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Language Learning Strategies for Enhancing Reading Comprehension among Rural Primary 6 ESL Learners

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Abstract

Teaching strategies for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) have seen a substantial change in recent years. Since 21st-century education emphasizes the learning process as opposed to the learning outcome, the significance of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) is undeniable. As a language skill, reading is a vital component of language proficiency since it concerns information and communication. However, pupils encounter various difficulties while comprehending their reading depending on how well they can read, especially those in rural schools. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the LLS that rural Primary 6 ESL pupils found to be the most helpful in terms of enhancing their reading comprehension. A survey questionnaire based on the Oxford (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was given out to 30 rural primary 6 pupils in a school in the Perak district through random sampling. Descriptive analysis was employed, utilizing the mean score as an indication. The findings showed that the pupils are likely to use social strategies most and metacognitive strategies least in reading comprehension. It is hoped that with this information, teachers, especially those in rural areas, will help pupils become more aware of their preferred LLS in order to enhance their reading comprehension.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Language Learning Strategies (LLS), English as a Second Language (ESL), Rural Primary School Pupils

Introduction

As a 'lingua franca', English is widely used for international interaction around the world. English continues to be a crucial language for international trade, business, and research as well as for tourist, print, and electronic media (Jabeen et al., 2021). Instead of being restricted to the English-speaking globe as it once was, English is now widely used in non-native-speaking nations thanks to a global market that is highly competitive. The English language's status as Malaysia's second national language has undergone significant change. It doesn't matter whether you're in elementary school, high school, or university. The Ministry of Education has taken several actions to raise student proficiency levels. At every stage of the educational process, pupils are required to study the English language. In addition, in

recent years, ESL teaching approaches have undergone substantial change, transitioning from a teacher-driven to a learner-driven approach (Ali & Zaki, 2019).

Over time, the education trend has drastically changed, shifting the focus from "what to learn" to "in what way to learn," leaving educators with little choice but to incorporate a wealth of language learning techniques into their instruction. It is important to emphasize the fact that each child has a unique approach to learning that works best for them. Recognizing and cultivating all types of human intelligence is crucial for exploring pupils' skills and helping them to identify various bits of intelligence (Thambu et al., 2021). In relation to this, teachers can quickly set learning goals and create diverse activities for pupils by studying their intelligence. Aljunaidi (2018), who contends that LLS is a crucial element that might enhance ESL learners' learning outcomes and academic achievement, supports this point of view. As a result, if LLS was used frequently in ESL classrooms, pupils would be able to adopt their preferred learning styles, and educators would be able to discover the best teaching approaches.

Reading is a necessary skill for acquiring knowledge. Reading is also recognized as one of the most difficult skills that require considerable effort in schools and universities (Amin, 2019). To master reading, one must master reading skills such as anticipating, creating associations, imagining, inferring, questioning, summarising, and so on. As a result, despite having learned to read in preschool, many ESL pupils struggle to read and comprehend simple words by the time they enter primary six (Chua & Sulaiman, 2021). It is possible because many of the learners don't strategically design their own learning objectives while efficient language users, however, tend to use LLS more than unsuccessful language learners. Earlier researches have found that a number of factors influence the learning approach that is chosen. Learning competence is one of the elements affecting the decision of a learning strategy (Zare, 2012).

When it comes to reading comprehension specifically, pupils have varying reading experiences. One of the things that affects reading comprehension is reading ability. A deeper look at the steps taken by pupils when understanding second language content would provide insight into how they get a grip on the hurdles of reading comprehension. An intriguing branch in that area is to discover more about the preferred language learning strategies used by pupils to enhance their reading comprehension. Furthermore, self-regulation should be implemented for successful language learning. Pupils who are skilled in self-regulation may take ownership of their learning, identify the best approach, use it, and then assess their performance at the end of the process (Gorgoz & Tican, 2020). In this setting, pupils with excellent self-regulation can employ more effective reading comprehension strategies.

Hence, the purpose of this study is to identify the Language Learning Strategies (LLS) employed to improve understanding of reading among primary 6 ESL learners. As a result, the following two research questions are formulated:

i. What language learning strategies are most frequently utilized by the rural Primary 6 ESL pupils to improve reading comprehension?
ii. What language learning strategies are the least utilized by the rural Primary 6 ESL pupils to improve comprehension?

