

Investigating the Use of Social Media as Language Learning Strategies among the Lower Secondary ESL Learners to Enhance Speaking Skills

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i7/17753> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v13-i7/17753

Published Date: 10 July 2023

Abstract

The ubiquity of social media sites which swiftly develop massive communicative networks in the virtual world is a notable element of the twenty-first century. The widespread utilisation of social media platforms has substantially promoted English as a global language in establishing a massive communication platform. However, English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in many countries including Malaysia are constantly struggling when communicating and conversing in English. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the use of social media as language learning strategies among lower secondary ESL learners to improve their speaking skill. This study employed quantitative research design that was conducted among lower form ESL learners at a Malaysian public school. The survey questionnaire used in this study was derived and modified from the Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was then used to examine and report on the data. Overall, the findings provide beneficial information to other researchers in analysing the language learning strategies ESL language learners employ to enhance their speaking skills with the help of social media.

Keywords: ESL Students, Language Learning Strategies (LLS), Social Media, and Public Speaking

Introduction

A prominent feature of the 21st century is the prevalence of social media sites that rapidly establish huge communicative networks in the virtual world. The tremendous amount of social media platform usage has massively promoted English language as a global language to establish an enormous communicative platform to bridge and connect the diverse world population. Social media sites refer to mobile technology used for various purposes inclusive

of communication, information exchange and entertainment. It also serves as a platform to promote group activities that involve interacting and connecting with others virtually through text, audios, images and video. The renowned social media platforms used globally namely Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram and just to list a few. Those media platforms enable its users to communicate freely with anybody at any time and from any location.

Besides, social media platforms could be considered as one of the easily available and effective platforms which could be exploited as a real means of language communication tools among the ESL learners. Social media could be used as various activity-oriented lessons in order to maximize the ESL learners' language input in order for them to have greater exposure to English speaking atmosphere. The students were given more opportunities to hear the target language and to use the language themselves more frequently. Enhanced communication skills may also be developed while practicing the linguistic routines in the target language especially for those students who might not be speaking in English for most of their time.

Good language learners are usually proactive and take responsibility for their language learning. They are also resourceful in figuring out how to effectively learn on their own terms. The effective language learners are aware of their learning strategies and know how to make language study engaging. Language learning strategies facilitate English as a second language learners in enhancing their English proficiency. They experiment with numerous platforms and learning strategies, utilise the advancement of technology tools in order to become engaged and have fun while learning a language. However, English as a Second Language learners in many countries, as well as in Malaysia, are anxious and in constant struggle when they are communicating and conversing in English.

Speaking is fundamental to what it means to acquire a second language. According to researchers in the field of second language instruction, speaking proficiency is a crucial component of a language teaching curriculum. Utilising social media to improve students' speaking ability and the ESL classroom environment is an innovative method for improving students' speaking ability and enhancing the ESL classroom environment. It provides a less stressful learning environment that is more conducive to language acquisition and practise for students. The non-threatening environment not only encourages students to speak English, but also enhances their confidence to do so. Therefore, this study focused on the relationship between the use of social media in identifying learning strategies and learners' speaking proficiency.

Hence, two research objectives of this study are to

1. Investigate the use of social media as language learning strategies among lower secondary ESL learners to enhance speaking skill.
2. Investigate the most and the least used language learning strategies using social media among lower secondary ESL learners in enhancing their speaking skill.

Literature Review

Social Media in ESL

As we know, social media has become a meaningful tool for learning and teaching nowadays. It is mainly due to its functions for knowledge sharing where we can exchange documents, videos and audios easily. Apart from that, virtual communication can take place anytime and anywhere with social media without the need to meet physically in order to communicate. Social media also serves as a knowledge formation platform. What is social

