion through exposure to authentic materials, practising with native speakers, setting goals, and maintaining a consistent study routine. Additionally, utilising technology resources, such as language learning apps or online courses, can enhance learning efficiency and provide interactive learning opportunities.

Rigney (1978); Rubin (1987) define language learning strategies as behaviours, procedures, or techniques language learners employ to facilitate language acquisition. Later, Wenden and Rubin (1987) defined learning strategies as "any set of operations, steps, plans, or routines used by the learner to facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and application of information. Next, Cohen (1990) stated that "learning strategies are processes that learners consciously select and that may result in actions to improve the learning or use of a second or foreign language through the storage, recall, and application of information about that language". Oxford (1990) defines language learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learner to make language learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations". Richards et al (1992), as cited in Meyer, 2012) suggested that "learning strategies are intentional behaviours and thoughts that learners employ during learning to help them better comprehend, acquire, or remember new information".

Based on the various definitions postulated by scholars, Language Learning Strategies (LLS) are defined as specific actions, techniques, processes, plans, thoughts or routines employed by learners to facilitate, improve, ease and enhance their language learning effectively. These intentional strategies are classified into cognitive, affective and social domains by several prominent advocates whereby learners not only aim to master the target language, for instance, a second or foreign language, and to learn applicable and transferable skills but also to boost their self-confidence (Rigney, 1978; Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Chamot & O'Malley, 1987; Ehrman & Oxford, 1990; Cohen, 1990; Richards et al., 1992).

Kölemen (2021) conducted the first study to examine the global landscape of LLS research trends and tendencies that contributes to the comprehension of LLS academic research and provides an overview of language studies' past, present, and future. The study was a systematic review of studies on Language Learning Strategies from 1977 to 2018, and several exciting insights on the development and the latest trend in LLS were discovered. Based on the study, the results proved that interest in language learning strategy research has steadily increased over time. As of 2018, there were 383 LLS publications in the Web of Science (WoS), the bulk of which were contributed by the field of education (68.41%) since the first study was published in 1977. The publications included articles, proceedings, book reviews, editorial content, a review, and an abstract of a meeting. Most importantly, the study discovered that language learning strategy research focused on individual learner variables such as motivation, gender, and proficiency in English as a foreign language. In contrast, most of these studies used the quantitative Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (Oxford, 1990).

Kenol and Hashim (2022) carried out a similar study, focusing primarily on the Language Learning Strategies used by ESL students in enhancing English Proficiency spanning from 2013 until 2022, and the results were substantially promising in terms of the recent research trends. For this study, 47 final papers were selected meticulously using three databases, namely Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). The data demonstrated that ESL students frequently utilise LLS to enhance their English proficiency. Interestingly, the study showed that socioeconomic, political, educational, religious, and cultural variables influence decisions on the use of LLS among ESL learners around the globe. Next, recent research indicates that language learners typically employ a single method, with only a handful of studies indicating that they employ multiple methods. Last but not least, focus groups for this study were predominantly conducted in schools, colleges, universities, institutions, and among ESL adults. These primary findings illustrate research deficiencies regarding variables influencing LLS decisions.

Good Language Learner

A good language learner has several vital qualities to excel in language learning. Numerous studies commonly consider good language learners (GLL) to be autonomous in their learning as they have clear goals by employing the right language learning strategies to be proficient in the target language. They are also seen as good problem solvers since they are active learners (Hanafiah et al., 2021). Good language learners are also known as successful language learners, and since they are highly aware of and are intelligent users of various language learning strategies, they are excellent L2 learners (Lim et al., 2021). According to Rubin (1975), the excellent language learner employs seven efficient strategies to learn a target language effectively. The strategies are: (1) being a willing and accurate guesser; (2) having a solid drive to communicate; (3) not being inhibited by psychological factors; (4)

focusing on communication and being prepared to attend to form; (5) practising pronouncing words or constructing sentences; (6) monitoring their own and the speech of others; and (7) attending to meaning.