Literature Review
Language Learning Strategies
Language Learning Strategies (LLS) contribute significantly to language learning. The significance of LLS is beyond dispute since teaching in the 21st century is more concerned

with the learning process than the learning outcome. It is important to first address the difference between the terms Language Learning Strategies (LLS) and Learning Strategies (LS). Many studies have distinguished between these terms. According to previous studies, LLS is focused on the process of learning to acquire a specific language, whereas LS generally refers to methods for assisting pupils in learning (Lee, 2010). LLS has been one of the most extensively studied areas of language learning since the 1970s. Lee, in her paper commented that in contrast to the vast majority of researchers, Oxford (1990) stands out for recounting LLS in greater detail. Direct and indirect language learning strategies were divided into two major categories (Oxford, 1990).

Direct Strategies were then subdivided into subcategories like memory (used for information retrieval), cognitive (utilized to understand the input and output of language) and compensation (used for wise guessing on new information) as well as metacognitive (used to organize and assess personal learning), affective (used to handle feelings), and social (used to facilitate group learning) were subcategorized under Indirect Strategies. Oxford's taxonomy offers an all-encompassing approach to language learning with six subcategories and sixty-two specified strategies spread across the two main categories. Zare (2012) noted that most of these hypotheses fall under the same classifications even though each has its own unique labelling. Researchers have discovered that learners will generally perform better on tasks if they use more strategies to complete them. Interestingly, this principle holds true for all taxonomies of language learning methods. Richard (1994) backed up this assertion and added that effective language learning strategies enable learners to complete tasks successfully. Briefly, the quantity and the appropriateness of language learning strategies have an impact on how effective language learning is.

Characteristics of Good Language Learners

LLS is frequently linked to the qualities of a successful language learner. Numerous research studies have repeatedly shown the more language strategies employed, the higher one's level of language proficiency. Wong et al. (2022), in their paper, stated learning a new language can present difficulties that must be resolved promptly to prevent unnecessary fear and disinterest among learners. In order to overcome these challenges, it is crucial for learners to have a set of LLS that is effective, as has already been discussed. According to Syafryadin et al. (2020), capable learners can consciously use LLS with which they are already comfortable at every stage of the learning process. It is important to choose the appropriate approaches and strategies to support the learners because LLS has been shown to improve learners' abilities to learn new languages in previous studies (Bayuong et al., 2019). As stated by Norah and Daniel (2021), competent language learners have a strong intrinsic desire to learn, which in turn provides learners with internal motivation and enjoyment. On the other hand, Yen and Mohamad (2021) mentioned that effective language learners can easily assimilate into their learning environment. Yahya et al (2021) in their writing is also supportive of this study in which they claimed that despite their learning environment, effective language learners are able to plan their learning while remaining creative and focused. They can usually use a variety of learning techniques when they speak and write the language. Hence, it is essential to make use of the learners' unique qualities, particularly their propensity for language learning, in order to help them effectively acquire the targeted language within the allotted time.

Reading Skill

Malaysian schools emphasize four main English skills namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Reading is the most fundamental of the four language learning skills, according to Krashen & Brown (2007), as it can increase a language learner's overall proficiency. Numerous studies are also supportive of this statement in which reading skill, which is a crucial component of language learning, is one of the apex levels of language because it influences language development via reading-based vocabulary and sentence structure acquisition. For any ESL learner who wants to be proficient in the English Language, reading is regarded as a foundational skill. One's academic performance frequently reflects his/her reading abilities. Without reading, one is less likely to grasp the material and even recognize the splendor of learning (Hui et al., 2022). When learning to read, pupils must be able to comprehend the diction and semantics of the English Language in addition to pronouncing words correctly. This is corroborated by Chang et al (2018), who claimed that reading comprehension is a cognitively active process that necessitates engagement with the reading materials. According to Phantharakphong & Pothita (2014), learners are struggling to comprehend written text because they have not yet mastered reading comprehension. ESL learners frequently struggle to comprehend several words as they read texts, whether they are formal reports or casual factual stories. It is unlikely that the learners need to look up the dictionaries every time they encounter a new word. As a result, it is crucial that they infer the meanings of the words deductively from the context of the reading material. It is also supported by Hashim et al (2018) who stated that it is essential for learners to have a fundamental level of understanding and comprehend the context provided throughout the entire reading text, failing which they run the risk of mis-comprehending the text's intended meaning entirely. Walker (2001) outlined the steps involved in reading, including switching between informational sources, complex meanings, and literary devices. Additionally, they must evaluate their comprehension and consider the social context of their responses. Despite fully understanding the meanings they want to convey; non-native English speakers frequently struggle to express certain ideas in many situations. It usually results from a lack of exposure to different languages and cultures. Since reading exposes second language learners to a limitless vocabulary and generous context, it has become their lifesaver because it allows them to substitute the educational encounter that they would as native speakers, never had. It helps them more subtly understand the language and learn it more quickly (Rojalai et al., 2021).

