

The Relationship between Language Learning Strategies and Attitudes in Learning Speaking Skills in an Online Learning Environment

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Abstract

The current Covid-19 pandemic has shifted the learning environment to a fully online learning setting in most parts of the world. Language learners have to change their learning strategies to be able to adapt to the changes made. Hence, this study was carried out to identify the language learning strategies used by learners and the relationship between language learning strategies and learners' attitudes when learning speaking skills in an online learning environment. 175 second language learners from a Polytechnic in Sarawak, Malaysia was involved in this study. This quantitative study adapted the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), and the data were collected online through Google Form. The findings indicated that affective strategies were the most frequently used strategies, while social strategies were the least used strategies among the respondents. Three normality tests using histograms, skewness and kurtosis value, and Q-Q graphic plot were examined to check the distribution of data. The results indicated that there was a normal distribution of data. Therefore, the Pearson's Correlation Test was examined to look at the relationship between learning strategies and attitudes. Based on the Pearson's Correlation Test, there is a strong relationship between the learning strategies used and the learner's attitude in learning language in an online learning environment. The study contributes to the planning of teaching materials and in identifying the most suitable teaching methods by language teachers.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies, Attitude, Speaking, Online Learning Environment, Second Language Learners

Introduction

With the current Covid-19 pandemic, online learning has suddenly replaced the role of physical classroom in most countries (Adnan & Anwar, 2020). Physical classes are now made fully online to prevent the spread of the virus during face-to-face interaction (Wannapiroon et al., 2022; Simamora, 2020). It has forced everyone to adapt to the new technology quickly. The drastic change of the learning environment has impacted learners in a way that they must

change their learning strategies to suit the current teaching and learning methods (Alamrani, 2020). The use of a face-to-face learning strategies might not be suitable to be used in this online learning environment.

There may be links between language learning practices and online learning (Emaliana & Rahmiati, 2019). Learners adopt tactics that are appropriate for the current learning environment because of the implementation of online learning. They need to recognize the best learning strategies that can be used in learning language. The strategies utilized in learning language in an online environment might be different compared to learning language in a traditional setting. Teachers have to be digitally competent to manage their online classes (Wannapiroon et al., 2022). The physical learning environment enables learners to interact directly with the teacher, while in an online learning environment, learners have limited interaction with the teacher. Therefore, less attention was given to the learners as it is difficult for the teacher to pay attention to all learners during online learning.

The differences in the learning environment have a lot to do with the most suitable strategies to be carried out. Even in a traditional classroom setting, ESL teachers face challenges with the low language proficiency of students (Singh et al., 2020). Therefore, a good support in terms of the environment enables learners to succeed and learn better. With sufficient support from the administration in terms of the tools needed by teachers to carry out online learning, and from the parents in preparing a conducive environment at home for learners to get involved in the learning process, learners could learn better. Learners were able to adapt to the online learning, but the lack of facilities and the unstable Internet connection were among the factors that demotivates them (Ramani, 2021). Hence, support from various parties such as the Parent-Teacher Association and the Education Officer also could help teachers and learners to create a conducive online learning environment.

The Objectives of this Study are to

- identify the language learning strategies that were most frequently used by the first-year diploma learners in a Polytechnic in Sarawak, Malaysia, and
- the relationship between the learners' learning strategies and their attitudes in enhancing speaking skills during online learning.

Literature Review

To further explore the topic, this section will discuss past studies on the language learning strategies and attitudes used in enhancing speaking skills during online learning.

Language Learning Strategies

Appropriate learning skills could help learners to improve on their speaking skills (Zakaria et al., 2019). Learning a language takes up a lot of efforts, energy, and strategies to be a competent learner (Hashim et al., 2019). Out of the six strategies classified by Oxford (1990); Zakaria et al (2019) suggested affective strategy and social strategy to be practiced in enhancing learners' speaking skills. This was supported by Mandasari & Oktaviani (2018) study on the use of affective and social strategies in language learning. Learners use different strategies based on the skills that they would like to enhance or acquire (Hashim et al., 2018). They were able to use affective tactics to drive them to gain speaking abilities, while social strategies allowed them to collaborate and participate as active learners.

Saputra & Subekti (2017) in a research conducted in Yogyakarta found that learners use many strategies in learning speaking. To become a good language learner, language learning

strategies were used by the learners (Hashim et al., 2018). It was also found that learners who scored high for speaking skills used many learning strategies to enhance their speaking skills (Saputra & Subekti, 2017). Good language learners were conscious of the use of strategies when learning language (Saputra & Subekti, 2017).