Since previous studies have proven that learners who are aware of and utilise more language learning strategies in their second language learning journey can master the target language faster, weak learners can be taught to employ more LLS in their learning via strategy training or instruction carried out by the teachers (Zhang et al., 2019; Kiu & Yamat, 2020). Once the low achievers are informed about these strategies, they can select the ones they are comfortable with to enhance their language skills (Oxford, 2001, as cited in Zhang et al., 2019). Rubin (1987), as cited in Al-Khaza'leh (2019) emphasised that there is a need for teachers and learners to be aware of LLS through strategy instruction, and such attempts have produced promising results. Learners can increase the number of strategies to learn L2 better (Zambrana, 2020). Hence, informed learners can apply the suitable LLS to achieve their learning goals despite their diverse demographic and environmental backgrounds.

Reviews of Language Learning Strategies

There is a growing interest in language learning strategies (LLS), particularly in employing the strategy inventory for language learning (SILL), a popular and credible instrument devised by Oxford in 1990. A few years later, two more inventories detailing the listening, vocabulary, speaking, reading, writing, and translation strategies used are proposed, the Language Strategy Use Survey by Cohen et al (2002) and the Young Learner's Language Strategy Use Survey by Cohen and Oxford (2002). All these instruments are widely used due to their high reliability and validity in researching language learning in the educational field (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Daflizar et al., 2022; Rianto, 2020). Furthermore, the majority of the research carried out in the field of LLS to date still employs Oxford's inventory which powerfully demonstrates that her taxonomy remains theoretically and highly applicable in the current setting (Iamudom & Tangkiengsirisin, 2020; Ranjan & Philominraj, 2020; Fernandez Malpartida's 2021).

Researchers primarily use the strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) to investigate the type of language learning strategies learners employ, broadly divided into two components: direct and indirect strategies. The direct strategy is further broken down into three components: memory, cognitive and compensation strategies, whereas the indirect strategies cover another three categories; the metacognitive, affective and social strategies (Oxford, 1990). On the other hand, the primary objective of both inventories is for the learners to discover more about themselves as a second language and to assist them in effectively identifying strategies that can enhance their proficiency in the target language (Cohen & Weaver, 2005).

Methodology

PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines have been employed for this systematic review. This guide is divided into four categories: identification, screening, and eligibility and included as shown in Figure 1 below.

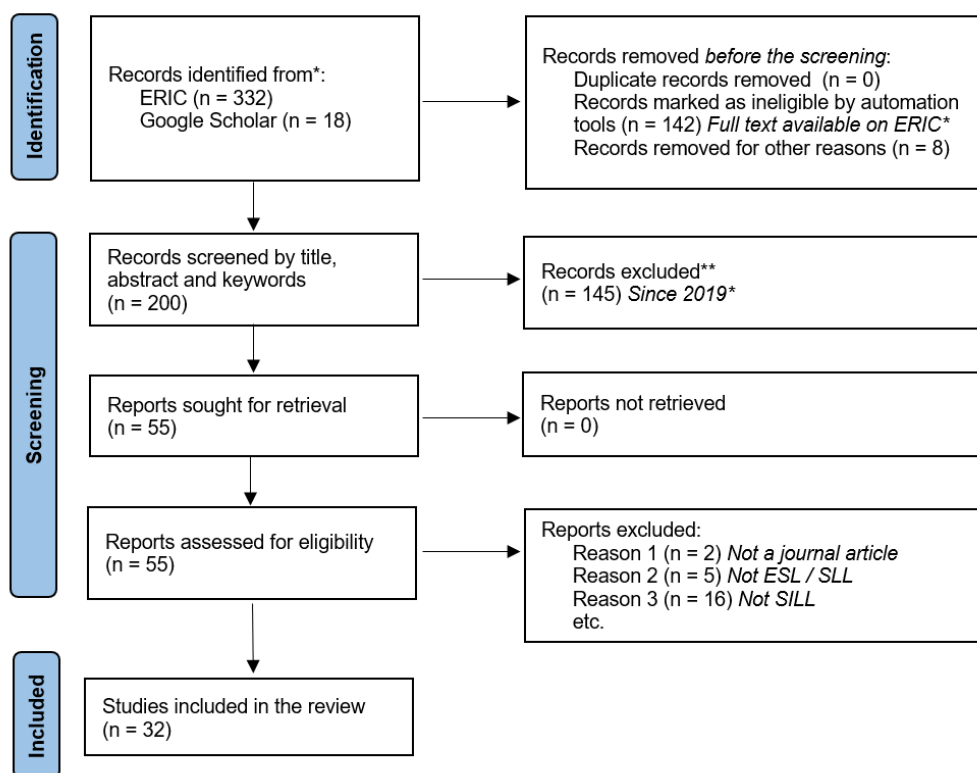


Figure 1: Systematic review using PRISMA adapted from Page, Moher and McKenzie (2022)

