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Abstract

There are a variety of learning types and learning strategies used by learners. However, implementing the pedagogy and teaching skills to cater to the different types of learners can be far more challenging and tedious, especially in an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. Speaking skill is one of the most fundamental skills of language as it serves as a medium of communication and enables the speakers to convey the message more effectively. Despite an early start in formal education, past studies have shown that ESL learners struggle to acquire and practice speaking skills effectively. Numerous studies have been conducted at secondary and tertiary levels but are very limited to the primary level. Therefore, this study aims to identify the most used language strategies to learn speaking skills and explore the Year 4 pupils of different language proficiency preferred learning strategies to learn speaking skills in a rural school in Malaysia. A quantitative investigation was conducted using a three-point Likert scale questionnaire adopted from Cohen and Oxford's Young Learner's Language Strategy Use Survey. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data by calculating the mean. 30 samples were selected through purposive sampling. The results indicated that compensation is the most used learning strategy for learning speaking skills among primary pupils of different proficiency compared to other strategies. Educators should take into consideration the learners' preferred learning strategies in designing teaching and learning approaches to provide a better learning experience and outcomes in an ESL classroom.
Keywords: Language Learning Strategies, Speaking Skills, English as a Second Language (ESL) Learners, Primary School Pupils

Introduction

In recent years, Language Learning Strategies (LLS) have been widely used to aid learners to develop their knowledge and skills. Cohen and Oxford (1990) divide LLS into six distinct categories; metacognitive, affective, social, memory, cognitive, and compensation. According to Yavich and Rotnitsky (2020), students differ in their approaches to teaching and learning, their responses to the learning environment and teaching practices as well as in motivation levels. Every learner has their preferred learning strategy that affects their learning outcomes. It is important for teachers to demonstrate the most suitable learning strategies in the lesson to help students learn effectively.

The teaching and learning of English as a Second Language (ESL) has evolved toward shaping students into global players. Acquiring good command of English has become an essential requirement as a communication language worldwide. Despite the advancement in learning medium and context, many ESL learners struggle to master language skills, especially speaking skills. According to Yavich and Rotnitsky (2020), the learning process is crucial as it affects students' academic performance, learning outcomes, and teaching strategies. A Hardan (2013) also stated that to achieve the learning objective, a strategy is required to be adapted in every learning process. Thus, implementing language learning strategies in teaching and learning approaches can aid learners to learn something more successfully (A Hardan, 2013). According to Oxford and Nyiko (1989), language learning strategies mold learners to be more successful, enjoyable, and independent persons attributed to their behaviours or actions. This is because there are many types of learners with different abilities and learning styles. The learning outcomes differ depending on the learning strategies used for each student. Thus, due to the diversity in learning preferences, it is important for teachers to take into account the students' language learning strategies preferences in designing the teaching approaches to achieve the purpose of learning.

Speaking skill has been perceived as the most essential yet challenging skill in language learning. This is because there are many aspects including vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and comprehension to be considered to be proficient speakers. According to Gunes and Srigoz (2021), speaking fluently in the targeted language is important because it allows people to communicate without much difficulty and opens up to different points of view. However, most ESL learners have difficulty acquiring productive skills which are speaking and writing skills as these skills involve more complex language features compared to receptive skills of listening and reading (Rao, 2019). Al Hosni (2014) stated that among the difficulties faced by ESL learners in learning speaking skills are caused by linguistic difficulties, mother tongue interference, and teachers' conduct. Numerous studies on the implementation of language learning strategies have shown positive impacts to support students to be more effective learners in ESL classrooms (see Psaltou-Joycey, 2018; Nhem, 2019; Thiing, 2021). Thus, this study aims to identify the most used and further explore the most preferred language learning strategies by ESL learners of different proficiency in learning speaking skills.

Literature Review
Language Learning Strategies
Definitions

Language Learning Strategies (LLS) has been defined in many ways by various researchers through numerous research studies. One of the definitions of LLS is that it generally includes conscious reasoning and actions to enable the process of language learning (Shakarami et. al., 2017). According to Arisman (2020), LLS is processes and behaviours in achieving learning objectives or goals regardless of the particular topic or circumstances, content, and context. In order to acquire a new language and learn easily, learners should be able to come up with a plan or strategy (Hashim, et al., 2018). Thus, LLS can be used by language learners to aid language learning.

