

Preferred Language Learning Strategies Employed by Rural Secondary School Students in Learning English

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Abstract

English language is a global language, yet it is regarded as one of the most difficult languages. Mastering the English language has been challenging among English as second language (ESL) students despite the fact they frequently employ various language learning strategies (LLS). This study aims to investigate the most preferred choice of language learning strategies among 30 Form 5 rural secondary school students through a survey and semi-structured interview. The quantitative survey was adapted from Strategy Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) by (Oxford, 1990). The data of the survey were analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings were presented and elaborated interpretively in this study. The obtained findings showed that memory strategy was the most preferred learning strategy among students due to proficiency level in English. The students' learning styles were also closely linked to their choice of learning strategies and eventually it showed a positive impact towards their English performance. This study hopes to give an insight on how these learning strategies influence students' achievement in their English language skills.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies, English Language, Language Skills, ESL

Introduction

English language has been more than just a mode of communication as it has outgrown most other languages with its rapid growth in this modern world. The language has occupied the status of commercial language by connecting every corner of the globe in almost every field; science and technology, engineering, medicine, education and many more. The evidence of the importance of English can be vividly witnessed through the span from business to international relations to academics (Kiew & Shah, 2020). It is crucial to learn English to be on a par with the demands of the expanding globalisation era, as it is the medium through which knowledge is circulated. The English language plays a vital role in many parts of the world including Malaysia. The influence of the language in Malaysia has begun before the independence of the nation and the impact of the language has never stopped itself and the growth of the multiracial nation till date, especially in the education system.

In Malaysia, English Language is a compulsory subject to be taught for both primary and secondary school students. It is not easy to learn a second language as it often needs more time to study its structure. English is considered as a second language in Malaysia and all Malaysians who have studied for at least eleven years should have acquired it (Ansari, 2015). One of the key aspirations underlined in the Malaysian Education Blueprint (2013-2025) is to produce students with bilingual proficiency of Malay and English languages. A student in Malaysia should acquire the language, which is divided in four main skills; listening, speaking, reading, writing and additionally the skills of mastering vocabulary and grammar. Despite the depth of the importance of the language is increasing rapidly, the language acquisition among Malaysian students is still one of the rising concerns of the nation. Their language acquisition is significantly incorporated with language learning strategies.

There has been a gradual growth of interest in language learning strategies (LLS) over the past years. Language learning strategies play a focal role in boosting the mastery of language acquisition. Different students have different learning styles and different strategies in order for them to further acquire and develop their language learning. Indeed, what suits one student may be inadequate for another. Amir (2018) proposes that students' language competence improve when they receive the guidance to learn through the identification of appropriate language learning strategies. Some researchers also justify that high users of language learning strategies eventually become good language students (Nazri et al., 2016). In order to assure the students' success in language acquisition, motivation and attitude are essential factors that must be retained by every language student (Kajan & Shah, 2019).

Much research has been done and a lot has been said about good language students. However, there is no adequate depth about the good language students among upper secondary school students and the strategies they tend to use in order to improve and acquire second language learning skills. Since English language is considered as vital in today's world, therefore there is a need for a study to identify strategies used by upper secondary school students in school to learn English language skills. There is a gap in the literature on language learning strategies among Malaysian Upper Secondary ESL students.

Thus, this study emphasises on the preferred language learning strategies by Form 5 students, specifically from the Malaysian rural school in learning English. The goal is to identify the most and least preferred learning strategies among the students. The obtained knowledge and awareness of the strategies applied by the students eventually will serve as guidance to enhance their language learning. In addition, the findings can be channelled towards the students' specific learning needs in the classroom. This study is conducted to answer two research questions:

- a) What is the preferred language learning strategy in learning English?
- b) To what extent do the students' preferred language learning strategies affect their English language learning?

Literature Review

English Language Skills

English language plays an undoubtedly significant role because it has developed into a lingua franca that is spoken all over the world. In practically every other field, including science, engineering, and technology, medical, trade and commerce, scientific research, tourism, finance, business, and several other fields, English is now broadly used across the globe (Parupalli, 2019). Hence, in order to be able to acquire the English language effectively, the four fundamental skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are commonly discussed.