Speaking Skills

The importance of speaking skills has always been emphasized especially among learners in higher learning institutions. With the awareness of the importance of speaking skills among graduates, more emphasis is now set out in enhancing learners' speaking abilities in order for them to succeed in their academics and thrive in their fields once they have completed their education (Rao, 2019).

Marpaung & Widyanotono (2020) defined speaking as one of the useful language skills that can be acquired through verbal engagement. It requires speakers to transmit a message to another speaker and take turns in speaking (Marpaung & Widyanotono, 2020). On the other hand, Rao (2019) mentioned the importance of speaking skills as an aspect to be successful in all fields. By having good speaking skills, learners are able to communicate well and could deal with people from other parts of the world (Rao, 2019). This will also create more job opportunities among graduates when they have gone into the working environment.

Online Learning

Excellent millennial learners nowadays utilize electronic media or e-learning media as their learning strategies to improve on their language skills (Atmowardoyo et al., 2021). The use of YouTube, and the utilization of the Internet, and other social media motivates learners to improve on many aspects of language including reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Atmowardoyo et al., 2021). These learning strategies are suitable for the learners as they are living in an era where technology is something common. Learners could move forward in parallel with the current learning environment and take advantage of the technologies that are used by the society today (Atmowardoyo et al., 2021).

In defining online learning, Dhawan (2020) mentioned that online learning is a tool that makes an innovative, flexible, and a more learner-centered teaching and learning process. The online learning can be carried out synchronously or asynchronously (Simamora, 2020). In a synchronous learning environment, learners attend lectures at real time with the teacher while an asynchronous learning enables learners to communicate through platforms such as e-mail, google form, streaming video, publishing course notes and social media platforms in a time-separated communication (Simamora, 2020).

Learners' language learning practices were influenced by changes in learning environments (Emaliana & Rahmiati, 2019). With the shift of learning environments, learners have to adapt to the changes and suit their learning styles with appropriate strategies. Teachers, on the other hand, can use the technology in transforming the teaching and learning environment (Lubis et al., 2011). By doing so, learners could identify what are the most suitable strategies to be used especially in an online learning environment. They must adapt to the language learning strategies and improve their learning to become a successful language learner (Hashim et al., 2018).

Attitudes

In learning speaking skills, learners' attitudes towards the learning environment should be taken into consideration. Rayah et al (2018) in a study mentioned that learners' speaking

proficiency is related to their attitudes. "Attitudes are merely types of factors that give rise to motivation which eventually results in attainment of proficiency in a second language" (Oller 1979 as cited in Rayah et al., 2018). A study carried out by Habok & Magyar (2018) indicated that learners who use the language learning strategies tend to show a positive attitude towards language learning. In another study, the findings by Yunus & Abdullah (2011) indicated that students enjoyed learning English language when there is a support in the environment.

There is a need for language developers, as well as curriculum designers and those who are the decision makers to plan an effective solution to create better engagement with the students (Rayah et al., 2018). As learners' positive attitude determines their success in language learning, educators should also plan ways to encourage learners to get involved actively in the online lessons. Educators must put effort in motivating learners through various unconventional methods in teaching English (Said et al., 2013). Performance expectancy for example were among the factors that influences the learner's attitudes during mobile learning (Hashim et al., 2018). Therefore, it is crucial to identify learner's attitudes during online learning as it motivates learners to perform well in learning English language (Sinaga & Pustika, 2021).

Methodology

A total of 175 students from a higher learning institution who are in the first semester in a Polytechnic in Sarawak, Malaysia was selected as the respondents for this study. The respondents were chosen based on a stratified random sampling method. According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for determining sample size from a given population, a number of 175 out of 320 respondents were needed to carry out the research. Due to the online learning, there were some challenges faced by the researcher in ensuring the number of respondents met the minimum requirement. As most students were back in their hometown, they were unable to get a good and stable Internet connection to answer the questionnaire which was distributed through Google Form. Therefore, more time was given for the respondents to answer the questionnaire.

The questionnaire used for this research was adapted from Bessai (2018) and Mohammed (2021) who adapted the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) in their studies. To ensure the validity of the research instruments, the questionnaire was distributed to three experts for content and face validity before it was disseminated to the respondents. Some changes were made to the research instruments based on their feedback.

