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In-Text Citation: (Ukat et al., 2022)
To Cite this Article: Ukat, J. A., Jack, J. D. L., Salleh, P. N. A. M., Baskaran, K., & Hashim, H. (2022). Epeolatry: The Practice of Language Learning Strategies in Reading among Lower Secondary School Students. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences. 12(6),* 131 – 143.

Vol. 12, No. 6, 2022, Pg. 131 – 143	
http://hrmars.com/index.php/pages/detail/IJARBSS	JOURNAL HOMEPAGE

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Epeolatry: The Practice of Language Learning Strategies in Reading among Lower Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Learning approaches utilised by the learners of a second language to ease their learning process may vary in each individual. Reading skills are crucial in a language classroom which comprises five requisite components namely phonemic phonics, awareness, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. Each component is crucial to muster effective reading instruction. Nonetheless, discrepancies in executing the language learning strategies may result in multiple issues in reading achievement. Limited studies were conducted in regards to language learning strategies in reading in the English classrooms previously. Henceforth, the researchers conducted a study to investigate the archetypal language learning methods used by Kuala Lumpur lower secondary school students when reading in English. To collect data, 40 lower secondary students were given an updated version of the Strategies Inventory for Language Learning questionnaire. The results yielded that the students use all of the categories of language learning strategies. The study also disclosed that metacognitive strategies is the prominent language learning strategy among lower secondary school students and these students engaged less in affective strategies. Thus, utilising relevant language learning strategies in reading in English may promote the successful reading skills in English. In this way, teachers are able to apply strategic-based instruction to enhance the reading skills in English among lower secondary school students.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies, Language Learners, English Language, Lower Secondary School, Reading

Introduction

English classrooms cater to the needs of students to master four major language skills. It is widely known that reading is an essential skill in order to obtain information. It is also regarded as one of the most strenuous areas that calls for great exertion in education institutions (Amin, 2019). Azmuddin and Ruslim (2014) also mentioned that reading is reckoned as essential for second language students, however, the reading comprehension strategy's teaching process is dismissed in English classrooms.

Teele (2004) asserted that the readers' goal should be directed to the comprehension of the reading materials. As proposed by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2013) in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025, a 50% diminution in achievement gaps concerning gender, socio-economic and urban-rural should be achieved. Therefore, to achieve the target, all students should be equipped with the needs of literacy capability as the elemental ability to persist withthe learning of the language in education institutions has been prioritised (Hasan & Ahmad, 2018). Nonetheless, The Ministry of Education (2013) will provide support and aid to any pupil who undergoes intricacy in learning reading, writing and numeracy skills to be on par with their peers.

Hence, the teachers are the key for the students to achieve an effective reading in the English classroom. According to Block and Israel (2005), to enrich their reading comprehension, teachers can aid their students by executing instruction of reading strategies, which to name afew such as, predicting, making connections, visualising, inferring, questioning and summarising. Duke and Pearson (2005) also concurred that it is substantial to illuminate strategies among teachers for reading by naming and elucidating the strategy, articulating with the think aloud medium, practices by group or partner, and self-sustaining strategy.

The ability to communicate in English has become one of the most key aspects for everyone, particularly in nations where English is spoken as a second language. Low language proficiency among language students is one of the most daunting issues in the process of teaching and learning language, wherein, no notable changes in students' English language proficiency have occurred, despite the usage of a myriad of methods by language teachers (Bergey et. al., 2017). Previous scholars noted that one feasible factor for this phenomena is that students are not capable of possessing suitable learning strategies, based on the factors that contributed to the issues. The majority of research on second language acquisition asserted that students' performance may be magnified by utilising particular strategies and an accurate implementation of strategies which permits students to effective and efficient learning process (Tang & Tian, 2015). Malaysian ESL students, particularly Malays, acknowledge the significance of English in their lives academically and socially (Kamaludin, 2005). Despite English's formal status as a second language, the language received insufficient attention. Malay students, particularly those in rural regions, do not employ methods as frequently as those students living in urban areas (Arthi & Srinivasan, 2018). As a result of the circumstance, students from rural areas have poor control of the English language. The trend gives language teachers anxiety, because English will also be used in tertiary education once students graduate from high school.