Categorizations

LLS, through numerous researches, have come out with different types of classification after going through phases and stages of development. Oxford (1990) has the most well-known LLS classification. Based on the study done by Lamudom & Tangkiengsirisin

(2020), the LLS taxonomy introduced by Oxford is still relevant. Oxford has divided LLS into direct strategies and indirect strategies and from these two main strategies, both are subdivided into six groups. Direct strategies such as memory, cognitive, and compensation. Meanwhile, indirect strategies consist of metacognitive, social, and affective. Oxford (1996) had mentioned these two main strategies where direct strategies directly involve the target language meanwhile indirect strategies are used to support and manage the learning without involving directly the target language. Memory strategies are distinguished by the conscious storage of information in the short term and long term, as well as its eventual use when needed. Cognitive strategies are also a purposeful way of learning, which includes writing and taking notes, along with concept elaboration. Compensation strategies place emphasis to reduce and eliminate the gaps in usage of the new language including mother tongue language gestures in expressing ideas. Metacognitive strategies are more likely towards self-monitoring, concentration, and planning for a mission or project to help to recall and perceive the previous lesson. Affective strategies are important in managing the emotions and attitudes in social groups and also individually. Interaction and cooperation or socializing with other individuals during the learning process is known as social strategies.

Findings of Previous Studies

LLS employment has been found to be consistently associated with linguistic achievements and plays an important role in helping language learners in regulating their language learning process. According to Wenden and Rubin (1987), LLS acts as sets of language learners' activities that help in enhancing the process of obtaining, to store, to retrieve and to use the linguistic information. On the other hand, Oxford (1990) defined learning strategies as specific actions that were taken by the learner in order to make their learning much easier, faster and enjoyable, more self-directed and effective beside it also more transferable in adapting to new situations. Oxford added that learning strategies are one of the most important factors that help to determine the success of language learning. (Chostelidou et al., 2015). For instance, learning strategies are specific plans or methods that language learners choose and employ to help them achieve a specific target, aims, or objectives in language learning, and as good strategic language learners, they able to select the best learning method that best suit their task needs and in the same time cater their personal learning preferences that will help in their learning as well. Chang and Liu (2013) also stated that learning strategies are steps taken by the learners towards achieving their learning objectives. Griffiths (2007) described LLSs as activities that were chosen by the language learners consciously in regulating their language learning. Besides, LLSs are also defined as mental activities that were taken by the learners in understanding the process of acquiring another language (Bayoung et al., 2019). Language learning strategies are also defined as techniques used with the purpose of helping the learners to improve their second language (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). Therefore, all actions taken, steps, techniques, and also strategies may all refer to the same thing or be related to one another. It is concerned with what a language learner does to improve his or her ability to learn and acquire the target language. Dissanayaka (2014) stated that LLS is attributed to improving language learners' competency. To be more specific on this, Tiing et al (2021) had elaborated by giving an example where one learning strategy can be effective and also functional to a certain group of learners and vice versa. In order to achieve comprehensive language learning, teachers and educators should be aware of the variety of strategies involved in conveying their knowledge to language learners. Teachers and students have centralised about 'what to learn and at the

same time focused on 'how to learn.' Teachers, for example, will be able to lead children effectively by utilising effective language acquisition strategies. Understanding what learning strategies are, on the other hand, is the first step in comprehending this method.

However, it is difficult in deciding the best strategies among six sub strategies according to Oxford due to other factors which contributed to the differences of language learning as stated by Yang (2016) for example, learning environment, age, gender, race, learning style, belief and motivation that gives impact to learners' learning strategies. A study conducted by Mohktar and Anuar (2021) has shown that gender plays role in LLS where female students preferred using a metacognitive approach and male students more to compensation strategy during learning English online. In a previous study conducted by Fernandez Malpartida (2021), with different groups of learning styles and proficiency, metacognitive strategies are the most used by both groups. Most of the studies highlighted the language learning strategy used by language learners either in college, university, or tertiary level and outside of Malaysia. As English consists of four main skills and language learning strategies may differ not only to gender but also in the learning environment and different main skills in language learning. Therefore, this study focuses on identifying language learning strategies used by rural primary school pupils towards mastering their speaking skills.