Methodology
Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design using survey. This study aimed to determine the most and least common language learning techniques used by primary year 6 ESL pupils in order to enhance their reading comprehension.

Research Sample

Purposive sampling was the approach employed by the researchers in this research project to select the research sample. A total of 30 pupils were chosen from a rural primary school in Taiping, Perak, to explore the Language Learning Strategies (LLS) favored for improving reading comprehension among Year 6 ESL pupils. The male participants accounted for 15 of the totals, with 15 females in attendance. In general, the pupils were at intermediate to higher levels of English proficiency.

Research Instrument
A survey questionnaire was used to determine how often study participants used Language Learning Strategies (LLS) to increase their reading comprehension. It was condensed to match the purpose of the reading comprehension research, which included 18 items divided into six sections: Section A: Memory, Section B: Cognitive, Section C: Compensation, Section D : Metacognitive, Section E : Affective, and Section F : Social.

Data Collection and Data Analysis
In-person English language courses were held at the school, during which the questionnaire was distributed and given out. The questionnaire was given to the respondents with plenty of time to complete it, and as soon as they finished, it was collected. The frequency counts and mean scores from the descriptive statistics analysis were then utilized to determine the LLS that were most and least used in assisting the pupils' reading comprehension.

This study is referring to Oxford's mean score classification. A mean score is used to calculate the average or central tendency of a set of data. A higher mean value suggests that a group of individuals preferred a particular strategy more than the others. According to Oxford (1990), a strategy is regarded as high if the mean is between 3.5 and 5.0, whereas a medium strategy is one with a mean between 2.5 and 3.4. A mean value of 2.4 or less is regarded as low.

Findings and Discussion
This study explored the LLS practices used by elementary school language learners. In connection to the research questions, the findings are displayed in tables. All six language learning techniques are classified into two categories: direct strategies and strategies that are indirect. Based on the findings of the questionnaire research, indirect tactics are used more than direct strategies. According to the study, pupils most frequently use social strategies to learn languages, while metacognitive learning strategies are the least popular. Responses were gathered from 30 pupils from a rural primary school in Taiping, Perak.

Table 1
Each language learning strategy's mean score

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES		OVERALL MEAN SCORE
Direct Strategies	Memory Related	2.95
	Cognitive	3.20
	Compensation	3.00

Indirect strategies	Metacognitive	2.33
	Affective	3.40
	Social	4.20

Table 2
Mean score for each questions in different language learning strategy

The Strategies		Mean	Average Mean
SECTION A: MEMORY STRATEGIES			
Q1.	I connect the sound of a new English word and image of the word to help me remember the word.	2.00	2.95
Q2.	I physically act out a new English word.	3.85	
Q3. a	I remember new words or phrases by recalling where they appeared on the page, on the board or street sign.	3.00	
SECTION B: COGNITIVE STRATEGIES			
Q4.	I read for pleasure in English.	4	3.20
Q5.	I read the content quickly at first, then I reread it slowly.	3.6	
Q6.	When I hear or read material in English, I summarise the information.	2	

SECTION C: COMPENSATION STRATEGIES		
Q7. To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	3.5	3.00
Q8. I read English without having to look up every word.	3.5	
Q9. I use a word or phrases that convey the same thing if I can't think of an English term.	2.0	
SECTION D: METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES		
Q10. I am aware of the errors in my English and utilise that knowledge to improve.	2.0	2.33
Q11. I try to read as much English as I can whenever I have the chance.	2.33	
Q12. I think about my progress in learning English.	2.66	
SECTION E: AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES		
Q13. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	3.0	3.40
Q14. I notice I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	4.0	
Q15. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am I am learning English.	3.2	
SECTION F: SOCIAL STRATEGIES		
Q16. I practise English with other pupils.	4.5	

