

Language Learning Strategies used by ESL Primary School Pupils to Enhance Grammar and Vocabulary Skills

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Abstract

Vocabulary and grammar skills are fundamental in language learning. It is essential for educators to discover the learners' preferences, needs and interests using the Language Learning Strategies (LLS) in learning the English language. However, a big number of teachers and learners are still unaware of the LLS used to elevate effective ESL learning. There is also a dearth of study on LLS used by ESL learners, specifically on grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, this study seeks to identify the LLS employed by learners in a rural primary school in Lahad Datu, Sabah in enhancing their grammar and vocabulary skills. This study is a quantitative study using survey as a method. The data were gathered using a set of questionnaires which was adapted from the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The questionnaire was distributed to 61 respondents aged 11 and 12 years old from a rural primary school in Sabah. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data descriptively. The results of the study show that most of the respondents preferred metacognitive strategy as compared to the other strategies, while the least preferred strategy is the cognitive strategy. Thus, teachers are suggested to train these ESL learners to be independent learners using comprehensive, independent, and effective approaches in learning the English language. This study also suggests various activities that are effective in helping learners using other LLSs. Further studies are recommended to investigate the potential of different LLSs among different types of learners or involving other subject areas.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies (LLS), ESL Teaching and Learning, Vocabulary Skill, Grammar Skill, Primary School.

Introduction

The vast and wide influence of digitalization in our modern world has seamlessly connected global citizens all around the world. There is now an urgency more than ever for the world citizens to master the English language as the international language, with a concentrated focus on the English as Second Language (ESL) or English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Malaysia especially, does not only have business relationships, but also diplomatic relationships with world countries that employ the English language as their main medium of communication for international relationships, economy, education, and other paramount roles (Oktavia et al., 2022). Therefore, in its effort to produce Malaysian individuals who are able to compete in professional sectors globally and internationally, the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) put high emphasis on scaling up Malaysian ESL learners' language skills.

In developing competent English speakers, focus is given on the four main language skills in the English language are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Additionally, to make sure that our ESL learners do not only master proficiency, but also accuracy, the English language, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which integrates grammar and vocabulary in the four main skills is adopted by the Ministry of Education (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021). Grammar specifically, is deemed as the most difficult fragment of the English language as it requires students to memorize and apply many grammatical rules such as English tenses and subject-verb-agreement (Yacob & Yunus, 2019). As opposed to the native speakers who learn grammar and vocabulary in natural setting, ESL learners are often forced to memorise and practice grammar and vocabulary which perhaps lead to their demotivation of learning the language. Rafiq et al (2019) in their study also mentioned that understanding and applying the grammatical rules correctly made teaching and learning of English strenuous and arduous.

Consequently, teachers and educators need to consider and implement various methods and strategies that can ease and facilitate students' grammar and vocabulary learning to master the English language. Before deciding on which method is compatible with the students, it is recommended for educators to use the Language Learning Strategies (LLS) as a base to discover the students' preference, needs and interests. According to Pongsukvajchakul (2021), ESL learners need to have a good grasp of what and how to optimize appropriate strategies in language learning. However, a big number of teachers and learners are still unaware of the LLS used to elevate effective ESL learning. There is also a dearth in research on LLS for vocabulary and grammar skill. Thus, this study aims to identify LLS utilized by learners in a rural primary school in Lahad Datu in enhancing grammar and vocabulary skills.

Literature Review**Teaching and learning of English as a Second Language**

The teaching and learning of English as a second language has been globally embraced for decades in various countries over the world. In a country that emphasises on the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language (ESL), Malaysia through the Ministry of Education (MoE) is consistently focusing on the needs of improving and enhancing the English language proficiency of students, especially at primary level. As mentioned by Singh et al (2021), this can be observed through the implementations of educational reforms to enhance the English language proficiency of primary students through modules design approach related to the four language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing under the

Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools (SCPS) in 2011. Besides the introduction to phonics, language arts and writing, Critical and Creative Thinking Skills (CCTS) is also prioritised to promote Higher Order Thinking Skills among primary students. Singh et al. (2021) also further stressed that Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools (SCPS) also concentrated on a learner-centred approach which involves the 4Cs known as communication, critical thinking, creativity and collaboration which are the required skills towards 21st century learning. Students should be taught to operate cognitive skills in language at a higher level and this is showcased in the latest inception of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) through the introduction of the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) and English Language Education Reform (The Roadmap) 2015-2025. According to Kok and Aziz (2019), the implementation of CEFR is pivotal for a successful reform process of the English language in our country's education system. Sahib and Stapa (2022) highlighted that the Malaysian government highly prioritises the English language proficiency of Malaysians. Hence, the curriculum was carefully devised to cater to international standards, and this can be seen through one of the main objectives of the implementation of CEFR which is to uplift the standard of the English language among both Malaysian students and teachers. As mentioned by Zaki & Darmi (2021), CEFR carries an important role towards the continuous development of English language education in Malaysia towards reaching global standards that the future generation will need to encounter as part of a well-designed roadmap. Nawai & Said (2020) mentioned that the CEFR framework represents language proficiency which consists of five communication skills which are spoken interaction, spoken production, listening, reading and writing. The skills are further simplified into four skills in which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing with the integration of grammar and vocabulary.

Language Skills in ESL Learning

There have been many challenges over the years for both teachers and students to teach and learn the four skills of the English language widely known as the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, as well as the integrated skills, vocabulary and grammar in the Malaysian context respectively. In second language learning, the listening skill is known to be an important skill but is often said to be challenging. According to Yaacob et al (2021), the teaching of listening comprehension is often not given emphasis among primary school pupils even though its significance has been proven time and time. This leads to the next skill which is speaking and is regarded as a fundamental medium of communication and yet difficult to learn. According to Azlan et al (2019), some of the main challenges faced by primary pupils in learning speaking skills is low self-esteem, insufficient practices, and lack of exposure to the language. Regarding primary school pupils in rural areas, the mastery of reading comprehension and writing skills in English as a second language has been an uphill challenge. As mentioned by Nawai & Said (2020), the pupils' poor learning ability often prevents them from attaining new knowledge and this affects their language learning ability which results in a delayed progress to master the reading comprehension and writing skills. Above all, a good grasp of grammar and vocabulary are paramount to ensure that pupils are able to master the four main language skills effectively.

Grammar has long been known to be the foundation of language learning to learners of English as a second language. According to Al-khresheh & Orak (2021), grammar is the foundation of language and the real challenge with grammar is overwhelming for both teachers and students. Failure to equip oneself with the necessary grammar foundation will have irreparable damage to their language acquisition unless they have learned by heart the

grammatical rules and concepts of the English language. Yacob & Yunus (2019) highlights that it is pertinent for ESL learners to be able to build sentences and be certain of their ability to voice out their ideas as some students may be reluctant due to being afraid of making grammar mistakes that may divert from the actual ideas. A teacher's grammar knowledge and teaching style does play an influential role for students to be able to learn grammar effectively. As noted by White (2020), teachers who are uncertain of their own grammar knowledge will most probably avoid teaching grammar lessons or would rely only on materials related to grammar exercises without understanding the need to incorporate grammar into group activities, discussions, role play, or even writing for responses to real audiences, which has time and again shown to inhibit language learning and use.

Another influencing factor in second language learning is vocabulary which is of utmost importance and ultimately forms the foundation of one's mastery of the four skills in English language acquisition. Anumanthan & Hashim (2022) stated that the upper primary pupils do face challenges in acquiring vocabulary skills in the learning of ESL as vocabulary is seen as an important feature in the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. It is imperative to note that vocabulary plays a vital role in enabling a student to communicate a reasonable amount of information effectively. According to Alshahrani (2019), a solid foundation of vocabulary will enable students to use complex materials that will be of advantage to them to communicate and better relate to others. Vocabulary skills are often not prioritised in comparison to other skills resulting in poor lexical mastery. Ariffin (2021) highlighted that in Malaysia, the teaching of vocabulary is not strongly emphasised in our education system in comparison to the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, though it is part of the English language syllabi for both primary and secondary as well as that of higher learning institutions. He further states that vocabulary is not being taught with the proper needed strategy in that it lacks dedicated and structured lessons on enhancing learners' skills and to figure out meaning of words through different techniques and approaches.

Language Learning Strategies

According to John et al (2021), the groundwork for Language Learning Strategies in English as a Second Language has been done by three distinct researchers with one of the earliest being Rubin in 1975. Rubin (1975) pointed out that good second language learners are motivated, spot on in their guesses, motivated to interact, are not shy, always seeking room for practice, keep a record of their own expressions and are attentive to sense and this is further expanded by O'Malley, et al. in 1985 as he and his associates pointed out three other aspects of language learning strategies known as metacognitive, emotional and social or effective strategies. John, et al (2021); Kehing et al (2021), continue to highlight the significance of language learning strategies mentioned which are classified as the direct and indirect strategies. These are further branched into six different strategies. The direct strategies include memory, cognitive and compensation strategies which are related to comprehending a specific language while the indirect strategies consist of metacognitive, affective and social strategies.