Speaking Skills in ESL Classroom

Speaking is one of the basic skills in English language learning. It makes speaking skill essential for language learners to learn. Speaking is an interactive process of oral communication to express ideas, convey feelings and share information with others (Purnamawati et al., 2015). Although the language learners have learned English for quite some time, speaking and conversing in English is still a difficult task for them. Bueno et al (2016) stated that speaking is one of the hardest skills that language learners need to face. The implementation of the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2013-2025 has reformed the Malaysian ESL curriculum. By emphasizing the importance of English which includes a lot of teaching and learning methodologies, teaching aids, and materials in order to help language learners to enhance their proficiency in English within all four main areas; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In creating an "internationally competitive Malaysian English language education system", The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages or normally known as CEFR was introduced as the underlying framework in ESL teaching and learning. The objective of the CEFR framework is to improve the educational language in aspects of reflection, communication, and networking (Göksu, 2015). The CEFR outlines act as guidelines for language learners need to accomplish in order to converse or communicate in a language.

The CEFR was formed in 2001 to set the global standards for foreign language education where it is able to suit the needs of language learners and professions that are related to ESL teaching and learning. It focuses on developing and building language learners who are able to communicate and interact in English. The framework consists of six levels of descriptors with three types of language users. Levels C1 and C2 for proficient users, levels B1 and B2 for independent users, and basic users in levels A1 and A2. According to Uri and Aziz (2018), the four main skills "can do '' statements are thorough descriptors of what the language learners can do. In speaking skills, the CEFR focuses both on the learner's production and their ability to take part in daily conversations and discussions. English speaking skill is highlighted as one of the most difficult skills and most important for language learners to

master. Therefore, teachers and educators need to plan various strategies and plans in aiding them to develop their speaking skills. As the teachers try to create a good ESL environment, the language learners themselves should give their best and put effort and allocate time to practice their speaking skill and achieve their "can do".

Language Learning Strategies in Speaking Skills

Speaking skill is one of the main skills in language learning besides listening, reading, and writing. One of the most frequently discussed topics is the use of language learning strategies to develop and at the same time improve speaking skills abilities. According to Dawi et, al. (2021), the learning strategies used by learners determine the success in acquiring the target language. However, mastering English as a second language has always been the biggest concern or problem for speakers, especially language learners in rural areas. Acquiring second language is a lot more challenging because the nature of first language is more natural and convenient (Adan & Harwati, 2021). As the result, they are struggling to become competent English language speakers. Self-confidence, low motivation level, and also not being familiar with the language structure has slowed down their potential to be good English speaker. According to Biaystok (1978) Language Learning Strategies (LLS) are the way that language learners could use in exploiting the information to improve their proficiency in a second language. LLS highlights the language process compared to the language product and LLS acts to facilitate language learning rather than the emphasis on the improvement of the language (Noor et.al, 2016). Lower-level language learners used strategies less frequently than intermediate-level students, who used strategies less frequently than upper-level students. (Aslan, 2009). According to Chai, Wong and King (2016) some language learners with good academic and high motivation are able to perform well in L2 with excellent proficiency as they are able to identify language learning strategies that suit them well. The main reason for language learners' not being able to perform well in speaking English is because of not enough exposure to the LLS (Griffiths & Oxfords, 2014). Frequent exposure to the usage of LLS will reduce the gap between language learners' proficiency and give a good impact on them being good language learners. Therefore, this study focuses on identifying language learning strategies used by rural primary school pupils towards developing their speaking skills.

Methodology
Research Design

This study makes use of a quantitative research design. Quantitative research is used to determine the relationship between variables and outcomes. Mertler (2016), stated that the goal of quantitative research studies differs greatly from the qualitative goal of better understanding a situation or event. When conducting quantitative studies, researchers seek to describe current situations, establish relationships between variables, and occasionally attempt to explain the causal relationship between variables.

Population and Samples

A class of Year 4 pupils in a rural primary school in Sabak Bernam, Selangor was chosen based on purposive sampling. 30 samples were chosen and they were categorized into 3 levels of categories; advanced, intermediate, and below intermediate. These categories are divided based on the CEFR level. According to Gorard (2001), a high-quality sample does not guarantee a successful piece of research and that it is well-known. The goal of sampling is to

use a small number of cases to learn about a much larger number; once the sample results have been collected, you will want to generalise the results to the population.