media? Otchie and Pedaste (2020) in their research stated that social media is the spreading and sharing of information over the internet facilitated by any technology. Among the examples of widely used social media nowadays are WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, WeChat, Telegram, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, and several others. In Malaysia, the most highly used social media among learners are Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter as they consider social media as a source of e-learning (Hosen et al., 2021). Social media does help a lot in learning nowadays specifically for English especially in Malaysia where English holds a status of second language. According to Ichsan and Ulya (2021), TikTok can be utilised as an interesting tool in teaching and learning process to make the lessons attractive and engaging for the learners because it can be used to portray learners' expressions and creativity. It is because the younger generations are interested and excited much about TikTok, so they can either generate videos individually or collaboratively with their peers that will enable them to share their knowledge in a particular topic. Apart from that, Hakim (2019) stated that Telegram consists of many educational channels which offer to educate the English language via different language skills. Learning will also become more meaningful by using Telegram since it has the special features like videos, pictures, audio, media and text messages, which at the same time offers an opportunity for more discussion between educators and learners. In addition, the utilisation of Instagram vlog as the media to enhance speaking ability among English learners, is intended to provide an anxiety free environment where learners can interact with others while exploring the media which is familiar to their daily lives in order to develop self-achievement, (Wulandri, 2019). As an example, learners have to create a short video (vlog) of themselves talking about their celebration by using an Instagram account set by the teacher. This is an example of one interesting activity that can give opportunities for learners to practice the target language creatively and most importantly without any anxiety of being assessed outside the classroom. Those are the examples of how social media can be beneficial for learners in learning English since it is the current trend that is very relevant to the current generation who are mostly technology-savvy.

Language Learning Strategy

O'Malley and Chamot (1990; as cited in Nhem, 2019) stated that "learning strategies are viewed as the special thoughts or actions used by learners to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (p. 1). From this definition, we can see that language learning strategies are any set of thoughts or actions taken by learners to facilitate acquisition, retention and also application of new knowledge. In addition, Oxford (1990; as cited in Pawlak, 2019) also stated that language learning strategies are "the specific actions used by the learners in order to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-centred and more transferable to new situations" (p. 8). Language learning strategy here can be seen as something that helps learners in learning how to learn, how to think, how to solve problems and also how to make their learning faster and more effective. The strategies involve planning, monitoring and evaluating an individual's learning process, which is versatile according to learners' various learning styles and also situations. Furthermore, Wenden and Rubin (1987; as cited in lamudom and Tangkiengsirisin, 2020) stated that it is "the strategies which play an important role to the development of the language system which learners construct and affect learning directly" (p.23). The strategies involve various types of techniques, resources and skills that learners used to process and comprehend new knowledge effectively. Thus, learners with a diverse set of LLS are more independent and

successful in language acquisition and they are very important to promote, enhance and facilitate language learning. Oxford (1990, as cited in Dawi & Hashim, 2022) has divided language acquisition strategies into two large categories: direct and indirect, each with three subcategories. On the other hand, indirect strategy entails learning as a whole and in a broader sense.

Direct and Indirect Language Learning Strategies

Direct strategies that are explicitly involved in comprehending the target language include memory strategy, cognition strategy, and compensation strategy (Oxford, 1990). Memory strategies are approaches to retrieve knowledge, retain facts, and transmit information from one skill level to another (Chanderan & Hashim, 2022). Cognitive strategies refer to the mental processes that are engaged in manipulating, altering, and communicating with the target language. Meanwhile, compensating strategies are employed to fill up information gaps that impede them from learning and using the target language (John, et al., 2021). According to Chanderan and Hashim (2022) students with low language skills and vocabulary will attempt to learn to guess correctly in order to overcome limits in conversation and writing using this learning technique. This is supported by Dawi & Hashim (2021) where direct strategy refers to how pupils handle focused language learning, which includes the participation of mental processes related to the language studied.

On the other hand, the indirect strategies include metacognitive strategy, affective strategy and social strategy (Oxford, 1990). The concept of metacognitive strategies refers to students' management and control of their learning (John et al., 2021). During the organisation and planning stages of the learning process, students look for knowledge about language acquisition, how to organise their studies, how to develop goals and learning objectives, and how to define activities like speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Next, students' feelings and emotions regarding their learning are thus referred to as affective techniques, where attempts are made to manage our emotions, motivate ourselves, and lessen worry (Adan & Hashim, 2021). Lastly, the social strategies promote social engagement such as in questioning and cooperating with others and feeling sympathy for others and understanding people's mind and feelings (Lestari & Wahyudin, 2020).