The six language learning strategies in ESL are further explained as follows. According to Oxford (2003); John, et al (2021), the first under direct strategies is memory-related strategies which enables ESL learners to relate an item or concept to another that does not require in-depth understanding. For instance, to recall information in an orderly manner, for example acronyms or to have learning and recalling of details through sounds like rhyming or

even images which reflects the mental picture of a word or the meaning of a word. Other examples include combining sounds and images such as the keyword method or mechanical means such as the use of flash cards. The second is cognitive strategies which allows ESL learners to skilfully use language materials in a direct manner namely by ways of reasoning, analysing, summarising, synthesising, rearranging information to strengthen background knowledge, practising in real-life settings and to practise structures and sounds in a formal manner. The third is known as the compensation strategy which involves guessing or the ability to infer from context in listening and reading skills besides using gestures to help ESL learners recall information. Both Oxford (2003); John, et al (2021) further note that the other strategies under indirect strategies, starting with metacognitive strategies are utilised to manage the entire learning process. For instance, ESL learners' ability to identify their needs and individual preferences in learning style, planning for a second language task, collecting, and arranging materials, organising a schedule and suitable study location, observing mistakes and being able to assess the success of various learning strategies. Affective strategies highlight suitable approaches to one's situation which shows significant relation to ESL learners' proficiency such as being able to figure out individual mood and anxiety level besides the ability to express one's feelings, rewarding oneself due to good performance and indulging in personal conversation with oneself. The sixth strategy is the social strategy which enables ESL learners to ask questions, seek clarification and ask for assistance in doing L2 tasks. This paves the way for ESL learners to work with others and at the same time to familiarise themselves with a certain culture and to learn their language, as in this context, the English language.

Language Learning Strategies in ESL Teaching and Learning

Due to the many challenges in teaching and learning of English as a Second Language, both educators and ESL learners must employ strategies that could help in the mastery of the language. The success behind language learning can certainly be attributed to learning strategies and through the implementation of these strategies, learners would not only attain learning achievement but at the same time improve on their language skills (Gustanti & Ayu, 2021). As mentioned by Adnan & Hashim (2021); Nair et al (2021), the language learning strategies in ESL are widely used to make learning fun, uncomplicated, quick, and autonomous. Adnan and Hashim (2021), further mentions that the most prominent feature of LLSs is the ability to produce self-reliant learners by which learners have the liberty to dictate their learning pace be it fast or slow according to their capacity and situation.

Various studies have been carried out by researchers on the language learning strategies used by learners in mastering the English language. Arono et al (2022) in their study argue that digital literacy and learning style have a prominent effect on students' metacognitive strategies in listening comprehension. They mention that learners have high focus, and constantly using their previous knowledge and experience in the listening process. Relating LLS to speaking skills, Syafryadin (2020), stated that there are various strategies that are usually used by learners to be active speakers. A study done by Wael et al (2018), showed that the most frequently used strategies in acquiring speaking skills are memory strategies. Another result in a study on metacognitive strategies in reading comprehension shows that students' reading performance is enhanced and their capacity to maximize effective reading is elevated (Muhid et al., 2020). They further state that learners eventually become more skillful with good reading strategies with metacognitive strategies. In regard to writing, LLS is shown to be vital in helping to improve writing skills as stated by Sarip@Khalid et al. (2021),

and the results of their study indicated that metacognitive strategies are the most used strategies in writing skills. Language learning strategies have always been popularly utilised by educators in the four ESL skills. However, not many studies have shown the use of LLS in grammar and vocabulary learning especially in primary school settings.

As mentioned by Lim et al (2021) on grammar learning, there are various methods and approaches that can work in relation to a learner's brain autonomy. Learners with the intention of wanting to improve on grammar learning must be able to identify the most suitable language learning strategies that work for them to make sure successful learning takes place. According to Linda & Shah (2020), the use of vocabulary learning strategies is crucial in influencing the success of English vocabulary learning. Tiing et al (2021) emphasises that vocabulary is the most prominent aspect of second language learning and therefore there is an increase in the use of language learning strategies in assisting primary pupils in vocabulary knowledge and skills. A classified vocabulary learning strategies was adapted from Oxford's and developed by (Schmitt, 1997). The learning strategies are sub categorised into two main categories. The first would be meaning of new words that a learner encounters for the first time and the second comprises of learners' ability to use familiar words. These two categories are further broken into five subcategories. Determination strategies is when a learner comes across the meaning of a new word without the need of assistance or help from other individuals experience. Social strategies take place as the learner learns a new word by communicating with others. Memory strategies happens when learners relate a new word to their previous knowledge. Cognitive strategies take place through repetition and using mechanical manner to learn vocabulary. Metacognition strategies revolves around utilising ones' consciousness through the learning process to assist students towards the best study approach (Thiendathong & Sukying, 2021).