Identification

According to PRISMA guidelines, identification is the first step needed for a systematic review. Three databases have been identified and selected as they provide many relevant and latest multidisciplinary journal articles for consideration and further analyses in this study. The Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and Google Scholar are these databases. The mandatory key terminologies utilised to obtain the articles were ‘strategy inventory for language learning (SILL), ESL and EFL’. Table 1 below shows the search string that retrieved journal articles from the Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and Google Scholar as the complimentary database.

Table 1

The search term used in this review

Database	Search string
ERIC	strategies in language learning, strategy inventory for language learning (SILL), language learning strategies (LLS), ESL, EFL
Google Scholar	strategy inventory for language learning (SILL), language learning strategies (LLS), ESL, Malaysia

Screening

The search results for The Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and Google Scholar produced 332 publications at first. However, when the automation tool 'Full Text available on ERIC" and "Malaysia" on Google Scholar were applied, 142 articles were excluded. The researcher only needed full-text papers accessible via ERIC for further consideration. As a result, only 200 studies are left for consideration. When the search parameter was further narrowed to the articles published within the last five years, from 2019

until 2023, another 145 records had to be excluded. In the second stage of screening, a total of 55 articles were assessed for eligibility, and 23 articles were eliminated due to the following reasons: (a) two papers were not journal articles; (b) the respondents were not ESL/EFL learners for another five studies, and (c) sixteen papers have unclear or no connection to SILL or LLS at all. In order to identify studies that are not related to SILL or LLS, the researcher selected the 'Strategy Inventory for Language Learning' under the 'Assessments and Surveys' menu and went through the abstracts of the remaining texts.

Table 2

The parameters for the inclusion and exclusion of journal articles

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Research conducted from 2019 until 2023	Research carried out before 2019
Scholarly journal articles	Conference papers, book chapters, reports and review articles
The respondents must be ESL/EFL learners	The respondents were not ESL/EFL learners
The article was published in English	Non-English language articles
Clear connection to the Language Learning Strategies (LLS) and the Strategy Inventory in Language Learning (SILL)	Unclear and no association with the Language Learning Strategies (LLS) and the Strategy Inventory in Language Learning (SILL)
Articles from Google Scholars must be studies on Malaysian ESL learners in primary, secondary, or tertiary levels.	Articles from Google Scholars on non-ESL learners in Malaysia, learners of other languages

Twenty-three full-text studies from the ERIC database were eliminated based on the eligibility standards because they were not journal articles, the respondents were not ESL or EFL learners and the articles were not associated with SILL as the research instruments used were not SILL or LLS. Hence, only 22 relevant papers remained to be included in the systematic review.

Included

The study's primary objective was to identify the most and the least frequently used Language Learning Strategies (LLS) among ESL and EFL learners within the last five years, from 2019 to 2023. As stated before, the screening and included procedures yielded only 22 articles from ERIC. The researcher specifically selected only studies that employed the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) alone or combined with any other research instrument for this review. However, Google Scholar was included as a database since the results yielded by ERIC did not include any articles written by scholars on Malaysian ESL learners. Initially, the search results produced 18 articles for consideration, but only ten were selected. The articles represented the differences in educational levels and institutions, subjects taught, and geographical locations of respondents to provide a general trend of LLS use among Malaysian ESL students. The researcher also intended to see whether there might be any differences between the LLS use between these two groups of learners on the global stage.