Speaking

Nowadays, it is very common for learners to have difficulty conversing in foreign language (Raba, 2017). This is because they are not familiar with the target language especially for learners who speak in their mother tongue who will commonly face this issue. This is because it will be difficult for them to comprehend the meaning of the English words apart from they are unsure of their pronunciation. As we can see, this has become the common factor of why they are unable to converse in the target language. Speaking skill is defined as a process between two parties exchanging important messages by delivering and receiving the messages (Rusli, 2018). Learners must converse fluently in order to deliver the messages excellently, so that the messages conveyed will be easy for the receiver to comprehend. In addition, pronunciation is one of the meaningful factors which will impact learner's speaking fluency (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). As we are all aware of, poor pronunciation often makes learners feel shy and less confident to converse in front of their friends and teachers. Moreover, the feeling of being afraid that they will mispronounce any unfamiliar words tends to make them demotivated to converse in the target language. This

will then make them unable to engage in conversation and face difficulties to converse in the target language.

Methodology

Research Design and Participants

For this study, quantitative descriptive research design was carried out using a survey questionnaire comprising 24 survey questions for the purpose of collecting data for the research. The data collected was used to investigate what are the minimally used and highly used Language Learning Strategies employed by Form 1 ESL learners in one of the researchers' schools in improving their Speaking skills. 30 Form 1 pupils were selected for this study using a purposive sampling technique. Based on a diagnostic test, the pupils' level of proficiency for Speaking ranged from weak to intermediate due to very limited speaking exposure outside of the classroom.

Research Instrument

This research employed a survey questionnaire modified and adapted from the Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0. The questionnaire was adapted and modified to a considerably simpler version in order to meet the study's emphasis on speaking skills. The frequency of second language learning techniques employed by respondents is examined in this survey questionnaire. There are 24 statements from 6 parts in the questionnaire that focus on the Language Learning Strategy related to Speaking skills under all six categories; cognitive, memory, metacognitive, compensation, social and affective, incorporating both indirect and direct strategies indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Questionnaire Description

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY		PART
DIRECT STRATEGY	Memory Related	Part A
	Cognitive	Part B
	Compensation	Part C
INDIRECT STRATEGY	Metacognitive	Part D
	Affective	Part E
	Social	Part F

Data Collection and Analysis

A 5-point Likert questionnaire modified from Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0 was used to collect the data. Respondents completed a Google Form-based

questionnaire that was administered online. A quantitative descriptive study method with statistical analysis was utilised by the researchers to investigate the most used as well as the least commonly used Language Learning Strategies intended for speaking skills. Each strategy's frequency, percentage, and mean score were calculated using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

Findings

Secondary school students' language learning strategies were examined in this study through 24 direct and indirect strategies. Regarding the aims of the study and the research questions, all of the findings are presented in 3 tables. Majority of respondents (above 70%) used direct strategies more than indirect strategies in the questionnaires analysed. Students are most likely to use cognitive strategies and least likely to use affective strategies according to the study.

Table 2

Mean Score and Percentages for Each Strategy

Language Learning Strategy		Mean	Percentages (%)
Direct Strategy	Memory Related	3.50	70.00
	Cognitive	3.77	75.35
	Compensation	3.63	72.60
Indirect Strategy	Metacognitive	3.70	74.00
	Affective	3.14	62.70
	Social	3.36	67.15

Table 2 describes that the Form 1 students are tending towards using the language learning strategies in a certain order. They preferred to use cognitive strategies ($M = 3.77$), followed by metacognitive strategies ($M = 3.70$), compensation strategies ($M = 3.63$), memory-related ($M = 3.50$), social strategies ($M = 3.36$), and finally affective strategies ($M = 3.14$).

The highly employed strategy to improve their speaking skills is cognitive strategy. Based on Table 1, 75.35% of the Form 1 students used cognition and reasoning to acquire and improve speaking in the English language. Computers, smartphones, and the internet are available to all students, enabling them to use cognitive tools therefore they are anticipated to be able to reason and do critical thinking, work individually and carry autonomous, self-directed learning. Consequently, cognitive strategies allow the students to have control on their own learning process.

At the bottom of the list is the affective strategy, which is least preferred. Only 62.70% of Form 1 students, according to Table 3, are using affective strategies to improve their speaking abilities.