Listening Skill

Listening is regarded as the primary language skill that must precede other secondary language skills such as speaking and writing skills (Ho, 2016). Listening is a sophisticated active process of interpretation in which listeners actively match what they hear to what they already know (Srirejeki & Darmayanti, 2019). Pamangin (2022) stated that listening refers to the act of taking in information delivered orally and the ability to listen actively can increase collaboration, lessen conflict, and foster understanding in personal interactions. Pamangin (2022) further stated that the poor proficiency in listening skills is influenced by several factors such as lack of English knowledge, limited vocabulary, lack of practice, limited understanding, and teacher's less precise teaching style. Hence, in order to improve the language students' listening skill which could influence their overall language proficiency, students should be exposed to authentic materials with real life context as much as possible. Language students need to be able to listen actively and comprehend the message delivered to them orally before they can produce the language in terms of speaking or writing.

The important roles of authentic materials in teaching listening skills have been highlighted by few scholars. Srirejeki and Darmayanti (2019) in their experimental study revealed that the students who were taught by using songs and authentic videos achieved better outcomes as compared to those who were taught in the conventional ways. It was further stated that the use of songs and videos exposed students to real-life context of the language use and enhanced their interest and enjoyment through the element of audiovisual media. Pamangin (2020) also conducted a study on the use of audio-visual to improve students' listening skills and it also indicated a positive result. Similar studies done by Pratama et al (2020) and Puspita and Amelia (2020) with the use of YouTube videos and TED-talk found an increment in their listening score. The studies also further revealed that these authentic materials and digital tools appealed to their attention, were fun, engaging and motivating, thus helping to improve their listening skills.

Speaking Skill

As mentioned previously, speaking skill is considered as secondary or productive language skills in which language students have to actively produce the language. According to Pratiwi and Ayu (2020), speaking is the ability to communicate verbally and convey thoughts using the target language vocabularies and grammatical structures. It is also known as multi-sensory activity as speakers need to incorporate paralinguistic elements including eye contact, gestures, physical expressions, tempo, pauses, pronunciation and intonation that can impact conversational flow (Dilobar, 2022). As speaking is a productive skill, it is often regarded as the measure for one's language proficiency and speakers who can effectively communicate in the language will be recognised as good language students (Dilobar, 2022; Altun & Sabah, 2020). However, speaking skills is one of the challenging skills to be acquired as it is not easy to make utterances and convey thoughts, especially in a second language, in a spur of a moment. Language students must carefully select the words that will best assist them to communicate with their audience. Consequently, through the process, language students will confront several challenges such as limited vocabularies, afraid of making errors, shyness, nervousness, lack of self-confidence and motivation (Ratnasari, 2020), which could influence their speaking ability.

Therefore, to overcome the challenges, Masuram and Sripada (2019), highlighted that it is crucial for language teachers to produce a friendly and non-threatening environment through task-based materials. The emphasis should be on the communication and collaboration

among the students to promote a sense of belonging within the group and teachers' role is as a facilitator. Additionally, a study done by Tuyen (2021) revealed that most of the participants (55%) preferred to listen to music to enhance their speaking skill. Listening to music can be appealing to the language students due to the rhythm and repetitive words, making language learning more enjoyable and fun. The second most preferred method was watching foreign movies with subtitles. Movies or videos with subtitles or captions will assist students in acquiring new vocabularies, knowing the spelling of the spoken words, as well enhancing memory retention as they can see and listen to the words at the same time (Arulchelvan et al., 2019; John, et al., 2021; Tuyen, 2021).

Reading Skill

In contrast to speaking skill, reading is considered a receptive skill in which language students only receive the language without producing it. Reading skill can be defined as the mental processes of producing meaning by subjecting texts and symbols to cognitive processes (Gedik & Akyol, 2022). Santi et al (2021) also described reading skill as a cognitive activity that helps readers to learn new things or expand their knowledge by comprehending the text being read. In other words, during the reading process, language students actively make meaning to comprehend written language, hence making it an equally important skill to be acquired.

In order to interact meaningfully with the reading materials, students are required to decode and recognize words, understand the meaning of the written text, and make connections between the different pieces of information. This comprehension process requires readers to possess a wide range of vocabularies in the target language. Inadequacy in vocabulary could influence the process of meaning-making as readers struggle to comprehend the text or sentence with unfamiliar words (Mauliza et al., 2019). On the other hand, reading can also boost vocabulary acquisition. Readers may learn deeper meanings through critical thinking skills and how words and phrases are used in context by frequently exposing themselves to a range of words and phrases (Santi et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to recognise the reciprocal link between vocabulary and reading skill.

