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In-Text Citation: (Wong et al., 2022)
To Cite this Article: Wong, S., Rakey, S. A. A., Sabari, N. A. S., Samuel, C., Shamsul, N. S. M., & Hashim, H. (2022). Language Learning Strategies for English Speaking Skill among Level 2 Primary School Pupils. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, *12*(11), 2619 – 2631.

Language Learning Strategies for English Speaking Skill among Level 2 Primary School Pupils

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Abstract

Speaking skills plays a vital role in improving the ability to communicate effectively using a language especially to second language learners. Language Learning Strategies (LLS) are beneficial for language learners as it helps them to learn and use a language effectively. However, the lack of confidence has always been a big barrier for them to perform well in speaking English. Hence, a descriptive study has been conducted which aimed to identify the most preferred LLS of speaking skill used by level 2 primary school pupils and ways for educators to improve their speaking skill by using the LLS. A survey questionnaire which has been adopted from the Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was distributed to 50 respondents of rural primary 6 pupils in Sarawak by using random sampling. The data and findings are collected and analyzed by using descriptive analysis through mean score and percentage as the indicators. As a result, the study discovered that the respondents are prone to apply metacognitive strategies most and compensation strategies least when learning English speaking skill. With this knowledge in mind, it is hoped that teachers, typically in the rural areas, would take part in contributing to increase pupils' awareness of their preferred LLS so as to better enhance their English speaking skill and indirectly boost their confidence level.
Keywords: Speaking Skill, Second Language Learners, Language Learning Strategies (LLS), Primary Pupils

Introduction

Speaking skill is one of the fundamental skills in learning a language and it is also one of the most difficult skills to acquire due to its complicated process. Brown and Lee (1994) asserted speaking as an interactive process of constructing language which involves producing, receiving and processing information. Nowadays, the English language is widely spoken around the world and has attained global status. It is used in most key areas such as business, medical, commerce and such. Despite the fact that English is not the most widely

spoken language in the world, it is the official language of 53 nations and is spoken as a first language by around 400 million people (ETS Global, 2020). As a matter of fact, many non-native countries have already applied English as their second language due to its importance in accessing most of the information around the world. Therefore, it is the most common second language in the world.

According to Rafidah and Maslawati (2020), Malaysia has sanctioned English as a second language status as stated in Article 152 and given due attention. Thus, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has implemented a number of ways in supporting English as a second language in education. One of the ways is by regulating English as a compulsory subject in primary and secondary level. This is most likely to be taken to another step when it comes to tertiary level in which the students must take Malaysia University English Test (MUET) as a prerequisite for admissions into all public universities and colleges in Malaysia and they have to achieve the demanded score of their course to pass the test. Furthermore, the 2021 MEF Salary Survey for Executives and Non-Executives has shown that oral and written communication, critical thinking, English proficiency, interpersonal skills, and flexibility or adaptability skills were the top five skills that employers require in newly hired graduates. Hence, it is clear that the importance of speaking ability in English is viewed as a very useful skill in most jobs. Speaking in English allows more career opportunities as well as the ability to communicate with global citizens.

However, after years of progress in learning English as a second language, many pupils in Malaysia are still facing difficulties in their speaking skill. It is not highly expected for non-native speakers like Malaysian to be fully fluent in English since it is regarded as a second language. Nevertheless, there should be an improvement after many efforts have been taken by the MOE. According to the EF English Proficiency Index (2021), Malaysia was ranked 28th among 112 countries and is left behind by Singapore who ranked 4th, which entitled them to a very high proficiency level whereas Malaysia is only listed as a high proficiency level country. This should not be a satisfactory level and Malaysians need to work hard to be better each year. In addition, a study by Misbah et al (2017) in Nazifullah, et al (2019) mentioned how pupils seem to struggle to communicate effectively when given the opportunity to speak due to the influence of their first language, lack of vocabulary knowledge and the socio-economic status of the family. This, in turn, affects their English language learning. Therefore, LLS is introduced to help the pupils to speak in English confidently, in many ways. This can be a guide for English Language teachers to know their pupils better. There are six strategies used to analyze the respondents' perception which are metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, memory strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. It is stated by Adi et al (2019) in (Katherine & Melor 2021) that researchers discovered that language learners who apply learning strategies are frequently better learners. As a result, there is a need to be aware of learners' learning strategies in enhancing teaching preferences and the generation of "excellent language learners". This study aimed to identify the preferred LLS among rural primary 6 pupils in learning speaking skill and to find out ways for teachers to increase the pupils' confidence through their most preferred LLS. The research question is stated as below:

1. What are the most preferable LLS for speaking skill used among rural year 6 primary second language learners?

Literature Review
Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

Learning a new language poses different types of challenges among pupils. As a result of this, numerous research has been carried out to identify and implement language learning strategies. According to Chamot (2005); O' Malley and Chamot (1990) in Hashim et al (2018), learning strategies are considered as a mental algorithm designed and employed by learners in order to learn and apply language. Meanwhile, according to Habok and Magyar (2018), a number of studies on LLS have proven to be helpful among pupils in aiding them to learn more effectively in the classroom. This would in turn cause the pupils' targeted language proficiency to be enhanced. Moreover, another study by Brown (2003) in Wulan et al (2019) expressed that acquiring a foreign language can be successful once the pupil is able to identify and employ suitable LLS. A research conducted by Wu (2008) in Mohammad et al (2018) top this up as they managed to illustrate that proficient pupils tend to apply LLSes more frequently than less proficient learners. In short, every pupil learns in a different way and they utilize LLS in some way or another regardless of their proficiencies. Oxford (1990) in Yahya et al (2021) categorized LLS into direct and indirect strategies. The direct strategies consisted of memory strategy, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies whereas indirect strategies encompassed metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies.

Characteristics of Good Language Learners

More than often the act of acquiring a new language could possess challenges that need to be countered as soon as possible to curb unnecessary anxiety and demotivation among learners. As mentioned, it is crucial for learners to have a set of LLS that works in order for them to overcome these challenges. Syafryadin, Martina and Salniwati (2020) mentioned that competent learners are able to employ LLS in which they are familiar consciously in every step of the learning process. As LLS have proven to leave positive impacts in enhancing pupils' abilities in acquiring new language in past studies, it is also crucial to identify the right approaches and strategies to support the learners (Bayuong et al., 2019). Good language learners possess strong motivation to learn and this in turn offers intrinsic motivation and enjoyment in learners as mentioned by (Norah and Daniel, 2021). Yen and Mohamad (2021) on the other hand mentioned that good language learners have the ability to assimilate effortlessly with their learning environment. This study is also supported by a writing by Yahya et. al (2021) which asserted that a good language learner is capable in strategizing learning whilst being creative and focused despite their learning environment. They could employ multiple approaches in learning typically when they speak and write in the language. As a result of this, there is a vital need to harness the pupils' individual characteristics especially in being a good language learner to assist them in attaining the targeted language effectively within the time frame provided.

Speaking Skill

Mastering communication skills is irrefutably essential in the modern-day ESL context. It has come to the attention that learners feel the need to study the English language with the intention to foster their proficiency in communicating whilst trying to fulfill the need of the ever-changing modernized society (Griffiths, 2008; Hanifa, 2018). There are four main English skills emphasized in Malaysian schools' contexts, namely speaking, listening, reading and writing. Among these four skills, speaking is a productive skill that is considered complex as it requires a few abilities to be utilized at the same time, therefore the rate to develop such skill

varies among pupils (Rajendran & Yunus 2021). Therefore, it is essential for pupils to equip themselves by being proficient in speaking English in order for them to communicate and express themselves clearly with other people (Chen & Harwati, 2022). Generally, acquiring language skills in speaking comprises vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency and appropriate grammar. These sets of skills can be attained through consistent spoken interactions by accentuating the speaking skill elements. Regardless of the taxing processes involved in speaking, it is a known fact that communication is essential in our daily lives especially when it comes down to attaining or presenting information (Syarfryadin et al., 2019). One's capability to carry out a conversation and exchange thoughts by speaking is first and foremost defined by their ability to manipulate different sets of LLS in acquiring the language. However, without a doubt, not all pupils are able to speak English fluently after finishing their 6 six years or primary schooling. Based on a 2008 report carried out by the Office for Standards in Education, it was highlighted that speaking was the least attained skill among the pupils, resulting in their inability to express themselves, thus becoming a catalyst in harboring unpleasant speaking experiences and diminishing their confidence to learn (Tuttle & Tuttle, 2012 in James etal., 2019). Lack of confidence during a speaking process tends to occur when pupils are aware of their partners' inability to interpret their messages. This is supported by a study carried out by Nijat et al (2019) which illustrated that pupils' lack of confidence in speaking is due to their inability to fluently speak which inevitably contributed to their shyness in using the language. All in all, this proves the necessity of being proficient in speaking the English language as by acquiring this skill one could be defined as being able to assimilate in a globalized society.