Theoretical Perspectives

There are three dominant theories under the Language Learning Strategies that will be discussed in this article, which are Cognitivism, Social Constructivism and Behaviourism.

Cognitivism

Cognitivists argue that learners have an innate mental capacity to learn and develop logical thinking. Seeking for knowledge is a mental process that entails automaticity in processing information and controlled learning (Anastasi & Cyprien, 2021). In cognitivism, the focus is on the learning process rather than the observed behaviour and more on internal processes rather than external demonstration of learning (Devaki, 2021).

Cognitive, Metacognitive, Memories and Compensation Strategies are the four strategies in LLS that are heavily influenced by the Cognitivism theory. The Cognitive Strategies in language learning requires the learners to process acquired information in a way that is meaningful by relating them to their existing knowledge (Al-Shammari et al., 2019). While learning, the learner's mind is constantly and consciously processing and interpreting information and tries to connect the new information with previous knowledge to solidify their learning. Meanwhile, the Metacognitive Strategies teach students to think about their own thinking in order to monitor and change their way of thinking if deemed necessary. Learners may use target study skills, concept mapping and flow chart to plan and organise information (Al-Shammari et al., 2019). By doing this, they are aware of their progress and may alter or modify their learning strategies in accordance to their progress. Meanwhile, the

Memory Strategies encompasses learners' strategies in storing and retrieving information from the mind. More than often, learners are able to memorise new knowledge, but are unable to apply this knowledge when presented with a different situation or context. For instance, students may remember that the pronouns 'he' or 'she' are paired with the verb 'is', but when the pronouns are changed to 'Zaki' or "Lily", they are confused with the verbs because they only memorise without understanding. The Memory Strategies stresses that learners should not only memorise, they must also be able to apply what they have memorised in other contexts and situations (Al-Jarrah et al., 2021). Apart from that, in Compensation Strategies, learners compensate their lack of knowledge in the target language by using gestures, linguistic cues, and making guesses. The qualities in these four strategies fit the narrative of Cognitivism, making it desirable for the learners to use the strategies in learning and mastering the English language.

Social Constructivism

Vygotsky's theory of Social Constructivism contends that knowledge is shared and learners built understanding through active participation in social and communicative interactions (Vygotsky & Cole, 2018). When learners are interacting and collaborating with each other, they are said to be in the Zone of Proximal Development where learning takes place (Vygotsky, 1978). In Social Strategies, learners are encouraged to be exposed and involved in an environment with other English speakers which in turn provides them the opportunities to use, practice and improve their English language skills (Hardan, 2013). Collaborating with other learners also poses an advantage for the learners as they might be more familiar with other learners' perspectives as compared to the educators (Zhang & Bayley, 2019).

Behaviourism

Behaviourism is one of the oldest learning theories which posits that reinforcement and motivation are the driving forces in the learning process (Krishnamoorthy et al., 2021). Giving rewards and positive reinforcement when the learners are able to complete a task or reach a goal motivates the learners to learn and be more absorbed in the learning process (Jirin et al., 2022). The Affective Strategies in LLS is similar to the Behaviourism theory as it focuses on lowering the students' anxiety, controlling their emotions and enhancing their motivation by providing rewards and positive reinforcement. When the students are relaxed and motivated, they are more likely to internalize the lesson content in the teaching and learning process.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The quantitative study was conducted using a survey method. The questionnaire for this study was adapted from Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford (1990). The questionnaire consisted of 24 items which were divided into six sections to cater all six language learning strategies; Memory Strategies (Item 1 to 4), Cognitive Strategies (Item 5 to 8), Compensation Strategies (Item 9 to 12), Metacognitive Strategies (Item 13 to 16), Affective Strategies (Item 17 to 20), and Social Strategies (Item 21 to 24). The Likert Scale was used in the questionnaire. However, since the respondents were children aged 11 and 12 years old, "emojis" were used to replace the scale to make it easier for the children to understand and answer the questionnaire. The study was conducted among Year 5 (11 year-old) and Year 6 (12 year-old) pupils from a rural primary school in Lahad Datu district of different proficiency

levels (low, intermediate and high). The respondents' proficiency levels were identified from the results of their previous School Based Assessment. There were 61 respondents in this study which were selected using purposive sampling. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the results of the study.