Previously, most researchers gravitated to focus on successful language learners' strategies to employ comparable strategies to unsuccessful language learners. Throughout that period of time, Teh & Embi (2010) affirmed that studies mostly focused on identifying the characteristics of successful language learners. Researchers started to explore a new dimension of language instructional approaches in the 1980s (Starks, 2018; Wigfield et al., 2016; Monos, 2016) . By categorising the strategies into broad categories, these researchers generated new classifications and concepts. Research on the link between language learning methods and reading ability were also being conducted. In order to scrutinise the interdependence between language performance and strategies utilised by students, Wharton (2000) manoeuvred SILL and the performance report as the pivotal strategies. A research conducted by Supian (2003) used a variety of strategies to obtain data from the students, including observation, survey, and pre and post test studies. It was deduced that both metacognitive and cognitive strategies were favoured among the students.

Furthermore, the researcher discovered various novel strategies used by students in language learning, including spiritual and attitudinal strategies.

The present research provided insights into English teaching in Malaysia, notably in secondary schools. The study demonstrated the efficiency of numerous language learning strategies used to increase students' English learning by incorporating secondary school students. Due to the study centralising technique of the language learners', the strategy of practising language learning strategies as a tool to enhance both direct and indirect language learning is elevated. Teachers, students, and researchers in this sector may benefit from this research. Identifying the usage of language learning strategies in reading is the focal objective of this research. Another aim is to determine the most and least favoured language learning strategies commonly utilised by lower secondary school students to amplify their reading abilities when learning English.

Literature Review
Reading Skills
Reading is a purposeful activity. Readers may read with the intention of acquiring new information, to validate their instilled beliefs, for pleasure or even to have a clear understanding of the particular language in which they are reading. Reading has a vital role in civic life. Reading brings an individual up to date with his country's political, social, economic, andcultural issues. Reading has an impact on our attitudes, beliefs, standards, morality, judgements, and overall conduct; it moulds our thoughts and behaviours. It helps in reconnecting the established concepts being read to our prerequisite knowledge. Readers have to be aware of their reading materials in enacting the relationship between the concepts. Grabe William and L.Fredrika (2002) emphasised a number of reading purposes in their finding namely, reading to grasp simple information, for rapid skimming, text learning, information integration, for writing, text criticising and for general comprehension. Thus, reading may be accompanied by myriads ofpurposes according to each individual and not limited to students merely yet for all members of the society. As a part of the community, reading allows one to stay informed regarding national matters including social, political and economic challenges.

Language Learning Strategies
Derived from the ancient Greek word, strategy means "steps or activities conducted in order to win a battle." The world's warlike connotation has thankfully faded, but control and goal-directedness remain in the current sense (Oxford, 2003, p. 8). Although many studies of foreign/second language learning have broadly established language learning techniques, there has been minuscule consensus among academics for a long time on defining language learning strategies. Despite many studies in regards to the learning of a second or foreign language have broadly established language learning techniques, there has been minuscule consensus among academics for a long time on defining language learning strategies.

Language acquisition strategies, referring to Oxford (1990, p. 1), are "particular acts, behaviours,stages, or approaches students use–often consciously–to better their progress in apprehending, internalising, and employing the L2." Cohen (1998) defined language learning strategies as "conscious learning processes that may result in action taken to facilitate the acquisition of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of knowledge about that language." Furthermore, Chamot's (2004) takes on

language learning strategies was "intentional thoughts and activities that learners employ to attain a learning goal."

Acquiring a new language can be an arduous task especially in a school setting of a diverse ethnicity. In Malaysia, English possibly positioned as a second or third language, hence, explainsthe difficulty to acquire a new language compared to their mother tongue. Thus, students' language learning in an appropriate manner can be supported by introducing language learning strategies. Past studies have shown that students employ language learning strategies to improve new language learning. Bayoung et. al. (2019) asserted that the accurate approaches and strategies may provide assistance and support to the students to learn the language.