Q17. When I speak, I kindly ask English speakers to correct me.	3.7	4.20
Q18. I make an effort to learn about English speakers' culture.	4.0	

From Table 1, it can be seen that indirect strategies are more favoured in general by pupils. Social strategies (4.20) are more favoured as the mean obtained is the highest, followed by affective strategies (3.40), cognitive strategies (3.20), compensation strategies (3.00), memory-related strategies (2.95), and metacognitive strategies (2.33). Table 1 also shows that most pupils preferred to use metacognitive strategies to enhance reading comprehension.

Using social strategies to improve reading comprehension is considerably high according to the results obtained in Table 1. (m=4.2). This is shown in item 16 "I practice English with other pupils."(m=4.5) followed by item 18 "I try to learn about the culture of English speakers." The least preferred social strategy is item 17, "When I speak, I kindly ask English speakers to correct me" with a mean score of 3.7.

Regarding item 16 under social strategy in Table 2, "I practice English with other pupils" and item 18, "I make an effort to learn about English speakers' culture." The data revealed that most of the respondents employed social strategies such as practicing with other pupils and attempting to understand the culture of native English speakers to enhance reading comprehension. According to Oxford (1990), language is a type of social behavior that people use to communicate with one another. Various individuals are involved in language learning. As a result, efficient social methods are crucial to the process. In order to break the second language barrier, pupils practice with their peers of the same level and age so they feel comfortable using the language.

This is consistent with Garay and Andonegi (2015), who claim that maintaining interactions with people who aren't always teachers while learning a language helps a learner develop their sense of self-worth and self-confidence. Pupils pick up a language by conversing with those around them who are learning it as well, such as teachers, friends, or even just fellow pupils. As you require a second language and control the affective component, this encourages engagement and feedback. Pupils' reading comprehension skills can be improved with more opportunities for language practice and better feedback on errors made. Learning the culture of native English speakers also enables pupils to have empathy and learn the way of thinking of native speakers. This allows pupils to enhance their reading comprehension capabilities as they are able to relate the use of language to their understanding. Therefore, by employing social strategies, pupils are able to achieve their aims of enhancing reading comprehension sooner than expected (Oxford, 1990).

In addition, item number 17, "I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk," received a mean score of (M=3.7), indicating that participants employed the approach by requesting others who are fluent in the language to correct them when they spoke. Garay and Andonegi (2015) state that the ultimate aim of all languages in all contexts is having an effect on communication. In a cooperative context, collective intelligence builds the basis of cooperation. A good language learner makes an effort to communicate and learn through communication. Mandasari and Oktaviani (2018) also state that pupils have opportunities to cooperate and become engaged language learners without the fear of making grammatical

and sentence structure mistakes. Learners improve the most when they are comfortable with the learning environment. This takes place when they are able to study without worrying about making mistakes because they are aware that any faults, they make will be rectified by others whose native tongue is English.

Implication and Conclusion

The findings of this research shed light on the Language Learning Strategies (LLS) used by the rural Primary 6 ESL pupils in order to improve their reading comprehension. The researchers' conclusions showed that when it comes to increasing their reading comprehension, the social technique is the LLS that is most frequently used, whereas the metacognitive-related approach is the least frequently used. As a result, it helps ESL teachers become more aware of their pupils' favourable LLS. LLS serves as an addition in boosting learners' motivation to learn the language because English is a required language in this globalized 21st century. Particularly, in relation to language learning, it's important to highlight that it's not one man's responsibility in education.

In order to determine the ideal LLS for their pupils and themselves, educators and learners alike must become familiar with the wide variety available. Overall, this study offers fresh knowledge to assist educators in helping their pupils successfully implement LLS to improve their reading comprehension. They may employ, improvise, and research additional teaching techniques that best suit the needs, preferences, and learning styles of each of their pupils. It is advised that future studies expand their analysis of LLS to include other language abilities including speaking, listening, and writing in figuring out what constitutes a successful language learner.

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