Findings

Table 1 shows the demographic background of the respondents. The respondents consisted of Year 5 and 6 pupils from a rural primary school in the Lahad Datu district in Sabah. Based on the table, the respondents were categorised into three main categories: gender, age, and proficiency level.

Table 1

Demographic background of the respondents

No.	Item	Category	Percentage (%)
1.	Gender	Male Female	(27) 44.3% (34) 55.7%
2.	Age	11 year-old 12 year-old	(25) 41% (36) 59%
3.	Proficiency level	Low Intermediate High	(7) 11.5% (34) 55.7% (20) 32.8%

As seen in the table, there were more female respondents (55.7%) as compared to male respondents (44.3%) who participated in answering the questionnaire. Also, there were more Year 6 respondents (12-year-old) than Year 5 respondents (11 year-old) who took part in this study. Additionally, most of the respondents were of intermediate level (55.7%), followed by high level (32.8%) and the least were from low level of proficiency (11.5%).

Data analysed from the SILL questionnaire is used to show the LLSs used among the respondents. Table 2 to 7 reveal the data results of these respondents' preference in LLSs, while Table 8 shows the mean values for each LLS collectively, and Table 9 displays the ranking of LLS used among the respondents.

Table 2

Memory Strategies

Item No	Statement	Mean
1	I use new English words in a sentence to help memorise them better.	3.98
2	I connect the sound of a new English word and a picture of the word to help me memorise the word.	3.30
3	I prefer using flashcards to memorise new English words.	3.46
4	I can memorise new English words or phrases by memorising their location on the page, board, or street sign.	3.77

As seen in Table 2, the highest mean value for memory strategies section can be seen in Item 1 “I use new English words in a sentence to help memorise them better” with 3.98 which indicates that most of the respondents preferred “using” the new words to memorise better. On the other hand, Item 2 “I connect the sound of a new English word and a picture of the word to help me memorise the word.” has the lowest mean and shows that this strategy is not used often by the respondents.

Table 3

Cognitive Strategies

Item No	Statement	Mean
5	I look for words in my own language that are similar to the new words in English.	2.89
6	I start conversations using English.	3.11
7	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	2.51
8	I say or write new English words several times.	3.56

Table 3 shows the results of the cognitive strategies section in the questionnaire. From the table, the highest mean value can be seen in Item 8 “I say or write new English words several times” with 3.56 which portrays that the respondents preferred learning through “saying” or “writing” the words several times. The lowest mean value can be seen in Item 7 “I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English” with 2.51, displaying that the respondents did not really prefer this strategy of learning the language.

Table 4

Compensation strategies

Item No	Statement	Mean
9	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	3.39
10	I make guesses to understand unfamiliar English words.	3.98
11	I use gestures when I can't think of an English word during conversation.	3.26
12	I use any word I know when I do not know the exact word in English.	3.33

Table 4 displays the results of the compensation strategies section in the questionnaire. Item 10 "I make guesses to understand unfamiliar English words" shows the highest mean value which is 3.98, thus showing that the respondents are more prone to making predictions or guesses while learning new language vocabulary. Item 11 "I use gestures when I can't think of an English word during conversation" has the lowest mean value with 3.26, which implies that the respondents seldom incorporate gestures into language learning. Item 9 and 10 also have almost the same value of mean.

Table 5

Metacognitive Strategies

Item No	Statement	Mean
13	I think about my progress in learning English.	4.28
14	I try to find out how to be a better and more effective learner of English.	4.41
15	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	4.20
16	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	3.97

The results of the compensation strategies section in the questionnaire are shown in Table 5. Item 14 "I try to find out how to be a better and more effective learner of English" shows the highest mean value which is 4.41. It indicates that these respondents prefer discovering effective learning strategies for their own learning in order to enhance their language learning. However, Item 16 "I pay attention when someone is speaking English" has the lowest mean value with 3.26, suggesting that the respondents are passive listeners in English. The results for each item are not quite far apart, which are only differentiated by the decimal points.

Table 6

Affective Strategies

Item No	Statement	Mean
17	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	3.87
18	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	3.80
19	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	3.34
20	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	4.02

Table 6 reveals the results of affective strategies section in the questionnaire. Based on the table, the highest mean value can be seen in Item 20 "I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English". It can be concluded that most of the respondents reward or treat themselves when they can do better in the process of language learning. On contrast, Item 19 "I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English" has the lowest value of mean which is 3.34" which means that the respondents are not aware of their feelings of tense and nervousness when they are learning the language.