Writing Skill

Another productive skill in language learning is writing. Writing refers to the mental process of brainstorming ideas, analysing ways to communicate it in written form, and organising the ideas into coherent sentences and paragraphs for the readers (Hasan, 2023). Hence, from the definition given, writing can be regarded as one of the challenging skills to be mastered as it requires a lot of thinking processes before putting the ideas into words. Language students also need to pay attention towards the sentence structure, choosing the appropriate words to convey the intended meaning, as well as paying attention to the element of spelling and punctuation (Sa'adah, 2020; Hasan, 2023; Husin et al., 2022). Although the writing skill is taxing and writers often experience writer's block throughout the process, mastering writing skill is essential for effective communication in written form. Besides, students' motivation and performances in writing is enhanced with personalised feedback (Wang & Xu, 2020). This could facilitate their competency to write better in terms of accuracy, fluency, and complexity. Language students would be able to develop their cognitive and critical thinking along with the process of writing (Diana et al., 2020; Abdullah et al., 2020).

To sum up, improving language proficiency requires equal development of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) as these skills are interconnected. Language

students need to be constantly exposed to the language (listening) before they can speak the language confidently. Additionally, they also need to read extensively to acquire a wide range of vocabularies before they can start to write. Having rich vocabularies will help them to choose the right words to convey their ideas effectively to the readers. Hence, language teachers should not neglect any skills and strive to engage students in activities that could promote the development of all four skills. By doing so, teachers could assist language students to enhance their overall language proficiency.

Language Learning Strategies

There are several definitions of strategies used in language learning. Researchers have suggested various definitions of LLS and have identified categories of strategies. One of the pioneering researchers in this field, Rubin (1975) defined learning strategies as “the techniques or devices which a student may use to acquire knowledge”. Later Oxford (1990) expanded on this definition, stating that LLS are “thoughts and actions, consciously chosen and operationalized by language students to assist them in carrying out a multiplicity of tasks from the very outset of learning to the final stages of communicative competence” (p.8).

LLS are defined by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) as techniques acquired with the specific intent of assisting students in their learning of a second language. They have identified different categories of LLS and proposed a classification of strategies into cognitive, metacognitive and social or affective categories. Cognitive strategies are used to manipulate and practice language while metacognitive strategies are used to monitor and regulate learning processes. Social or affective strategies relate to methods that leverage people's emotions and social interactions to improve language learning. Some of these techniques in socio-affective strategies assist students in reducing the anxiety associated with language acquisition (Chanderan & Hashim, 2022).

Another classification of LLS was proposed by Oxford (1990), who identified two main types of LLS; direct and indirect strategies which are further divided into six subcategories. The strategies under direct strategies are cognitive, memory and compensation whereas under indirect strategies are metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Cognitive strategies are used to understand and produce language. According to Chanderan and Hashim (2022), cognitive strategies are related to how students think about their learning process such as practising, receiving, and sending messages and making assumptions. They further stated the students create input and output structures that will help them learn a new language in far more useful ways. This input can be created through activities such as note-taking, identifying new words or language content, analysing it, summarising, reasoning, and creating structure (mental schemata) that will ease the process of knowledge retrieval (Alrashidi, 2022; John et al., 2021; Šakić & Bobić, 2021; Stanlee & Singh, 2021; Sukying, 2021)

Meanwhile memory strategies are referring to the process of storing and retrieving information. It involves creating mental associations with the use of visuals, sounds, use of gestures and physical expressions to facilitate memory (Chanderan & Hashim, 2022). This strategy also eases students' memory through activities such as remembering, repeating, or drilling, imaginary and grouping the language content (Lestari & Azizi, 2021). students can also use the new knowledge in a different context, identifying the keywords and creating an association of sounds in their memory. Abdulla (2014) also indicated that memory strategy is best used to enhance students' ability of grammatical accuracy.