Methodology
Research Design and Instrument
The study conducted was quantitative research specifically applying survey research design. Survey questionnaire was employed to help gather data for the purpose of this study. The questionnaire consisted of 50 items and was adopted and adapted from the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0 (Oxford, 1990). This questionnaire would be applied solely to access inventory involving LLS of speaking skill. This research design was specifically chosen as it was taught to best fit the aim of the study; to identify the preferred LLS among rural primary 6 pupils in learning speaking skill. The questionnaire consisted of six parts (as highlighted in Table 1: Questionnaire Descriptions) that each highlights specific characteristics of the learning strategies; Part A (Memory), Part B (Cognitive), Part C (Compensation), Part D (Metacognitive), Part E (Affective) and Part F (Social). Meanwhile, as mentioned in Table 2: Likert Scale Description for the Questionnaire Item, likert scales with emojis were employed to gauge the participants' responses for each statement provided. Emojis were used to replace the words in an effort to provide visual aids for the lower proficiency pupils in completing the survey questionnaire. For the sake of respecting the pupils' privacy, names of the pupils were excluded from the questionnaire.

Table 1: Questionnaire Descriptions

	Strategy	Part
Direct Strategy	Memory	A
	Cognitive	B
	Compensation	C
Indirect Strategy	Metacognitive	D
	Affective	E
	Social	F

Table 2: Likert Scale Description for each Questionnaire Item

Scale	Description
☹	Totally Disagree
☹	Disagree
😐	Not Sure
🙂	Agree
😊	Totally Agree

Population and Sampling

Research participants play vital roles in a study as subjects of observation and analysis (Nair et al., 2021). As asserted, there is a need for fellow researchers to develop professional understanding with research participants to ensure a smooth flow when it comes to the data collection. In addition, provided that the researcher and participants are in agreement, the instructions would be able to be delivered clearly and any ethical issues that may come to rise within the study could be dismissed. For the purpose of this study, a random sampling was conducted. Fifty year 6 pupils were selected from four national primary schools in the rural areas of Sarawak. These pupils are of mixed abilities and were specifically chosen to allow for a more detailed, comprehensive understanding of how pupils of different proficiencies employ LLS to speak. These pupils were of different backgrounds and ethnicity. Some are more able than the others financially and they are Chinese, Iban, Malay and others. These pupils learn English as a second language in school.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

For the purpose of this study, the researchers were directly involved with their samples. The researchers distributed and facilitated the questionnaires personally. It was conducted in this manner to permit for additional explanations from the researchers on the items in the questionnaires in case the pupils needed them. The researchers read and explained each item to the pupils and guided them throughout the whole process of completing the survey. This was done to avoid any loopholes and prevented the pupils from randomly answering the questions just to get the questionnaires over with. All the components in the questionnaires indicated the difficulties and problems faced by the pupils while familiarizing themselves with the speaking aspect of the language. Descriptive statistics with mean scores and percentages are used to identify the level of strategy usage (Rojalai et al., 2021).

Findings and Discussion

This study investigated LLS employed by primary school language pupils. The findings are presented in tables in relation to the research questions. All six language learning strategies are categorized into two types which are direct strategies and indirect strategies. After analyzing the questionnaires, it is shown that indirect strategies are employed more compared to direct strategies. The study showed that the most used language learning strategies are metacognitive whereas compensation strategies are the least strategy used among the pupils. In order to answer RQ1: What are the most preferable LLS of speaking skill

used among rural year 6 primary second language pupils?, a brief and general discussion on the most and least favorite learning strategies would be conducted first. Once this is done, more detailed explanation on these two strategies would be conducted based on the data obtained from the questionnaires.