Table 7

Social Strategies

Item No	Statement	Mean
21	I practise English with other students.	3.90
22	If I don't understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	4.07
23	I try to learn about the culture of native speakers.	3.93
24	I ask for help from good English speakers.	4.33

The results of social strategies can be seen in Table 7. Item 24 "I ask for help from good English speakers" shows the highest mean value with 4.07, representing that most of the respondents tend to ask whenever they don't understand something in English. On the other hand, Item 21 "I practise English with other students" has the lowest mean value of 3.90, though it is not far apart from item 23 "I try to learn about the culture of native speakers". Even though the respondents prefer help from good English speakers, they do not prefer to practice with their friends. This may be because they are not confident that their peers have the required knowledge and skills to help them.

Table 8

Language learning strategies mean values

	Memory Strategies	Cognitive Strategies	Compensation Strategies	Metacognitive Strategies	Affective Strategies	Social Strategies
Mean	3.6270	3.0164	3.4918	4.2131	3.7582	4.0574

Table 8 shows the mean values of each language learning strategy as a whole. The mean values were used to identify the respondents' most and least preferred language learning strategy. Based on the table above, it is shown that the metacognitive strategies section holds the highest mean value, which is 4.2131, while the cognitive strategies section has the lowest mean value, stating the value of 3.4918.

Table 9

Language learning strategies rank

Rank	Language Learning Strategies	Mean Value
1	Metacognitive	4.21
2	Social	4.06
3	Affective	3.76
4	Memory	3.63
5	Compensation	3.49
6	Cognitive	3.02

Based on Table 9, the metacognitive strategy is in the first rank with 4.2131 mean value, followed by the second rank, social strategy with 4.0574 mean value. The third rank goes to affective strategy with 3.7582 and memory strategy with 3.6270. Compensation strategy is in the fifth rank with 3.4918 while cognitive strategy is in the last rank with the lowest mean value; 3.0164. Generally, based on the above results, most of the respondents preferred metacognitive learning strategies as compared to the other learning strategies. On the other hand, the respondents' least preferred strategy is cognitive strategy. The results were further discussed in the next section.

Discussion

The following part discusses the findings and interpretation of the language learning strategies used by primary school pupils in enhancing their vocabulary and grammar skills. The most often used language learning techniques will be discussed first in this section, followed by the techniques that are less frequently utilised.

Metacognitive Strategy

The results indicate that the students in this study used metacognitive strategies the most frequently, with a mean value of 4.2131. Based on the data results, it is shown that these

rural primary school ESL learners can organise, monitor, and assess their learning activities with the use of metacognitive methods, which coincides with cognitivism. The learners need to think about their own thinking in order to monitor and change their way of thinking if deemed necessary. Metacognitive methods in language learning refer to a learner's capacity for goal setting, activity planning, difficulty identification, and strategy modification. Successful language acquisition has been found to depend heavily on the use of metacognitive techniques. Thus, for these ESL learners to understand their own learning process, metacognitive methods are essential in the ESL classrooms. These learners are more likely to recognise any areas they need to focus on or receive assistance for if they have a better understanding of their own learning. The emphasis is placed on the learning procedure rather than the observed conduct, prioritising the inner mechanisms of learning over the external display of knowledge (Devaki, 2021). It suggests that these learners find it vital to learn to manage their language learning for successful language learning acquisition. This is because learners who have clear awareness of the learning process will have a bigger opportunity in setting more realistic and achievable goals and utilise potent strategies in their own learning. Metacognitive strategies also help learners to become more self-directed learners. This is aligned with the Primary Schools' Standards Curriculum (SCPS) that places a strong emphasis on a student-centered approach (Singh et al., 2021). Learners are better equipped to assume ownership of their own learning when they could track and assess their own progress.

Social Strategy

With a mean value of 4.0574, social strategy was the second most used tactic. Based on this insight, these ESL learners entail engaging in social interaction to hone and develop their linguistic abilities. This study backs up the idea that learning a language is a social activity and demonstrates that social interaction is an important component of language acquisition.

Since learning a language is primarily a social activity, social interaction is crucial. Utilising interpersonal communication to sharpen one's language abilities is a key component of social language learning strategies. According to Vygotsky and Cole's (2018) theory of Social Constructivism, knowledge is a collaborative process where learners actively engage in social and communicative interactions to construct their understanding. These methods include looking for speaking opportunities, conversing with native speakers or other language learners, and taking part in group activities or language exchange initiatives.