Affective strategy enables learners to deal with feelings and emotions in learning. Students' goal-oriented behaviour could be explained by this result and therefore they will keep their focus only on the result of their learning in the end, without being distracted by feelings and emotions. This may have been a reason why affective strategies are the least favourable among the Form 1 students.

Table 3

Mean Score for Specific Cognitive Strategies

Language Learning Strategy	Specific Strategies	Mean Score
Cognitive	I try to talk like native English speakers I saw on social media.	3.87
	I find the meaning of an English word that I learn from social media by dividing it into parts that I understand.	3.87
	I make summaries of information that I hear or read from social media in English.	3.33
	I practise the sounds of English that I heard from social media.	4.00

In Table 4, the most frequently used statements are listed along with their mean scores for cognitive strategy among the Form 1 students. The cognitive section includes 4 statements that : 1) I try to talk like native English speakers I saw on social media. (M = 3.87), 2) I find the meaning of an English word that I learn from social media by dividing it into parts that I understand. (M = 3.87), 3) I make summaries of information that I hear or read from social media in English (M = 3.33), and lastly 4) I practice the sounds of English that I heard from social media. (M = 4.00). The most used cognitive strategy is "I practice the sounds of English that I heard from social media".

Table 4

Mean Score for Specific Affective Strategies

Language Learning Strategy	Specific Strategies	Mean Score
Affective	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English on social media.	3.37
	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English on social media.	2.80
	I talk to someone else on social media about how I feel when I am learning English.	2.47
	I encourage myself to speak English on social media even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	3.90

The following table shows the least used Affective strategies and their mean scores. The affective section includes 4 statements too, namely: 1) I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English on social media. (M = 3.37), 2) I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English on social media. (M = 2.80), 3) I talk to someone else on social media about how I feel when I am learning English. (M = 2.47), and finally 4) I encourage myself to speak English on social media even when I am afraid of making a mistake. (M = 3.90). The least used affective strategy is “I talk to someone else on social media about how I feel when I am learning English”.

Discussion

The most used LLS by Form 1 learners in enhancing speaking skill

The findings indicate that the cognitive strategy is the most used LLS by the Form 1 students in improving their speaking skills. This is similar to the study conducted by (Nhem, 2019), where cognitive strategy was identified as the most common form of learning technique. Practising the language with others, sending emails or messages in English, reading and sharing the posts and articles on social media, listening to English music or audios and watching English-language films are some of the example activities that ease the process of acquiring the language according to the research of (Nhem, 2019). Cognitive strategies enable students to better perceive and produce language in ways that are appropriate for their individual learning. This is to emphasise that each learner has a unique approach to achieving certain goals and objectives in language learning because no one person is confined to a single learning style. This is also supported by Alyas (2021), who claimed that cognitive strategies are mental procedures or techniques used by language learners to facilitate and make sense of their own learning process.

Abbasi et al (2020) stated that cognitive strategies were specific actions and procedures which learners used while working directly with a text. In regard to this statement, students may have a tendency in using tools or mediums they see online to help them understand and use

the target language. They may have applied support strategies such as referring to a vocabulary list or dictionary, doing note taking or highlighting and comprehending some text or conversation they saw or heard online to help them improve in their speaking.

The results of the study also show the same mean scores between 2 cognitive tasks: “I try to talk like native English speakers I saw on social media.” and “I find the meaning of an English word that I learn from social media by dividing it into parts that I understand”. Alsohbani (2018) stated that this preference of the students indicates that they employ suitable attention to the use of English in contexts which help them to benefit and develop their speaking skills. Students may watch online programs in English, and they even try to talk like native speakers.

Alyas (2021) also identified cognitive strategies that include employment of cognitive skills such as summarising and forming language learning materials, understanding, translation and applying problem-solving measures. Thus, using the opportunities the students meet like listening to anyone conversing in English will engage them in appropriate strategies that could help them to keep on progressing in speaking English. They would be able to participate in situations that can help them to advance in their own learning at their own preferences and aptness.