Compensation strategies on the other hand are used to overcome limitations in one's language ability. According to Zou and Lertlit (2022), compensation strategies are meant to

make up for knowledge gaps that may arise during language use. For example, when students encounter unfamiliar words while reading a text, they will try to guess the meaning of words in the target language. Students may also use gestures when speaking in the target language or use synonyms in their writing. As for metacognitive strategies, it is employed to organise, monitor, and assess learning processes. It refers to the process of “thinking about thinking” and is often considered as the highest level of mental activity (Wray & Hajar, 2015). To produce independent students who are aware of their learning through metacognitive strategy, students need the guidance and assistance of the language teachers (Adan & Hashim, 2021).

Affective strategies involve utilising feelings to enhance learning, whereas social strategies involve utilising social interactions to enhance learning. These strategies according to Oxford (1990) are the deliberate actions taken by the students to aid the learning process, fun, student-centred, effective, and applicable to daily life. By lowering anxiety levels and giving positive feedback for the students, it can promote a positive learning environment, and thus making learning becomes more fun and meaningful. Additionally, some students prefer to work and interact with their peers through collaborative activities. Hence, it is crucial for language teachers to identify and use the strategy that suits the students’ preferences.

Studies on Language Learning Strategies

Many studies have investigated preferred LLS for learning English among students from various countries and backgrounds. Studies in recent years have looked at the preferable LLS for learning English. Lestari and Wahyudin (2020) conducted a study on 76 Indonesian undergraduate EFL students to explore the LLS used in learning English. It was revealed that metacognitive strategies have been the most frequently used strategy followed by social and compensation strategies while affective strategies have become the least strategy used by the students. Similar study was also conducted by Sukying (2021) on 1523 Thai EFL university students. The study discovered that the most preferable LLS used was affective strategies. The findings show that the use of learning strategies among Thai university students varies, depending on individual differences and contextual factors. Affective strategy is also the most preferred strategy employed by the respondents in a study done by (Dawi et al., 2021). Lestari and Azizi (2021) also carried out a study to measure LLS employed by university students in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The study revealed that the students employed metacognitive as the most frequently employed strategies to assist their learning.

Similarly, the results reported by Alrashidi (2022) who studied 256 English major students at three universities in Saudi Arabia indicated that metacognitive strategies were also the most commonly used, while memory strategies were the least commonly used. The study also discovered that highly proficient students used more language learning strategies. In comparison to male students, female students are inclined to employ memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensatory, and affective techniques more frequently. Similar studies were also undertaken by researchers in Malaysia. A study conducted by Hashim et al (2018) to identify LLS employed by successful language students among students of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) revealed that they tend to use three LLS, namely cognitive, metacognitive and socio affective. The study also further revealed since the students are proficient language users, they are aware of the strategies that best suit their learning preferences. Similarly, Lim et al (2021) in their study to identify commonly used LLS by ESL students in primary school uncovered that cognitive strategies are the most used LLS in learning English. From the study, the strategies are seen to be practical because students can

properly process knowledge, convey knowledge to others and relate knowledge to new situations and lead to enhanced and better-retained learning.

Additionally, a study conducted by Arulchelvan et al (2019) on 35 secondary students in rural demographic locations reported that the most preferred LLS were memory strategies, followed by metacognitive and compensation. In the study, the students employed memory strategies by making sounds, using images, reading a lot, matching tones, using mental imagination, picturing words, linking in different ways, using rhymes, and recalling words. Meanwhile, Kussin et al (2021) found that indirect LLS (metacognitive, affective and social) were employed more by 300 pre-tertiary students than direct LLS (cognitive, memory and compensation). The findings revealed that there were significant differences in LLS preferences based on proficiency level where highly proficient students employed metacognitive strategies the most while low proficient students implemented affective strategies more in language learning. Likewise, a study by Adan and Hashim (2021) also revealed that the most employed LLS by 16 to 17 years old students in an art school are metacognitive strategies while the least employed LLS are compensation strategies. John et al (2021) also found similar findings in their study to identify the highly utilised LLS among 60 upper secondary ESL students. The result of the study revealed that metacognitive strategies were highly used LLS while memory related strategies were the minimally employed LLS.