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)
Table 1
Categorisation of SILL by Rebecca Oxford (1990)

Direct strategies	Memory strategies	Part A	Remembering more effectively
	Cognitive strategies	Part B	Using all mental processes
	Compensation strategies	Part C	Compensating for missing knowledge
Indirect strategies	Metacognitive strategies	Part D	Organising and evaluating learning
	Affective strategies	Part E	Managing emotions
	Social strategies	Part F	Learning with others

The table above displays the categorisation of language learning strategies after going through a series of developments. Oxford (1990), as cited in Lee (2010), presents an exhaustive taxonomy of language acquisition processes of all the taxonomies proposed. Oxford (1990) has revamped the categorisation as shown in table above which is two main strategies namely direct and indirect. Each strategy consists of another three different strategies respectively with a total of sixstrategies. The comprehensive category is segmented into subcategories. The direct strategies comprises cognitive, memory, and compensation strategies. On the other hand, affective, metacognitive and social strategies are covered in indirect strategies. All in all, the taxonomy presented by Oxford offers an extensive plan for language learning, with two major divisions and six subordinate categories which then extended to 62 particular strategies. This argument also supported by Adan & Hashim (2021), Oxford's version of language strategies categories can be deemed as the most well known and extensively used due to its expounded classification.

Many scholars have also developed their own language learning strategies' taxonomies. O' Malley et al (1985) categorise these strategies into three parts which are cognitive, metacognitive and socio affective strategies. Rubin (1987) divided language learning strategies into three categories, in particular, learning, social and communication strategies. Last but not least, Stern (1992) provided an enlarged taxonomy that includes five major language learning strategies namely cognitive, management and planning, interpersonal and affective, and communicative-experiential.

As a result, the Strategy Inventory of Language Learning was established that soon became an essence for teachers to discern the students' language learning strategies based on their preferences. Despite the fact that each statement has its own labelling, Zare (2012) noted

that most of these arguments have comparable categories. Researchers have discovered that learners who use more techniques to finish tasks are more likely to succeed. This notion, interestingly, applies to all of the various taxonomies of language learning systems. Richard (1994) concurred with the concept and remarked that in order for the students to complete tasks, effective languagelearning approaches function as an aid. In a nutshell, the amount and appropriateness of languagelearning strategies influence language acquisition success (Dawi et al., 2021).

Methodology

This study is a quantitative study that pivots on lower secondary school students which were Form two pupils in Kuala Lumpur. The learners were from two classes of mixed-ability in English language. 40 learners of 14 years old age were selected via purposive sampling who are English as a second language learners in the school. In order to determine the strategies in reading used by the sample of respondents, an online structured questionnaire was constructed accordingly. The adapted version of the questionnaire is developed on Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). There are 80 items of learning strategy statements in SILL which are then broken down into six categories namely Cognitive, Metacognitive, Memory, Compensation, Affective, and Social categories respectively. However, the questionnaire was amended to a simpler version with only 16 items. In order to determine the reading strategies used, only the items related to reading skills were selected in the adapted questionnaire. A Likert scale, rating from (1) "n*ever or almost never true of me"* to (5) "*always or almost always not true of me"*, is used to allocate scores for each item. The researchers distributed the questionnaire to the respondents and respondents were given ample time toanswer. The data collected then analysed with descriptive statistics using frequency, mean and percentage counts.

Findings and Discussion

This part tenders the results and examines the findings according to the data collected from the questionnaire administered. The data are tabulated based on the parts according to the adapted questionnaire.

Table 2
Part A (Direct Strategies: Memory Strategies)

Part A	1	2	3	4	5
I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English	4 10%	3 7.5%	9 22.5%	13 32.5%	11 27.5%
I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	2 5%	9 22.5%	8 20%	14 35%	7 17.5%
I physically act out new English words.	4 10%	8 20%	12 30%	6 15%	10 25%
I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	5 12.5%	7 17.5%	12 30%	10 25%	6 15%

Strategies	Percentage %
I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English	82.5
I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of asituation in which the word might be used.	72.5
I physically act out new English words.	70
I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	70
Mean	73.75

For Memory strategies, 82.5% of the participants prefer to think of relationships between what they learn and what they have learned previously. It shows that they know the new words by associating their hindsight with the new words acquired. They do not favour enacting newly learned English words physically nor recall those latest words or phrases based on the locationon the page, board, or a street sign as both shared the same percentage of 70.