Table 1
Mean score and percentage for each language learning strategy

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		MEAN SCORE	PERCENTAGE (%)
DIRECT STRATEGIES	Memory Related	3.12	62.4
	Cognitive	3.08	61.6
	Compensation	2.98	59.6
INDIRECT STRATEGIES	Metacognitive	3.19	63.8
	Affective	3.09	61.8
	Social	3.06	61.2

Table 1 describes the mean score and percentages for each LLses. As shown in Table 1, the pupils inclined more towards utilizing metacognitive strategies (M=3.19), followed by memory related strategies (M=3.12), affective strategies (M=3.09), cognitive strategies (M=3.08), social strategies (M=3.06), and lastly compensation strategies (M=2.98).

Based on Table 1, 63.8% of the pupils prefer to use metacognition to improve their speaking skill. Metacognitive strategies help pupils to have control over their own learning. The data concludes the pupils would likely be self-sufficient and prefer to be independent on their own learning. Independent learners are pupils that could arrange and self-evaluate their own performance. Independent learners lead to good language learners which could also help low achievers to achieve better results (Kehing & Melor, 2021). In this 21st century, most pupils have their own mobile phones and gadgets with access to the internet that they can utilize to a good use in learning. Hence, metacognitive strategies become the most used strategy compared to the others as the pupils prefer to work independently on their own learning progress.

Table 1 also showed that the least preferred strategy is the compensation strategy. Only 59.6% of the pupils prefer a compensation strategy to improve their speaking skills. For pupils with poor speaking skills, they would probably try to avoid conversation or to communicate English partially or entirely. The pupils might have anxiety about speaking a language which is not their mother tongue, hence when they could not think of a new word during a

conversation, they would probably make the conversation short without making effort to replace the new word with gestures. They would probably prefer to avoid continuing a conversation due to their fear of making mistakes. Therefore, compensation learning strategies are the least preferred strategy among the primary school pupils.

Table 2
Mean score for specific metacognitive strategy

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY	Specific Strategies	Mean Score
Metacognitive	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	**3.20**
	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	**3.34**
	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	**3.58**
	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	**3.60**
	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	**2.70**
	I look for people I can talk to in English.	**2.98**
	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	**3.12**
	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	**3.06**
	I think about my progress in learning English.	**3.16**

In depth, Table 2 specifically shows the statements and the mean score for metacognitive learning strategies. The metacognitive strategies consist of 9 statements which are: 1) I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English (M=3.20), 2) I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better (M=3.34), 3) I pay attention when

someone is speaking English (M=3.58), 4) I try to find out how to be a better learner of English (M=3.60), 5) I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English (M=2.70), 6) I look for people I can talk to in English (M=2.98), 7) I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English (M=3.12), 8) I have clear goals for improving my English skills (M=3.06), and lastly 9) I think about my progress in learning English (M=3.16).

The findings show that metacognitive strategies are the most used strategy among the pupils involved and it reflects on the pupils' learning awareness and learning beliefs. The most used metacognitive strategy is 'I try to find out how to be a better learner of English'. The result is consistent with several related studies which reported similar strategy preferences. For example, a study done by Nurhidayah (2017) shows that the most frequently used strategy by high achievers is metacognitive strategies. Similarly, Carol (2010) cited in Nurhidayah (2017) found that the most preferred strategy by successful learners was metacognitive strategy. Hanafiah et. al (2021) in their research also revealed similar findings where metacognitive strategy ranked the first among the others. Metacognitive strategies are strategies that are used by pupils to manage and have control of their own learning. Pupils who have preferred metacognitive learning strategies are able to improve their metacognitive control over their own learning. Hence, it is better for teachers to guide pupils to understand metacognitive strategies in order for them to learn English better. Pupils need to be guided to have control on their own learning, try to find many ways to practice English, own the mistakes made and improve, and also think about progress that can be made to improve their own English ability. One of the ways to increase pupils' confidence through metacognitive strategies is by giving the opportunity for pupils to be vocal of their own thoughts in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers can also help in assisting pupils to become self-directed and gain confidence in their own speaking ability. In classroom settings, teachers can encourage pupils to be confident in speaking although they might have a bad overall English skill. Pupils who have confidence in speaking despite having low cognitive skills in English have self-control in speaking and they are also self-evaluating themselves after practicing speaking skill.