Table 3

Summary of the selected studies

Study	Database	Objective	Sample	Finding
ESL learners				
Chandran & Hashim (2022)	Google Scholar	To ascertain the LLS utilised by students attending a private university in Selangor	200 freshmen from five different faculties at a university	Highest use: metacognitive, social Least used: affective
John et al. (2021)	Google Scholar	To discover the most frequently used LLS among Form 4 ESL learners to enhance their speaking abilities	60 Form 4 ESL learners	Highest use: metacognitive Least used: memory-related
Kehing et al. (2021).	Google Scholar	To examine the impact of LLS on the development of speaking abilities and the motivation level of Semester 1 engineering Diploma students in a polytechnic in Sarawak.	18 to 21 years old from Sabah, Sarawak and the Peninsular	Highest use: metacognitive Least used: social Average learners' motivation level
Nair et al. (2021)	Google Scholar	To identify the LLS employed by pupils at a rural primary school in Selangor, Malaysia	52 Year 6 pupils	Highest use: memory Least used: social
Hanafiah et al. (2021)	Google Scholar	To determine the LLS utilised by students at a rural elementary school in Selangor, Malaysia	54 successful language learners (ESL teachers and lecturers) at various learning institutions in Malaysia	Highest use: metacognitive Moderate use: affective
Adan & Hashim (2021)	Google Scholar	To examine the LLS employed by ESL learners who possess creative talent and are enrolled in an art school.	77 pupils who are 16 and 17 years old	Highest use: metacognitive Least used: compensation
Lim et al. (2021)	Google Scholar	To determine the most and least utilised LLS among Year 6 students at a primary school in	30 pupils Year 6 class of a primary school in Sarawak	Highest use: cognitive Least used: memory

		Sarawak for acquiring English grammar skills.		
Ghulamuddin & Rahman (2022)	Google Scholar	To analyse STEM students' LLS for ESL at a Malaysian public university (PU) and its underlying determinants on open distance learning (ODL).	250 engineering undergraduates as respondents	Highest use: Compensation Least used: Affective The PCA added vital information to the metacognitive strategy.
Ali (2022)	Google Scholar	To examine 21st-century English learning when digital learning platforms assigned writing exercises to students	72 engineering students studying at a technical university on the East Coast of Malaysia	Students used: metacognitive Grammarly, Quillbot, and Google Translate, to name a few, were used to check writing.
Vimalakshan & Aziz (2021)	Google Scholar	To examine how secondary school students utilise effective LLS to learn the four primary English abilities and vocabulary based on their primary school backgrounds (SK/SJKT/SJKC).	60 Form 1 students from diverse secondary schools in Klang	Highest use: metacognitive for SK & SJKT Highest use: compensation for SJKC Least used: cognitive
EFL learners				
Ates & Yayli (2022)	ERIC	To determine if strategy utilisation directly affected language learning achievement. To determine which tactics students preferred and whether they changed after the learning programme.	A total of 286 students filled out the SILL questionnaire Six students from each university were asked to answer interview questions	Highest use: cognitive Least used: compensation
Zhang et al. (2019)	ERIC	To assess how effective reading and writing learning strategies improve Chinese EFL students' low competency at private universities.	70 non-English major undergraduates, 35 students in the experimental group and the rest 35 students	Strategy training managed to improve the reading and writing abilities of low achiever EFL students

			in the control group.	
Marassi & Assgar (2019)	ERIC	Examine how effective classroom management affects EFL students' anxiety and learning strategies.	750 male and female learners and their 30 teachers (aged range of 21-51)	Teacher's classroom management correlated positively with learners' LLS
Aktar & Strong (2019)	ERIC	To study the correlation between vocabulary, receptive skills, and strategy utilisation.	31 Pre-Undergraduate and Pre-Masters international students	Highest use: social Least use: affective
Al-Khaza'leh (2019)	ERIC	To investigate the favoured LLS utilised by a cohort of Saudi EFL students at Shaqra University in Saudi Arabia.	60 male undergraduate students	Highest used: social Least used: memory
Iamudom & Tangkiengsirisin, (2020)	ERIC	To explore learner autonomy and language learning practises among Thai EFL learners, comparing international and Thai public school students at a Bangkok tutorial school	200 senior high school level students, 100 international school students and 100 Thai public school students in a tutorial school	Highest used: cognitive, compensation Least used: affective
Salam et al. (2020)	ERIC	The study aims to analyse the main learning styles and techniques of a college student in the English Education Study Programme across four years.	One successful four years college student	Strategies used: cognitive compensation
Tieocharoen & Rimkeeratikul (2019)	ERIC	To examine the utilisation of Vietnamese and Thai university students in LLS. To conduct a comparative analysis of six distinct dimensions of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) among	116 English major Thai university students, 174 English major Vietnamese students 16 lecturers were interviewed	Vietnamese students were high LLS users; Thailand students used LLS moderately