Table 3 illustrates the Cognitive strategies used by the students as shown in table below;
Table 3
Part B (Direct Strategies: Cognitive Strategies)

Part B	1	2	3	4	5
I read for pleasure in English.	1 2.5%	5 12.5%	8 20%	8 20%	18 45%
I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.	3 7.5%	8 20%	7 17.5%	12 30%	10 25%
I try not to translate word-for-word.	11 27.5%	6 15%	8 20%	9 22.5%	6 15%
I make summaries of information that I read inEnglish.	5 12.5%	7 17.5%	12 30%	11 27.5%	5 12.5%

Strategies	Percentage %
I read for pleasure in English.	85%
I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) thengo back and read carefully.	72.5%
I try not to translate word-for-word.	57.5%
I make summaries of information that I read in English.	70%
Mean	71.25

Referring to Table 3, the data gained from the questionnaire displayed that the majority of the participants (85%) frequently read for pleasure in English. When students enjoy something they do, they will gain something good at what they practise which further develops deeper understanding on the subject. This may amplify their learning outcome in English. Some students also prefer to use skim technique in reading as well as summarising information after reading in English. The least favourable strategy in Cognitive strategy among the participants is translating word-for-word (57.5%). They prefer to translate the whole sentence compared to word-for-word as it is considered to be more acceptable for them. This is due to the fact that misunderstanding the whole meaning of the context may arise if only one word meaning is put into account as it requires students to possess a certain level of understanding of most of the words that exist in the sentence.

Compensation strategies in reading are evinced in Table 4.

Table 4
Part C (Direct Strategies: Compensation Strategies)

Part C	1	2	3	4	5
To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	7 17.5%	4 10%	7 17.5%	11 27.5%	11 27.5%
I read English without looking up every new word.	5 12.5%	9 22.5%	8 20%	12 30%	6 15%

Strategies	Percentage %
To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	72.5
I read English without looking up every new word.	65
Mean	68.75

It is shown from Table 4 that the favoured strategy in Compensation strategy is using prediction to understand the peculiar English words encountered (72.5%). This is the most common strategy used incorporating contextual information from the text. It is nearly impossible to read while looking up every new word as it is a hassle for them and their motivation level to read in English will be impinged if this strategy persists. Hence, this explains why the statement *"reading in English without searching for every new vocabulary or word"* ranked second with 65%.

The metacognitive strategies is illustrated in Table 5:

Table 5
Part D (Indirect Strategies: Metacognitive Strategies)

Part D	1	2	3	4	5
I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	3 7.5%	3 7.5%	8 20%	9 22.5%	17 42.5%
I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	3 7.5%	3 7.5%	7 17.5%	12 30%	15 37.5%

Strategies	Percentage %
I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	85
I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	85
Mean	85

According to Table 5, both strategies in Metacognitive strategies dominate an equal percentageof 85. Students tend to seek out a chance to read in English immensely which reflects the second item which is "*I have clear goals for improving my English skills",* showing that students are highly motivated and keen to navigate ways in progressing their ability in learning English. The tremendous awareness of one's own thought processes in Metacognitive sanctioned creativity and self-regulatory learning among students as they can take control of their own learning. Hence, students may advance better in learning English. Table 6 demonstrates the Affective strategies.

Table 6
Part E (Indirect Strategies: Affective Strategies)

Part E	1	2	3	4	5
I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	13 32.5%	2 5%	12 30%	9 22.5%	4 10%
I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	8 20%	7 17.5%	10 25%	8 20%	7 17.5%

Strategies	Percentage %
I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	62.5
I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	62.5
Mean	62.5

As for Affective strategies in Table 6, it also indicates that both items "*I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English*" and *"I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am*

learning English" have the same preference level at 62.5% among the lower secondary students. This signifies that students try their best to lower their affective filter in learning English. Reducing the affective filter helps students to feel utmost comfortable to learn the language thus allowing more input for the language acquisition process to be more effective. On the other hand, when one communicates their thoughts with someone else, it shows that they are not intimidated by external factors such as other people's possible sentiment towards them.