The Importance of Language Learning Strategies in Acquiring Second Language (English)

As discussed previously, language learning strategies refer to the actions or ways employed by language students in order to facilitate their learning. It is significant to note that each language student is different. They might come from different backgrounds with different proficiency levels, cultures, and styles of learning (Alrashidi, 2022). Hence, by identifying the preferred language learning strategies employed by students, teachers would be able to provide teaching and learning strategies that suit their preference. For instance, some students might learn best with their peers, and thus, teachers could employ cooperative learning during the lesson. By doing so, teachers could engage students more in their learning, making the students become more active participants. Additionally, LLS could also assist language students to set their own goals explicitly and become independent students. By setting their own attainable goals, students would have more autonomy in their learning, thus will be able to work towards their individual goals (Adan & Hashim, 2021). This is important as different students might have different goals in their learning, according to their own pace and proficiency.

By being an independent and autonomous language student, it also can help students to develop their own metacognitive skills. By “thinking about their own thinking,” language students would be able to monitor their own progress, adjust their strategies and become more conscious of their own qualities and limitations in learning (Wray & Hajar, 2015). However, this skill might be challenging for the less proficient students, hence teachers’ roles as facilitators are very much needed. LLS could also enhance language students’ memory retention. For example, while employing memory strategy, language students would try to make mental connections, using visual and sounds, examining the language content extensively and taking action to make meaning (John, et al., 2021; Abdulla, 2014). This process also involves their cognitive processes, which could improve their ability to remember new words or grammar structures, thus enhancing language acquisition.

Methodology

This section further explains the research design used in this study, respondents, instruments, data collection procedure and methods of data analysis.

Research Design

The research aims to determine Form 5 students' preferences of learning strategies in language skills as well as to further understand how their preferred strategies would affect them in learning English language skills. Therefore, a mixed method approach was administered through quantitative and qualitative instruments. Creswell (2013) asserted that the combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies yields a more thorough grasp of the research gap than the strategy alone. This is supported by Strout et. al (2020) whereby the researchers claimed the complementarity of the qualitative and quantitative datasets offered a richly expanded perspective that valued both consistent and inconsistent findings. Combining qualitative and quantitative data is seen to be useful because the two types of data might capture various realities, allowing for new explanations and conclusions to emerge (Ponterotto, & Grieger, 1999).

Respondents

This study involved 30 respondents of Form 5 students from a rural school in Perak, Malaysia. The respondents are selected using a purposive sampling method based on their proficiency and experience of learning English. The respondents are from mixed-ability students. Since these Form 5 students are at the end of their schooling years and ready to brace the world with their future undertakings, it is best to know their interest and strategies of learning to help them in their higher education. According to Neuman (2014), purposive sampling is carried out by selecting cases with a specific purpose in mind. This is further supported by Palinkas et. al (2015) where the researchers stated that purposive sampling is frequently employed in mixed methods research because it allows the researcher to pick individuals or circumstances that are most relevant to the research topic or hypotheses being studied.

The respondents consist of students from various races, ethnicities, backgrounds, and genders. 12 respondents were male (40%) and 18 female respondents (60%). The respondents of this study were mainly Malay, followed by Indians and the least is Chinese where English is known as their second or even third language besides their mother tongue. The respondents are known as English as Second Language (ESL) Learners. The demographic of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic details of the respondents

Respondents	30 Form 5 students	
	Age	17 years
Gender	Male	40%
	Female	60%
Experience of learning English	11 - 12 years	
Level of proficiency in English	Excellent	20%
	Good	30%
	Fair	30%
	Poor	20%
Other studied languages	Malay	50%
	Tamil	30%
	Mandarin	20%
Reasons for learning English	Interested in the language	30%
	Have friends who speak the language	20%
	Need it for my future career	20%
	Need it for travel	30%

Instruments

Two data collection methods were used in the study. The first method is a survey which is conducted through distribution of a questionnaire to collect quantitative data. Meanwhile, the second instrument used is semi-structured interview to collect qualitative data.

Survey

The questionnaire used in this study was adapted and adopted from Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) version 7.0 by (Oxford, 1990). Questionnaires were used in this study as it is known for its versatility and efficiency in terms of researchers' effort, time, energy and financial resources (Curle & Derakhshan, 2021; Dörnyei, 2007). Thus, the SILL questionnaire is administered to the respondents to identify their most preferred learning strategies for learning English language skills. The respondents had to fill out a background questionnaire prior to taking the SILL. The necessary background information collected is intended to determine the respondents' profile specifically about their age, sex, years of English study, estimated (self-rated) proficiency, other languages they have mastered, and motivations for learning English. The questionnaire contains 30 items which were divided into direct and indirect items based on the four main English language skills as well as vocabulary skills. It is made up of 6 parts of language learning strategies. Six language learning strategies are categorised into Part A, B, C, D, E and F: memory strategy, cognitive strategy, compensation strategy, metacognitive strategy, affective strategy and social strategy. For every category, there are 5 items listed according to each of the language skills.