		Thai and Vietnamese students.	from Vietnam and Thailand	
Rahman (2020)	ERIC	To examine how Qassim University Department of English Language and Translation students learn EFL using LLS.	30 students from level four	Highest used: metacognitive Least used: affective
Pongsukvajchakul (2021)	ERIC	To examine the utilisation of LLS in English composition by Thai undergraduate students	100 Thai undergraduate students	Highest used: social Least used: affective
Berg et al. (2021)	ERIC	To examine the English LLS employed by university students from Taiwan	736 Taiwanese university students	46 strategies found for 5 direct and 3 indirect strategies
Zambrana (2020)	ERIC	To evaluate the predominant L2 learning strategies employed by undergraduate students and their correlation with language proficiency	84 students with a degree in English Studies at the University of Malaga	Highest used: metacognitive Least used: memory
Tomak & Seferoğlu (2021)	ERIC	To study the self-regulation process of A1-level language learners in a one-year English prep programme at a Turkish state university.	Ten participants were selected based on the results of SILL, which was applied to 169 English language students.	Highly autonomous learners had effective time management, did self-assessment for language learning
Fernandez Malpartida (2021)	ERIC	To develop a longitudinal assessment of students' LLS use, analyse their English proficiency and describe their perspective of online English training in Lima-Peru's new normal.	50 undergraduate students who participated in an online high intermediate English course over 16 weeks	Highest used: metacognitive Least used: memory

Almusharraf & Bailey (2021)	ERIC	To map the multidimensional impact of student attributes on behaviour emphasises the significance of learning models.	175 undergraduates EFL junior and senior undergraduate students	Cognitive strategies correlated positively with other LLS
Montaño-González & Cancino (2020)	ERIC	To examine the association between LLS and self-efficacy among Chilean university EFL students.	Sixty-two EFL learners at a Chilean public university	Students were moderate LLS users
Daflizar et al. (2022)	ERIC	To study Indonesian EFL university students' LLS and autonomy and their relationships.	76 Indonesian EFL university students	Highest used: metacognitive Least used: social
Shehadeh & Dwaik (2022)	ERIC	To examine the utilisation of strategies in certain circumstances, specifically in the case of Palestine	73 freshman medical students	Highest used: compensation Least used: affective
Zou & Lertlit (2022)	ERIC	To investigate Chinese students' use of Oxford's SILL to study English To compare English language learning practises among students of different competence levels.	244 Chinese students at a university in Thailand, semi-structured interview of 10 students from the same group	Highest used: compensation Least used: memory
Ziani (2022)	ERIC	To enhance the student's self-awareness regarding the use of distinct learning tactics in online education as opposed to traditional classroom instruction.	80 Master's students in English	Many learners employed similar LLS for both class setting
Abdullah (2022)	ERIC	To compare the usage of common learning strategies by high- and low-achieving students.	160 high school students (80 high achievers and 80 low achievers)	Highest used: metacognitive, compensation Least used: affective, social
Sukyng (2021)	ERIC	To examine Thai EFL university students' LLS	1,523 first-year students	Highest used: affective

			enrolled in a general English course at a university	Least used: memory
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Table 4