Table 3

Mean score for specific compensation strategy

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY	Specific Strategies	Mean Score
Compensation	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	**3.02**
	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	**2.66**
	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	**2.84**
	I read English without looking up every new word.	**3.06**
	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	**3.10**
	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	**3.22**

Table 3 shows the statements for compensation learning strategy and the mean scores for each statement. The compensation learning strategy includes 6 statements which are: 1) To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses (M=3.02), 2) When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures (M=2.66), 3) I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English (M=2.84), 4) I read English without looking up every new word (M=3.06), 5) I try to guess what the other person will say next in English (M=3.10), and lastly 6) If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing (M=3.22).

The findings also concluded that the pupils are not active users of compensation strategies. The compensation strategies are meant to help pupils to overcome their limitations in learning the language. In compensation strategies, the least used strategy is 'When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures'. This is likely due to the pupils being shy or anxious to continue the conversation as they are afraid of making mistakes or they have insufficient knowledge of the English language. This is agreed by Hanafiah et. al (2021) where pupils use compensation strategy but not as often because during a conversation, they tend to dig for words and not easily find a way to switch to their first language instead. Therefore, teachers should consider helping and guiding the pupils to be confident in speaking and aid them in increasing their knowledge of English vocabulary.

There is a need for teachers to help pupils identify the learning strategies that fits them to help the pupils understand the use of learning strategies in helping them to improve their learning. Pupils presented with a supporting and motivating environment are able to succeed and learn better (Doraisamy, 2021).

Implications and Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the most preferred language learning strategies (LLS) among the Year 6 pupils in enhancing their speaking skills. The data indicated that the pupils used both indirect and direct language learning strategies, as the percentage ranged between 59.6% and 63.8%. It can be observed that most pupils preferred to use memory related strategies for direct strategies, and metacognitive strategies as indirect strategies in learning speaking skills. The results identified metacognitive as the most used strategies and compensation strategies as the least used. The results portrayed the high language learning awareness among the pupils. They pay attention to improving their speaking skills by being mindful of the English-speaking people and environment as they are opportunists in learning the speaking skills. They always look for ways to apply the language while being aware of their own goals and progress towards becoming fluent English speakers. Having the metacognitive strategies as the most preferred language learning strategies indicated that the pupils used it both consciously and unconsciously, as they are aware of their proficiency in speaking, whether it is in terms of fluency or accuracy. With a good understanding of their level of proficiency, they may consciously apply the metacognitive strategies to enhance their speaking skills. Through the awareness, the pupils may apply suitable techniques and ways to learn speaking skills which they deem suitable for their preferences and level of proficiency.

The significant finding of this research acts as a stepping stone and a reinforcement for more educators who are interested in conducting further research on language learning strategies. They may employ, improvise, and study more learning methods which suit their pupils' individual needs, preferences and styles. Furthermore, it is also recommended for educators or researchers to investigate the pupils' LLS in learning other skills, namely listening, reading and writing, by adopting the SILL questionnaire. Highlighting further into the contribution of this research, it fortified the pupils' understanding and awareness of the LLS they used in enhancing their speaking skills. Apart from that, this study provides an insight to educators on the importance of having an understanding of pupils' individual needs and preferences in language learning. Through the exploration of pupils' most preferred LLS, educators can plan and prepare both suitable lesson plans and materials to suit the language learning style of the pupils. As a result, it may help educators in enriching the learning experience for the pupils in developing their speaking skills as well as encouraging them to be independent learners. It may also boost the confidence and self-esteem among pupils in learning speaking skills. To conclude, this study contributes to the continuation of the notion of studies on language learning strategies in enhancing the speaking skills, and proves the strong use of metacognitive strategies in language learning among the pupils. It provides further understanding for educators on their learners' language learning. Hence, it may help educators in assisting their learners to utilize language learning strategies to further develop and enhance their speaking skills.

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