Table 1
Questionnaire descriptions

Section	Item Number	Source
A Demographic Information	1 - 5	Review of Literature
B Strategies Used to improve speaking skills during online learning	1 - 20	Bessai (2018) Mohammed (2021)
C Attitudes towards strategies used to enhance speaking skills during online learning	1 - 10	Mohammed (2021)

After the changes were made, a pilot study was carried out before the questionnaire was distributed to the population to check for its reliability. 30 respondents were involved in the pilot study. The questionnaire was distributed online through Google Form.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section intended to elicit demographic information of the respondents. The second section was about the strategies used in learning speaking skills during online learning. For this section, a 5-point Likert Scale items scaled from 'never', 'rarely', 'sometimes', 'often' to 'always' were used. The third section used the 4-Likert Scale, scaled from 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'agree' to 'strongly agree' that were intended to elicit information about the students' attitudes towards strategies used to enhance speaking skills during online learning.

The description for the reliability of the questionnaire was as classified by (Baba, 1999).

Table 2

Description of the reliability classification from Alias Baba (1999)

Value	Reliability Description
1.00-0.80	Very Strong
0.60-0.79	Strong
0.40-0.59	Weak
0.10-0.39	Very Weak

Based on the pilot study, the strategies used by learners to improve speaking skills in online learning in the second section of the questionnaire scored a coefficient of 0.934 which is considered 'very strong'. The third section on the attitudes towards the strategies used to enhance speaking skills during online learning coefficient was 0.689 which is considered 'strong'.

Table 3

Value of Cronbach Alpha

Construct	Number of Items	Value of Cronbach Alpha
Pilot		
Strategies Used	20	0.934
Learners' Attitude	10	0.689

In analyzing the data collected, descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, standard deviation, and percentage were used to identify the language learning strategies used for speaking skills by first year diploma learners in an online learning environment in a Polytechnic in Sarawak, Malaysia. To look at the effect of language learning strategies on attitudes, a correlation test was carried out. A normality test was examined using histogram, skewness and kurtosis value, and Q-Q graphic plot to look at the distribution of the data. The results of the normality test using histograms showed a bell curve which fulfils the normality criteria whereby the histogram of a normal data has a bell curve. For the skewness and kurtosis value, the value has to be in between -1.7 and +1.7 to be considered normal (Darusalem & Hussin, 2018). After the test was examined, the Skewness and Kurtosis values for memory (-.692, 1.109), cognitive (-.146, -.126), compensation (-.531, .419), metacognitive (-.431, .256), affective (-.687, .068), social (-.056, .227) and attitude (-.025, .307) shows the values for all the variables are in between -1.7 and 1.7. Therefore, the data distribution is normal. For the Q-Q Plot, the data can be considered as having a normal distribution when

most of the data dots are on or very near the straight line (Darusalam & Hussin, 2018). The result shows the dots are either on a straight line or are located very near the straight line. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data distribution is normal since the dots of all the Q-Q plots are on the straight line or located very near the line.

Based on the normality tests used which are the histogram, skewness and kurtosis value, and Q-Q graphic plot, the results show a normal distribution of the data. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data for this research has a normal distribution. Hence, a parametric statistic is suitable to be used for inferential analysis.

The Pearson's Rank Correlation test was used to identify the relationship between the first-year diploma learners' learning strategies and their attitudes in enhancing speaking skills during online learning. The data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26.0.

Findings

This section reports the findings of the study in terms of the demographic profile, learning strategies used and attitudes towards the strategies used.

This study was carried out in a Polytechnic in Sarawak, Malaysia. 175 responses were received after the questionnaire was distributed through Google Form. The respondents were Semester 1 students of a higher learning institution from the 2020/2021 session.

Table 4 shows the demographic profile of the 175 respondents who were involved in this study. Based on Table 5, 81 of the respondents (46.3%) were male, while 94 respondents (53.7%) were female. There were 171 respondents (97.7%) of the age of '18 and below', while 4 respondents (2.3%) were '22 and above'. There were no respondents between the age of '19 to 21'.

Table 4

Respondents' gender, age and department

Demographic Profile	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	81	46.3
Female	94	53.7
Age		
18 and below	171	97.7
19 to 21	0	0
22 and above	4	2.3
Department		
Civil Engineering	35	20.0
Electrical Engineering	18	10.3
Mechanical Engineering	26	14.9
Commerce	84	48.0
Information Technology	12	6.9

To identify the language learning strategies used for speaking skills by first year diploma learners in an online learning environment, the data were analyzed.