Research Instrument and Procedure
The survey was carried out in a face-to-face class. By having 30 samples complete the printed survey, they were able to collect 100% of valid respondents in their class. The survey is divided into three sections, each with four questions, and one open-ended question. The open-ended question is intended to learn about the samples' preferred speaking activity. The sections are as follows:

Table 1
Sections in Survey

SECTION	LEARNING STRATEGIES
SECTION 1	Cognitive
SECTION 2	Affective
SECTION 3	Compensation
OPEN-ENDED	Language proficiency

The survey was adapted from the Young Learners Language Strategy Use Survey developed by (Cohen and Oxford, 2002). The Likert scale consists of three scales which are 'Disagree', 'Not sure' and 'Agree'. The scales are aided with smiley symbols to help the samples to understand the questions better. Samples were instructed to indicate their level of agreement by selecting one of three scales ranging from 1 to 3.

Before samples began answering the questions, the researchers explained the purpose of the survey to them. The printed surveys were handed out. The researchers and samples went over each question together to ensure that the samples understood the meanings of each item. Samples were permitted to ask questions during the session to ensure that they understood the questions and the answer they chose.

Data Analysis Method
Descriptive analysis is used to analyse the data collected from the samples by calculating the mean to find significant differences among subgroups. The frequency for each learning strategy also is tabulated. The researchers calculated the means for each item and identify the most preferred learning style based on the data gathered.

Findings and Discussion
The findings were obtained from the survey given to 30 Year 4 ESL primary learners in a rural school. The survey was adopted from Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey with speaking strategies items chosen specifically. It consists of 13 questions and one open-ended question. The items in the survey were categorized into three aspects which are cognitive, affective, and compensation in language learning strategies. A 3-point Likert scale was used to identify the language learning strategies frequently used by the learners. The

data were tabulated in Tables 2,3 and 4 and the frequency and mean were calculated. The mean was calculated according to the score of each scale. {agree(A) = 3, not sure (NS) = 2, disagree(D) = 1}

Table 2
Cognitive strategies used by learners to learn speaking skills.

Cognitive strategies	Advanced			Intermediate			Below intermediate			Mean
	A	NS	D	A	NS	D	A	NS	D	
I make the sounds of the language until I can say them well.	6	2	2	6	3	1	10	0	0	2.63
I imitate the way native speakers talk.	5	3	2	5	3	2	10	0	0	2.53
I say a new expression to myself.	4	5	1	4	5	1	2	2	6	2.07
I practice using new grammar forms when I talk.	3	2	5	3	1	6	1	1	8	1.60
							Total mean for cognitive strategies:			2.21

Table 3
Affective strategies used by learners to learn Speaking skills

Affective strategies	Advanced			Intermediate			Below intermediate			Mean
	A	NS	D	A	NS	D	A	NS	D	
I start conversations.	6	3	1	3	3	4	0	2	8	1.87
I change the subject if I don't have the words I need.	5	3	2	2	4	4	0	2	8	1.77
I plan what I am going to say.	8	0	2	5	2	3	2	1	7	2.10
I ask the other person to correct me when I talk.	6	3	1	3	2	5	0	0	10	1.77
							Total mean for affective strategies:			1.88

Table 4
Compensation strategies used by learners to learn Speaking skills.

Compensation strategies	Advanced			Intermediate			Below intermediate			Mean
	A	NS	D	A	NS	D	A	NS	D	
I ask the person to help me.	1	3	6	7	1	2	10	0	0	2.33
I try to say it in a different way.	5	3	2	3	2	5	0	2	8	1.77
I use words from my own language.	10	0	0	10	0	0	10	0	0	3.00
I use words from my own language but say them with sounds from the new language.	8	0	2	10	0	0	10	0	0	2.87
I move my hands or body so the person will understand me.	8	0	2	10	0	0	10	0	0	2.87
Total mean for compensation strategies:										2.53

Table 2, 3 and 4 indicate the mean score for cognitive, affective, and compensation strategies used by learners to learn speaking skills. The mean scores are 2.21, 1.88, and 2.53 respectively. The result shows the most frequent language learning strategies used by Year 4 ESL primary learners are compensation strategies, followed by cognitive and affective strategies. The items in compensation strategies, which is 'I used words from my own language', received the highest mean, 3.00.