Table 7 specifies the Social strategies in learning.
Table 7
Part F (Indirect Strategies: Social Strategies)

Part F	1	2	3	4	5
I ask for help from English speakers.	8 20%	8 20%	13 32.5%	5 12.5%	6 15%
I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	6 15%	5 12.5%	13 32.5%	13 32.5%	3 7.5%

Strategies	Percentage %
I ask for help from English speakers.	60
I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	72.5
Mean	66.25

It is evident that the lower secondary students are inclined to use the strategy of "*I try to learn about the culture of English speakers"* in the Social Strategy.. This statement has a higher percentage 72.5% compared to the other item "*I ask for help from English speakers."* with only 60%. This is plausible because native English speakers may have difficulty understanding local students because they talk at a different tempo and with a strong accent, explaining why students do not opt to seek guidance from native speakers.

Referring to the findings obtained, it is made apparent that the students indeed practise language learning strategies in order to excel in reading skills. These findings confirmed that metacognitive strategies is the most favourable learning strategy in reading among lower secondary students. This statement is supported by a study (Hashim et. al., 2018) where the respondents utilise metacognitive strategies alongside socio-affective as well as cognitive. In the study done by Habók and Magyar (2018) also asserted that the excellent pupils utilised metacognitive strategy and often used social strategies concurrently. The reasons might be due to the high level of awareness owned by the students about their merits and demerits in learning a language. Therefore, they know what their goals are in learning English and they are able to regulate their behaviour in optimising learning strategies. The previous literature by Channa et. al (2015) suggests that planning, monitoring and evaluating strategies extend the reading skills of students to promote better text comprehension based on their personal learning needs which further validates the finding of this study. The metacognitive strategy instruction in the classroom must be given prominence to maximise the learning outcome in

reading. This strategy might be apanacea to all reading comprehension difficulties and equip the students with a way to motivate them to enhance their reading performance. Utilising the correct strategy in classroom instruction that caters to the students' learning needs yields positive results in language learning. Metacognition is a tenacious predictor of learning for the students. Estacio (2013) also addressedthat metacognitive reading strategies can act as a reading achievement predictor.

Meanwhile, the least preferred language learning strategy among lower secondary school students is the affective strategy. This may be due to the students' concentrated level of anxiety. It is a common issue in language learning in which the students are too conscious of what others might think of them and the most poignant one is fearing negative evaluation. This is also mentioned in a previous study by Galti (2017) the affective strategy is not practised because students indeed have a high level of anxiety. To overcome this issue, students' must be fused with motivation and disengage themselves from their own fears and those needs to be accompanied with encouragement. In another findings from related literature (Mak, 2011; Khatak, 2011; Hismaoglu, 2013) also affirmed that young learners typically went through anxiety in learning the language.

Implications and Conclusion

In the eyes of second language learners, learning the language is a strenuous task. The learners need to invest their time and commit entirely in order to acquire and master the language. Understanding texts written in a second language, with explicit and implicit meaning, may overwhelm the readers. However, the students may overcome the barriers in mastering the language by fully utilising the language learning strategies available which suit their learning needs and preferences. Identifying the correct learning strategies, especially in reading, aids the students to become better language learners. Since English language is present in every tier of education, hence learners are more motivated to grasp the language. According to previous research, English language learners are more likely to use a variety of language learning approaches based on their learning preferences and styles. The process of determining the ideal strategies in reading is crucial. Therefore, both teachers and learners hold the key in order for thestudents to fit the criteria of a good language learner. The teachers' role is to expose the students with various strategies and the students are given the autonomy to use the strategy that suits thembest. Teachers understanding each strategy from different categories is significant which may aidthe learners in deciding the appropriate strategy. Besides, teachers have a critical role in identifying and implementing successful language learning strategies to a diverse group ofstudents (Mahalingam & Yunus, 2017). The learners also need to take charge of their own learning based on their proficiency and learning styles. Both teachers and learners should work hand in hand to enable the learners to achieve the standard of a good language learner, particularly in reading.

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