It's important to note that in this poll, social techniques were the second most popular sort of strategy used by elementary school students. This demonstrates that the students are conscious of the importance of interpersonal communication in language learning and are actively seeking out chances to converse with others. In grammar context, accuracy plays a vital role in language learning as Yaccob and Yunus (2019) emphasise the importance of ESL learners being able to construct sentences to express their ideas confidently. Learners have the chance to practise applying their language skills in practical contexts through social engagement. As students are able to use what they have learned in a meaningful context, this can aid in the development of fluency and accuracy.

Affective Strategy

Since affective strategies involve controlling students' emotions and motivation to foster a positive learning environment, they become crucial for language learning. These ideas cover ways to stay motivated, control worry and emotions. With a mean value of 3.7582, the

use of emotive approaches by primary school students in this study suggests that they were aware of the need of emotional regulation and motivation in language learning.

Affective methods are crucial for language learning for a variety of reasons, including their ability to foster a happy learning environment. This strategy is useful in coping with the main challenges in language learning as suggested by Azlan et al (2019) which are low self-esteem, insufficient practices and lack of exposure to the language. Learners are better able to concentrate on the learning activity and interact with the information when they are able to control their emotions and motivation. As a result, learning may become more enjoyable and satisfying, which may eventually advance into greater success.

Due to the strategy's resemblance to Behaviourism Theory, utilising affective methods can also help to sustain motivation over time. Krishnamoorthy et al (2021) assert that reinforcement and motivation are the primary motivators in the learning process. Even when learning becomes challenging, students can learn to stay motivated and get beyond challenges by employing emotional methods. The study's findings imply that the participants understood the value of controlling their motivation and emotions in order to foster a supportive learning environment.

Memory Strategy

Learners utilise a variety of techniques known as memory strategies to aid in the retention of new vocabulary and grammatical concepts. These strategies use methods including association, repetition, and visualisation. The results of this study's primary school participants' use of memory techniques, with a mean value of 3.6270, indicate that they were aware of the significance of memory for successful language learning.

Al-khresheh & Orak (2021) argue that grammar constitutes the basis of language, and its intricacies pose a daunting challenge for both educators and learners alike. Memory is an essential component of learning a language because new vocabulary and grammatical rules must be retained in order to be utilised appropriately. Learning difficulties can make it challenging for students to remember the vocabulary and grammar they have learned, making it challenging for them to communicate in the target language.

Memory strategies can help students get past this obstacle by providing techniques for enhancing memory and recall. For instance, learners might utilise repetition to help them memorise new language by creating flashcards and revisiting them frequently. They might also employ visualisation strategies to link new words to scenarios or pictures, which would help people recall them. This is in line Al-Jarrah et al (2021), that suggested Memory Strategies emphasizes learners to do more than just commit information to memory; they should also be capable of employing what they have memorized in diverse contexts and scenarios. Cognitivists argue that by using the newly acquired knowledge and information in a meaningful way to them, learners are more susceptible to retaining such information in their brain.

Overall, the results of this study's primary school participants' use of memory techniques, which had a mean value of 3.6270, indicate that they were aware of the significance of memory for successful language learning.

Compensation Strategy

Compensation strategies are a set of techniques that learners use to overcome language difficulties by using alternative strategies. These strategies involve techniques such as circumlocution (using alternative words to express an idea), using nonverbal

communication (such as gestures and facial expressions), and using context to infer meaning. The finding that primary school students in this study used compensation strategies with a mean value of 3.4918 suggests that they were aware of the importance of being resourceful when facing language difficulties.

The importance of compensation strategies in language learning stems from the fact that students may encounter language difficulties that they cannot surpass with their existing knowledge and skills. Learners must be able to use alternative strategies to communicate effectively in the target language in such circumstances. By employing compensation strategies, language learners can maintain their engagement with the language and advance in their journey of language acquisition.

The development of learners' problem-solving skills is a significant advantage of using compensation strategies. According to Singh et al (2021), the Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools (SCPS) places a heavy emphasis on approaches that incorporate the 4Cs - communication, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration - as essential 21st-century learning competencies. When challenged with a language barrier, students can benefit from the ability to think critically and broadly in order to discover alternative methods of expressing their thoughts. By employing compensation strategies, language learners can develop these skills and become more resourceful.

The study showed that primary school students utilized compensation strategies with a mean score of 3.4918, indicating their recognition of the significance of resourcefulness in tackling language challenges.

Cognitive Strategy

Cognitive strategies are an assortment of methods that learners utilize to acquire a new language by engaging their thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving abilities. These strategies encompass approaches like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The results of the study indicate that primary school students used cognitive strategies less frequently, with a mean score of 3.0164, indicating that they may have had a weaker grasp of the vital role cognitive strategies play in effective language acquisition.