Table 5
Frequency of the activities the learners like to use for learning speaking.

Language proficiency	What type of activity do you like to use for learning speaking?		
	Read aloud	Songs/movies	Language games
Advanced	2	5	3
Intermediate	3	3	4
Below intermediate	5	3	2
Total	10	11	9

According to Table 5, there is not much difference between the three types of activity the learners like to use for learning speaking. The most popular activity is using songs or movies which is the affective strategy and the least popular activity is using language games which is the compensation strategy.

The most used language learning strategies by Year 4 ESL primary learners in rural school.

Based on the findings, the most frequent language learning strategy used by Year 4 primary learners for learning speaking is the compensation strategy. According to Bayoung, et. al, (2019), language learning strategies were the activities that were chosen by the learners to understand the process of acquiring knowledge. So, the learners themselves chose and frequently used this strategy to cater to their learning process. The learners always seek help from the others and use actions so that the others can understand them better in speaking

skills. This explains the statement from Dissanayaka (2014) that the strategies used are attributed to improving the language learners' competency.

Compensation strategies place emphasis to reduce and eliminate the gaps of usage of the new language including mother tongue language gestures in expressing ideas (Oxford, 1996). This is proven when all the learners agree that they used words from their own language when speaking. Even though the language games activity which is one of the compensation strategies is the least popular activity, there are always changes in the language learning strategies used. This is because there may be some factors involved in the teaching and learning process. Yang (2016) stated that learning environment, age, gender, race, learning style, belief, and motivation gives an impact on learners' learning strategies. Thus, the ESL learners in a rural school can develop their speaking skills more with the educator's guidance after identifying the language learning strategies used by them.

The preferred language learning strategy in learning speaking is based on language proficiency

By using the CEFR band, the learners were categorized into three language proficiency which is advanced, intermediate, and below intermediate. The advanced learners may identify their language learning strategies in speaking skills well compared to the others. This is supported by the research from Chai, Wong and King (2016) who said some language learners with good academics are able to perform well in L2 with excellent proficiency as they are able to identify language learning strategies that suit them well. The results in the Table 6 indicated that advanced learners preferred to use affective strategies, intermediate learners preferred to use compensation strategies, and below intermediate learners preferred to use cognitive strategies. There is not much gap between language learners' proficiency and the results of the language learning strategy used but the learners can lessen the gap after the exposure to various language learning strategies. This is proven by the research with similar problems about the learners who were unable to perform well in speaking English by Griffiths and Oxfords (2014) because of insufficient exposure to the language learning strategy. Therefore, educators can plan the appropriate teaching and learning methods in accordance with the learners' preferred learning strategies. It will help in developing the learners' speaking skills as the learners always struggled in acquiring the language.

Table 6
Language learning strategy used according to language proficiency.

Language learning strategies	Language proficiency (Mean)		
	Advanced	Intermediate	Below intermediate
Cognitive	2.20	2.20	**2.23**
Affective	**2.48**	1.93	1.23
Compensation	2.40	**2.66**	2.64

Implications and Conclusion

Speaking skills are important in learning English because the language is widely used all over the world. The purpose of this research is to identify the most common learning strategies used by Year 4 ESL Primary learners in a rural school. We discovered that they prefer to use compensation strategies when learning to speak a second language. In order to

improve their speaking skills, ESL learners frequently seek assistance from their peers and teachers. This indicates that it is crucial to include peer learning activities to support ESL learning. Thus, the educators can implement language learning strategies in planning and designing their teaching and learning approaches to ensure students learn at their best. Educators also must provide adequate and supportive environments and strategies for ESL learners.

This study also aims to identify the most preferred learning strategy based on language proficiency. According to the findings, advanced learners preferred affective strategies, intermediate learners preferred compensation strategies, and below intermediate learners preferred cognitive strategies. This suggests that each learner has different types of learning preferences which can affect their language performance and learning outcomes. This study can help educators better understand their students and choose the best strategies for teaching speaking skills to ESL young learners. To conclude, when planning the lesson and selecting teaching and learning materials, the most suitable language learning strategies should be taken into account to cater to the different ESL levels of proficiency and learning diversity.

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