Table 2

Description of the statements in the questionnaire

Number of Items (No.)	Language Skills (each item 1 skill)	Description
1 – 5	1. Writing → 2. Reading → 3. Speaking → 4. Listening → 5. Vocabulary	Part A: Memory Strategy
6 – 10		Part B: Cognitive Strategy
11 – 15		Part C: Compensation Strategy
16 – 20		Part D: Metacognitive Strategy
21 – 25		Part E: Affective Strategy
26 – 30		Part F: Social Strategy

Instead of taking all the 50 items as listed in the original version of SILL by Oxford (1990), the researchers had to eliminate the general statements of learning strategies and rephrase the statements of the items to suit the language skills. For example, item 47 (from the original version of SILL) "I practice English with other students" was adapted to suit writing skills with a new statement "I practice English with other students through communicative writing". Furthermore, the score for each item of this questionnaire was based on 4-points Likert scale: "Never", "Usually not true", "Usually true" and "Always true". The use of only 4-points for the Likert scale is to avoid the respondents giving neutral or no answers at all (Yunus & Mahat, 2021). The description of the 4-points Likert scale is exhibited in Table 3.

Table 3

Description of the Likert scale for each item of Language Learning Strategy

Scale	Description
1	Never
2	Usually not true
3	Usually true
4	Always true

The data collected were analysed using descriptive analysis with the comparison of the mean scores for each category. According to Oxford & Burry Stock (1995), the classification of the mean score in this survey was interpreted as Table 4.

Table 4

Interpretation of mean score

Range of Mean Score	Level of Mean Interpretation
< 2.49	Low use of strategy
2.50 - 3.49	Average use of strategy
> 3.5	High use of strategy

Interview

On the other hand, for the qualitative data collection, a semi-structured interview was conducted to answer the second research question. The interview consists of four key questions to further explore and comprehend the interviewees' opinions regarding the relationship between their choice of learning strategies in their process of language learning. In this interview session, there were five interviewees selected based on their learning abilities and various English proficiency. The five interviewees, ranging from average to highly proficient, were prompted with several questions to enable them to reflect and elicit their opinions. The interviewees were allowed to express their views in their mother tongue as well which were carefully translated and transcribed by the researchers. The transcriptions were analysed interpretively in the findings and discussion section.

Findings & Discussion

This section explains the findings obtained through survey and semi-structured interview to answer the two research questions respectively.

RQ1 - What is the preferred language learning strategy in learning English?

The results from the SILL questionnaire were employed to answer the first research question. Table 5 presents the descriptive data that involves frequency, mean scores, and its interpretation for the six learning strategies under Oxford's classification.

Table 5

The result of the mean scores for six learning strategies

No.	Item	PART A (MEMORY)	1	2	3	4	MeanScore	Level of use
1.	2	I use new English words to write in a sentence so I can remember them.	4	13	8	5	2.47	Low
2.	9	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	7	12	3	8	2.40	Low
3.	2	I use new English words to speak in a sentence so I can remember them.	2	2	5	21	3.50	High
4.	3	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help remember the word.	4	5	6	15	3.07	Average
5.	5	I use rhymes and songs to remember new English words.	2	2	5	21	3.50	High
		PART B (COGNITIVE)						
6.	10	I write new English words several times.	0	4	7	19	3.50	High
7.	18	I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully.	8	10	7	5	2.30	Low
8.	14	I start conversations in English.	11	12	4	3	1.97	Low
9.	15	I watch English language TV shows, movies and listen to English songs.	0	4	5	21	3.57	High
10.	19	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	1	2	8	19	3.50	High
		PART C (COMPENSATION)						
11.	26	I make up new words to write if I do not know the right ones in English.	10	8	9	3	2.17	Low
12.	27	I read English texts without looking up every new word.	13	8	4	5	2.03	Low
13.	25	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	11	8	7	4	2.13	Low
14.	28	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English by listening carefully.	1	1	9	19	3.53	High
15.	24	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	9	7	6	8	2.43	Low
		PART D (METACOGNITIVE)						
16.	31	I notice my English written mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	1	1	10	18	3.50	High
17.	36	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	10	6	9	7	2.57	Average
18.	35	I look for people I can talk to in English.	14	8	5	3	1.90	Low
19.	32	I pay attention and listen attentively when someone is speaking English.	2	1	7	20	3.50	High
20.	30	I try to find as many ways as I can to use English words.	8	6	7	9	2.57	Average
		PART E (AFFECTIVE)						
21.	43	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	6	6	7	11	2.77	Average