The pursuit of knowledge, according to Anastasie and Cyprien (2021), involves both automatic processing of information and deliberate learning as a cognitive process. In relation to this, cognitive strategies are crucial for language acquisition because they require the application of higher-order cognitive abilities to process and comprehend the language. By engaging in cognitive strategies, language learners can analyse the language to identify patterns and norms, synthesise information to create new meanings, and assess their own language comprehension.

Devaki (2021) explains that in cognitivism, the focus is on the process of learning as opposed to observable behaviour, and on the internal mechanisms of learning as opposed to external demonstrations of knowledge. Regrettably, the younger language learners have not mastered cognitive skills required as a successful language learner unlike the senior learners. The primary school students are most likely still in the process of cognitive development before they manage to advance their reading and problem-solving skills.

Implications and Conclusion

In a nutshell, LLSs has become a significant construct in the ESL language learning research over the years. The development of various language skills through different language learning strategies has been attempted and clarified by researchers in the language

field. This paper presents the identification of the LLS used by ESL Year 5 and 6 learners in a rural primary school in Lahad Datu to improve their vocabulary and grammatical abilities. Based on the findings of this paper, it is shown that all six LLSs are used among learners. However, the survey results show that the metacognitive strategies are most frequently used among learners, while the cognitive strategies are the least used among them. The learners are seen to have educators develop a more comprehensive, independent and effective approach to learning English, that results in successful language learning. Besides, the findings conclude that learners are less likely to learn a new language through critical thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving abilities.

Hence, as these learners acquire all six of the LLS stated in the Oxford's classification, this paper offers various implications for language teaching and learning. Educators and stakeholders can use a variety of activities to help learners learn English in class depending on the topics or theme needed. Learners will be able to achieve successful language learning through the implementation of LLSs that suit their respective learning styles. Firstly, metacognitive strategies such as goal setting, monitoring, self-assessment, reflection, vocabulary acquisition, language use, and seeking feedback can help ESL learners become more responsible in their own learning, identify their own strengths and weaknesses, and hence develop more effective learning strategies that are suitable and work best for themselves (John, et al., 2021). Next, to accommodate learners using social strategies, group language activities or initiatives such as in-class role-plays or real-life video calls via social media platforms are highly recommended in and out of the ESL classrooms. This will engage and support learners in interacting actively with others while transferring information and learning from others as role models from the activities (Hardan, 2013). Meanwhile, teachers are suggested to provide a positive learning setting to help learners using the affective strategies learn better in classrooms such as having entertaining language videos or weekly language-related songs during ESL classes. The videos and songs will display affective factors such as humour, encouragement and empathy among ESL learners (Jirin et al., 2022). Besides, drilling and repetition activities such as mnemonics or flashcards improves learners' retention among those who frequently use the memory strategies (Al-Jarrah et al., 2021). Learners using the compensation strategies are suggested to have activities such as gesture games and Charades which are resourceful in helping them understand and use the language learnt. By engaging in cognitive strategy activities, language learners can analyse the language to identify patterns and norms, synthesise information to create new meanings, and assess their own language comprehension. Meanwhile, educators can provide more comprehensive and effective knowledge for cognitive strategy learners in understanding and dissecting the grammar and vocabulary learnt (Anastasi & Cyprien, 2021). With consistent practice and dedication, ESL learners can enhance their English Skills and achieve their language learning goals using the various effective LLSs.

Overall, the study of LLS is a valuable area of research that has the potential to significantly improve language learning outcomes for learners of all ages and backgrounds. It is a broad field that needs to be studied and investigated consistently throughout time. The findings of the studies and research about LLS will assist to build a solid foundation for language development in the classroom and beyond which will undoubtedly benefit the learners in their learning. Teachers can plan their lessons accordingly and make sure that they match the needs of their students if they understand how learners approach language acquisition. Additionally, learners can become more effective and independent learners by

becoming more aware of the strategies they use to learn languages and adopting new proven effective strategies.

Although some teachers and learners are aware of the presence of different LLSs and they did try to implement them in the teaching and learning process, the outcome might not reach the intended expectations because each learner has a unique way of learning and not all findings can be generalised to suit all types of learners. Therefore, researchers should continue conduct further investigation in exploring, discovering, and proving on how to use the different language strategies in helping and supporting ESL language learning. Besides, research on the effectiveness of the language learning strategies is also vital to be investigated constantly. Practitioners could also look into supporting different types of learners or to involve in other subject areas based on the different LLSs stated.

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