The least used LLS by Form 1 learners in enhancing speaking skill

The results also show that the participants' participants use affective strategies the least when learning to speak English. According to Shi (2011), self-encouragement and anxiety-reduction which fit to affective strategies would help them not to be easily distracted in acquiring or obtaining the target language. However, in the case of the Form 1 students, this strategy might not be as helpful in improving their speaking skills as younger learners could have less control over their motivations, emotions, feelings and attitudes while learning although according to Alyas (2021), affective strategies equip learners with control.

Mujiyanto (2022) explains that affective learning strategies affect significantly in shaping students characters and implementing this strategy should focus on how students react during teaching and learning processes. Nonetheless, if the students put much concentration and attention in achieving their goals in acquiring the language, they would not be distracted by their emotions and attitudes as they put full devotion towards the goals. Motivation plays an important role here as well, but Sun (2022) stated that respect to self-efficacy has been acknowledged for its positive contribution to learning outcomes as well. This means that students who recognised their full potential would not need many motivations to push them towards achieving the language learning goals. They can self-equip themselves and this also supports why the Form 1 students have a tendency in choosing Cognitive learning strategy instead.

In this study as well, students did not point out that levels of comfort increase their possibility of asking for explanations and getting a deeper understanding of their learning. This is shown in the mean score (2.47) for the statement, “I talk to someone else on social media about how I feel when I am learning English”. They are keener in choosing cognition to facilitate their acquisition in the target language. They can do reasoning to speak better without even trying to consult other people to validate their feelings and emotional state while learning and acquiring the language especially while speaking.

Implication and Conclusion

The findings of this study show that cognitive strategy is the most preferred or the most frequently employed LLS in enhancing speaking skill by the Form 1 students from a rural area in Sabah. This is followed by metacognitive strategy and compensation strategy. On the contrary, the least favoured LLS to enhance speaking skill is affective strategy. Therefore, the LLS that students used are more in line with their personal preferences for learning style and methodology. The students were aware of what they intended to do to use the cognitive strategy to enhance their speaking abilities. They get through their learning curve and enhance their speaking skill with greater organisation, comprehension, and confidence in their English. The students used cognitive strategies in a variety of ways, both consciously and unconsciously, observed by the implementation of this method. Thus, language teachers must familiarise themselves with the techniques and be aware of how to instruct them to their pupils if they are to expose their students to a diversity of teaching methods.

It is believed that this study will considerably give educators insight into how language strategies function and their efficacy, helping them to understand the value of presenting the methods to their language learners, particularly those who are regarded less successful. The information provided in this research also should assist teachers and ESL students in implementing relevant and effective strategies that will have a positive influence on and increase English language acquisition. Teachers could use similar surveys to identify their learners' preferred LLS so that the learning process will be smooth. Furthermore, revising teaching methods and upgrading pedagogy skills can take place after surveying to facilitate better language learning. Although learners are unfamiliar with LLS in-depth, it is possible that this research may help them understand them better. By completing the survey, they will discover more about their preferred LLS. The task may be completed by determining the strategy that is used the most frequently so that they are aware of how they acquire the second language. This will provide students with insights on how to select and combine appropriate ESL learning strategies in order to attain their desired objective, such as being able to communicate effectively and reaching a specific degree of competence.

Besides that, language teachers and educators should be more sensitive and aware of the preferred LLS by their students in order to prepare the suitable lesson plan, teaching approaches and learning materials in order to make the learning process run smoothly and effectively. In an effort to promote more speaking practices and lower learners' anxiety levels, teachers should be attentive to the learners' areas of interest and include them into the learning and teaching process. At the same time, educators should introduce students to a variety of LLS enabling students to decide on approaches that properly match their objectives and assignment specifications as the use of LLS improves language acquisition and mastery. For future studies, researchers should focus on increasing the sample size to include students from various cultural and social backgrounds, the mixed-gender classroom as well as from differentiated geographical settings. Additionally, rather than focusing on just one language skill, the language techniques cover more or all of the four: speaking, reading, and writing. This would provide a clearer image to guide teachers' educational practices in the classroom. In conclusion, this study offers fresh insights to aid the teacher in understanding their Form1 learners and helping them use language learning strategies to improve communicative language skills and not all findings of this study can be generalised to suit any kind of learners.

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