The focus group of ESL and EFL learners in the selected studies

Education level	Studies
Primary School (2)	Year 6 ESL pupils (Lim et al., 2021; Nair et al., 2021)
Secondary / High school (4)	Upper-form ESL students (Adan & Hashim, 2021; John et al., 2021) Lower-form ESL students (Vimalakshan & Aziz, 2021) Iraqi senior high school EFL students (Abdullah, 2022)
College (2)	Semester 1 Polytechnic Engineering students (Kehing et al., 2021) A college EFL learner of the English Education Program (Salam et al., 2020)
Universities (21)	Freshmen students (Chanderan & Hashim, 2022) Malaysian Engineering students (Ali, 2022; Ghulamuddin et al., 2022) Prep Year Turkish EFL students (Ates & Yayli, 2022) Non-English Chinese Students (Zhang et al., 2019) Pre-undergraduates & Pre-Masters Bangladeshi EFL students (Aktar & Strong, 2019) Saudi Arabian EFL learners (Al-Khaza'leh, 2019; Rahman, 2020; Almusharraf & Bailey, 2021) ⁷ Thai & Vietnam EFL students (Tieocharoen & Rimkeeratikul, 2019) Thai EFL students (Pongsukvajchakul, 2021; Sukying, 2021) Taiwan EFL students (Berg et al., 2021) Turkish EFL students (Tomak & Seferoğlu, 2021) Peru EFL students (Fernandez Marpartida, 2021) Chilean EFL students (Montaño-González & Cancino, 2020) Indonesian EFL students (Daflizar et al., 2022) Freshmen medical Palestinian EFL students (Shehadeh & Dwaik, 2022) Chinese students at Thai university as EFL learners (Zou & Lertlit, 2022) Algerian EFL Master's students (Ziani, 2022) Spanish EFL students (Zambrana, 2020)
Others (1)	Successful language learners: English teachers & lecturers (Hanafiah et al., 2021)
Combination (2)	EFL learners and teachers (Marassi & Assgar, 2019) Senior high school EFL learners and International school EFL students (Iamudom & Tangkiengsirisin, 2020)

Data Analysis Procedure

The researcher employed Mendeley as a systematic referencing application to analyse all the selected articles. The researcher carried out the data analysis using the thematic approach to answer the following researcher question:

- a) What are the most and the least preferred language learning strategies (LLS) among ESL and EFL learners based on the recent studies?

The review was conducted meticulously using the thematic mode to answer the research question. Since the researcher aimed to investigate the most and the least used language learning strategies (LLS) as explored in the literature review, the finding for each study was divided into the following categories: (a) the most used, (b) the least used, (c) medium use, and (d) unspecified. A discussion of the findings is provided in the next section.

Results

RQ1: What are the most and the least preferred language learning strategies employed by ESL and EFL learners?

Language learning strategies (LLS) invented by Oxford (1990) are divided into direct and indirect strategies. These two broad classes are further broken down into three subclasses each. The direct strategies include (a) memory, (b) cognitive, and (c) compensation. In contrast, the indirect category encompasses the following sub-strategies: (a) metacognitive, (b) affective, and (c) social. The unspecified category refers to findings that do not mention the specific language learning strategies (LLS) used but rather as a whole (all the six categories) or other results related to LLS.

Table 5

Language Learning Strategies (LLS) employed by ESL and EFL learners based on the recent studies

No.	Study	Most used strategy	Least used strategy	Unspecified*
1	Chandran & Hashim (2022)	Metacognitive, social	Memory, effective	
2	John et al. (2021)	Metacognitive	Memory	
3	Kehing et al. (2021)	Metacognitive	Social	
4	Nair et al. (2021)	Memory	Social	
5	Hanafiah et al. (2021)	Metacognitive		
6	Adan & Hashim, (2021)	Metacognitive	Compensation	
7	Lim et al. (2021)	Cognitive	Memory	
8	Ghulamuddin et al. (2022)	Compensation	Affective	
9	Ali (2022)	Metacognitive		
10	Vimalakshan & Aziz (2021)	Metacognitive, Compensation	Cognitive	
11	Ates & Yayli (2022)	Cognitive	Compensation	
12	Zhang et al. (2019)			The intervention of English reading and learning strategies enhance low EFL learners' proficiency

13	Marassi & Assgar (2019)			There is a positive correction between teacher's classroom management and EFL learners' LLS and a negative correction with learners' anxiety
14	Aktar & Strong (2019)	Social	Affective	
15	Al – Khaza'leh (2019)	Social	Memory	
16	Iamudom & Tangkiengsirisin (2020)	Cognitive, compensation	Affective	
17	Salam et al. (2020)			Cognitive is the first strategy, followed by compensation for speaking and writing skills
18	Tieocharoen & Rimkeeratikul (2019)			Vietnamese students highly used LLS, while Thai students were moderate users
19	Rahman (2020)	Metacognitive	Affective	
20	Pongsukvajchakul (2021)	Social	Affective	
21	Berg et al. (2021)			46 strategies across eight factors underlying Taiwanese university students' EFL learning strategy usage; 3 indirect and five direct strategies
22	Zambrana (2020)	Metacognitive	Memory	
23	Tomak & Seferoğlu (2021)			Highly self-regulated learners had both self-study time and evaluated their development in terms of linguistic competence.
24	Fernandez Malpartida (2021)	Metacognitive	Memory	
25	Almusharraf & Bailey (2021)			Cognitive strategies highly correlate with