Table 5

Mean Score, Standard Deviation and Rank of LLS

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
Memory	175	3.79	.725	2
Cognitive	175	3.53	.743	5
Compensation	175	3.56	.780	4
Metacognitive	175	3.72	.789	3
Affective	175	3.95	.963	1
Social	175	3.43	.696	6

Based on Table 5, affective strategies show the highest mean at 3.95, followed by memory strategies at 3.79, metacognitive strategies at 3.72, compensation strategies at 3.56 and cognitive strategies at 3.53. Social strategies were reported to be the lowest mean at 3.43. Therefore, it can be concluded that in learning speaking skills in an online learning environment, affective strategies seem to be the most frequently used strategies while social strategies were the least strategies used in learning speaking skills by learners in a Polytechnic in Sarawak, Malaysia during online learning.

In order to identify the relationship between the learners' learning strategies and their attitudes in enhancing speaking skills during online learning, a correlation between the learners' learning strategies and their attitudes was examined.

Table 6

Pearson correlation relationship between learning strategies and attitudes

Correlation	Attitudes		Interpretation
	Pearson Correlation	Sig	
Memory	.261**	.000	Strong
Cognitive	.293**	.000	Strong
Compensation	.346**	.000	Strong
Metacognitive	.280**	.000	Strong
Affective	.246**	.001	Strong
Social	.352**	.000	Strong

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results show a significant correlation exists between the learning strategies and attitudes of the learners, whereby the value of Pearson's r is 0.261 (memory), 0.293 (cognitive), 0.346 (compensation), 0.280 (metacognitive), 0.246 (affective), and 0.352 (social), and p is less than 0.05. According to the size of correlation coefficient as suggested by Davies (1971), there is a strong correlation between the learning strategies and attitudes of the learners. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is, in fact, a significant relationship between learners' learning strategies and their attitude ($r = 0.261, 0.293, 0.346, 0.280, 0.246, 0.352, p < 0.05$). This shows how learner's learning strategies are reflected positively in their attitudes.

Discussion

Based on the analysis of data, it can be seen that affective strategies seem to be the most frequently used strategies in learning speaking skills by learners in a Polytechnic in

Sarawak, Malaysia during online learning. Social strategies were reported to be the least frequent learning strategy used in learning speaking skills. In line with Zakaria et al (2019)'s findings, affective strategy was indicated as the most practiced in enhancing learners' speaking skills. However, the result of this study also contradicts with Zakaria et al (2019) who mentioned that social strategy as one of the most frequently used in language learning. This is probably due to the online learning environment whereby there was less interaction between learners and learners, and learners and teachers (Abou-Khalil et al., 2021). The findings of this study are consistent with Habok & Magyar (2018); Mandasari & Oktaviani (2018) who discovered affective strategy as one of the most frequently used strategy in language learning.

As mentioned by Rayah et al (2018), learners' speaking proficiency is related to the attitudes. This is probably because they are motivated to learn using the online method due to fun and interesting activities (Sinaga & Pustika, 2021). Therefore, it can be concluded that there is, in fact, a significant relationship between learners' learning strategies and their attitude ($r = 0.261, 0.293, 0.346, 0.280, 0.246, 0.352, p < 0.05$). This finding is in line with Mohammed's (2021) findings who found that there is a relation in the strategies used in enhancing speaking skills during online learning. This shows how learner's learning strategies are reflected positively in their attitudes which was also found in (Habok & Magyar, 2018).

Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to determine the learners' learning strategies that was most frequently used in learning speaking skills during online learning. This study also examined the relationship between learning strategies and attitudes in enhancing speaking skills by the first-year diploma learners in a Polytechnic in Sarawak, Malaysia. The results of this study show that affective strategies were most frequently used by the first-year diploma learners in a Polytechnic in Sarawak, Malaysia in learning speaking skills during online learning, while social strategies were the least to be used. It was also found that there is a strong relationship between learning strategies and learners' attitudes in enhancing their speaking skills during online learning. These findings suggest that educators need to adjust their teaching strategies to be aligned with the learners' learning strategies used by the learners. This sheds new light on the teaching approaches needed in an online learning environment. A limitation of this study is that it is only focused on the first-year students in a suburban area who come from various levels of proficiencies. Despite its limitations, this study was able to identify the learning strategies used by language learners during online learning and the relationship between the learning strategies and attitudes of the learners. Future studies could explore how learners learn writing, speaking, and reading skills during online learning. Policy makers and school administrators could look at the findings of this study to prepare appropriate courses and trainings for language teachers to upgrade their skills.

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