22.	42	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am using English to read.	4	5	9	12	2.97	Average
23.	40	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	2	1	7	20	3.50	High
24.	42	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am listening in English.	6	6	7	11	2.77	Average
25.	41	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English or when I learn a new word.	7	8	9	6	2.47	Low
PART F (SOCIAL)								
26.	47	I practise writing English with other students through communicative writing.	7	7	10	6	2.50	Average
27.	50	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers by reading any articles or journals on them.	8	9	7	7	2.50	Average
28.	47	I practise speaking English with other students.	1	1	7	21	3.60	High
29.	45	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	7	6	10	7	2.57	Low
30.	46	I ask English speakers to correct my vocabulary when I talk.	10	6	9	5	2.30	Low

Based on Table 5, the most used memory strategies are “I use new English words to speak in a sentence so I can remember them” and “I use rhymes and songs to remember new English words” with both mean score of 3.50, while the least used memory strategy is “I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign” with a mean score of 2.40. Next, the most used cognitive strategies are “I write new English words several times”, “I watch English language TV shows, movies and listen to English songs” and “I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English” with the mean scores of 3.50, 3.57, and 3.50 respectively. Meanwhile, the least used cognitive strategy is “I start conversations in English” with a mean score of 1.97. For compensation strategy, the most used strategy is “I try to guess what the other person will say next in English by listening carefully” with a mean score of 3.53 and the least used strategy is “I read English texts without looking up every new word” with a mean score of 2.03. For metacognitive strategy, the most used strategies are “I notice my English written mistakes and use that information to help me do better” and “I pay attention and listen attentively when someone is speaking English” with both a mean score of 3.50 and the least used strategy is “I look for people I can talk to in English” with a mean score of 1.90. Meanwhile, the most used affective strategy is “I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake” with a mean score of 3.50 and the least used affective strategy is “I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English or when I learn a new word” with a mean score of 2.47. Lastly, the most used social strategy is “I practise speaking English with other students” with a mean score of 3.60 and the least used social strategy is “I ask English speakers to correct my vocabulary when I talk” with a mean score of 2.30.

Table 6 summarises the mean scores and the ranks of the LLS according to the most preferred to the least preferred strategy.

Table 6

LLS Mean Scores and Ranks.

No	Major Classification of Learning Strategies	Learning Strategies	Mean Scores	Ranking
1	Direct Strategies	Memory strategies	2.99	1st
2		Cognitive strategies	2.97	2nd
3		Compensation strategies	2.46	6th
	Mean for direct strategies		2.81	
4	Indirect Strategies	Metacognitive strategies	2.81	4th
5		Affective strategies	2.90	3rd
6		Social strategies	2.70	5th
	Mean for indirect strategies		2.80	