				compensation, metacognitive and social strategies. Female learners reported higher levels of strategy use than males.
26	Montaño-González & Cancino (2020)			Participants were moderate strategy users
27	Daflizar et al. (2022)	Metacognitive	Social	
28	Shehadeh & Dwaik (2022)	Compensation	Affective	
29	Zou & Lertlit (2022)	Compensation	Memory	
30	Ziani (2022)			Most students use the same LLS for both in-class and online learning
31	Abdullah (2022)	Metacognitive, compensation	Affective, Social	
32	Sukying (2021)	Affective	Memory	

Table 6

Summary of the most and the least preferred Language Learning Strategies (LLS) employed by ESL and EFL learners based on the current studies

(a) The most preferred LLS

Strategy	Type	Frequency	Rank
Indirect	Metacognitive	12	1
Direct	Compensation	6	2
Indirect	Social	4	3
Direct	Cognitive	3	4
Direct	Memory	1	5
Indirect	Affective	1	

(b) The least preferred LLS

Strategy	Type	Frequency	Rank
Direct	Memory	8	1
Indirect	Affective	8	
Indirect	Social	4	2
Direct	Compensation	2	3

Direct	Cognitive	1	4
Indirect	Metacognitive	0	5

Discussion

Based on the analysis in Table 5, 12 studies illustrated that metacognitive is the most preferred strategy among ESL and EFL learners. Metacognitive strategies fall under the broader class of indirect strategies. This finding was not a surprise considering the popularity of these strategies among English language learners in numerous previous studies. The second most frequently used strategies were compensation, with six publications, which belongs to the direct strategies, whereas social strategies, with four studies, was the third most popular indirect strategy employed by learners to improve their second language acquisition. The cognitive (3), memory and affective strategies with 1 study each were ranked at number 4 and 5 respectively. Cognitive and memory are both components of direct strategies, whereby affective is a subclass of indirect strategies. At the other end of the spectrum, the findings for the least used strategies were expected as well, with eight researchers showing that memory and affective strategies were ranked first. It was followed by four studies that showed social strategies were in second place. The third was compensation strategies, which recorded two publications, and only one study proved cognitive among the least employed strategies. Interestingly, no publication showed that metacognitive was on the list, as many ESL and EFL learners favoured these strategies.

The review also showed that some ESL and EFL learners were moderate users of LLS, but as demonstrated in a few studies, this is not a static state. A study by Hanafiah et al (2021) on language learning strategies (LLS) found that successful ESL language learners were medium users of affective strategies apart from being high users of metacognitive strategies. In the same vein, EFL Indonesian students were discovered to be the most frequent users of metacognitive strategies but medium users of other strategies (memory, cognitive, compensation, affective and social) based on research done by (Daflizar et al., 2022). Ates and Yayli's (2022) research on whether EFL Turkish learners showed changes in their strategy preference by the end of a learning program yielded a positive result. They increasingly employed language learning strategies (LLS) towards the end of preparatory education. Similarly, Fernandez Malpartida (2021) found that before the SILL survey, Peruvian EFL students mostly used metacognitive strategies in their learning, whereas the other strategies were utilised in moderation. In contrast, post-SILL results produced fruitful outcomes as they employed more strategies (cognitive, compensation, social and affective) and became high LLS users.

More importantly, the recent comparative studies also shed meaningful discoveries for the advocates of language learning strategies (Fernandez Malpartida, 2021; Abdullah, 2022). As mentioned earlier by Kölemen (2021), most of the studies on language learning strategies (LLS) primarily targeted individual learner variables, namely motivation, gender and proficiency in EFL. The recent analysis in the English as a Second Language (ESL) context also employed a similar focus. These personal factors, as well as socioeconomic, political, educational, religious, and cultural variables, as highlighted by Kenol and Hashim (2022), affect the use among both EFL and ESL learners to a certain extent in a global setting. Educational variables can be further broken down into the following sub-variables according to the findings of recent studies

- a) learners' language learning levels (Ates & Yayli, 2022),
- b) years of educational experience (Aktar & Strong, 2019),
- c) types of education institutions (Iamudom & Tangkiengsirisin, 2020; Vimalakshan & Aziz, 2021),
- d) pedagogical approach (Tieocharoen & Rimkeeratikul (2019),
- e) field of study (Pongsukvajchakul, 2021),
- f) frequency of language practice (Pongsukvajchakul, 2021; Daflizar et al., 2022),
- g) Exposure to language learning strategies (exposure to LLS (Fernandez Malpartida, 2021).

Gender as another important variable was only significant in two studies (Zambrana, 2020; Almusharraf & Bailey, 2021). Both studies revealed that female learners recorded higher levels of strategy use than their male counterparts. In addition, other impactful variables mentioned in the recent studies are: learners' belief and interest (Vimalakshan & Aziz, 2021), (b) learners' anxiety (Marassi & Assgar, 2019), (c) learners' self-efficacy (Montaño-González & Cancino 2020; Daflizar et al., 2022), and (d) type of learners and learning behaviours (Almusharraf & Bailey, 2021; Tomak & Seferoğlu, 2021). The review revealed contradictory results across the various nationalities too. A few studies proved that successful language learners highly employed metacognitive strategies to learn the English language (Hanafiah et al., 2021; Abdullah, 2022). However, Shehadeh and Dwaik (2022) discovered that medical EFL Palestinians were the high users of compensation strategies, an eye-opening result considering the fact that they were high achievers. In Abdullah's study (2022), the low achievers were the most frequent users of the compensation strategies. In another study by Fernandez Malpartida (2021), both weak and strong EFL learners were the most frequent users of metacognitive strategies. This is another intriguing finding in the language learning strategies (LLS) domain.

Conclusions

The primary objective of this study was to identify the most and the least employed language learning strategies among both ESL and EFL learners in the last five years, from 2019 to 2023. For this purpose, 32 articles were meticulously selected from ERIC and Google Scholar databases for a systematic literature review. The current trends in language learning strategies (LLS) research are as follows

- 1) Oxford (1990) proposed the most comprehensive language learning taxonomy as she clearly distinguished between direct and indirect strategies to date. These strategies are developed principally to develop linguistic competence among language learners. The direct category contains three sub-classes, namely memory, cognitive and compensation. Meanwhile, metacognitive, affective and social strategies are components of indirect strategies. As pointed out by Oxford, the objective of the inventory (SILL) is for learners to know their learning behaviour and preference better in their quest to master the second language. An informed L2 learner can increase the number of and diversify their language learning strategies to achieve the desired learning outcomes. By conducting a survey, learners and educators can benefit from the findings.
- 2) Many studies were carried out in tertiary education institutions ranging from polytechnic, colleges and universities. Just a handful of research involved primary and secondary students as the subject of the study. Since many ESL and EFL learners learn English from a tender age across various nationalities, more studies could be conducted

on this group of learners. They can learn strategy training to help them become successful language learners in their later lives.

- 3) Most studies employed a cross-sectional study as one of the most popular quantitative methods. The primary research instrument was Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). Some scholars were aware of the shortcomings of using single instruments, so they utilised other research tools to provide better insight and results. A few studies utilised interviews, self-made instruments, other questionnaires and tests to complement their studies. Also, the researchers chose only two longitudinal, one quasi-experiment and one case study study. More research employing these methods should be carried out to produce even more comprehensive results.

There are several limitations of this study. First of all, the researcher exclusively reviewed journal articles that employed the Strategy Inventory in Language Learning (SILL) within a short span of five years, from 2019 to 2023. The study only aimed to investigate how frequently ESL and EFL learners utilise the six language learning strategies. Hence, the researcher should have attempted further investigation into all the variables affecting language learning strategies (LLS) among ESL and EFL learners. However, the LLS might apply to L2 learners of other languages, and necessary changes can be made. Since no languages genuinely share the same linguistic features, it will be advantageous if they are considered in future studies. This study has shown that Oxford's (1990) taxonomy remains highly reliable and valid amid several criticisms of its weaknesses in the academic arena. The researcher is optimistic that these LLS will continuously contribute to developing second language acquisition.

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