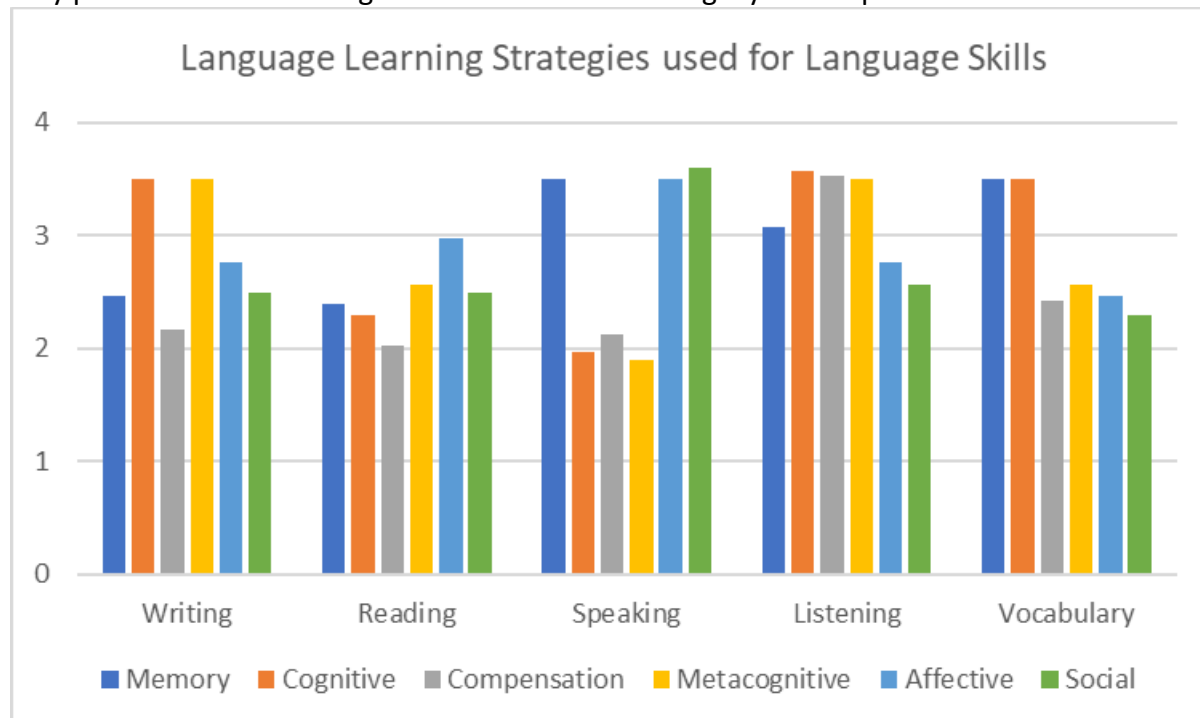
Overall data reveals that the most preferred learning strategies employed by Form 5 students are memory strategies with the highest mean score of 2.99 among other strategies followed by cognitive strategies with a mean score of 2.97, affective strategies with a mean score of 2.90, metacognitive strategies with a mean score of 2.81 and social strategies with a mean score of 2.70. The least preferred learning strategies are compensation strategies with a mean score of 2.46. The findings show overall mean scores for both direct and indirect strategies are 2.81 and 2.80 respectively. This indicates that in general the students are average users of LLS. This is due to the large proportion of Form 5 students who have low proficiency in English. Based on the data collected from the respondents, only 20% of the students have an excellent level of English proficiency. As stated by Alrashidi (2022), highly proficient students used more language learning strategies compared to low proficient students.

The highest mean score of 2.99 indicates that many students preferred memory strategies as their learning strategies in learning English. According to Oxford (1990), memory strategies are used to store and retrieve information. It involves creating mental associations with the use of visuals, sounds, use of actions or physical movements to facilitate memory (Chanderan & Hashim, 2022). Based on the results obtained from the SILL, it is found that most students selected items about using new English words to speak in a sentence so they can remember them and use rhymes and songs to remember new English words. Similar findings were revealed by Arulchelvan et al (2019) as students make sounds, use pictures, do mental imaginations, use rhymes and recall words in strengthening their language learning. The students believed that the use of memory strategies in learning English had served them positively.

Additionally, the second-most preferred LLS among the students are cognitive strategies with a mean of 2.97. Similar findings by Lim et al (2021) in their study revealed that students had

an inclination for employing cognitive strategies in learning as it involves deliberate manipulation of the language to enhance learning. The specific strategies preferred by the students are “I write new English words several times” and “I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English”. These have shown that the students develop input and output structures that greatly facilitate their acquisition of the English language (Chanderan & Hashim, 2022). Other than that, the students prefer learning the language by watching English language TV shows, movies and listening to English songs. This shows that the students listen to English words and use imagery from movies or TV shows to help them understand the language. As stated by Hashim et al (2018), students believed that the media played a significant role in helping them to improve on their listening and speaking skills. In cognitive learning strategies, the students are aware of their learning process and the strategies have assisted them in producing and understanding of the language.

On the contrary, compensation strategies were the least preferred learning strategies among the students. This is similar to the finding in a study by Adan and Hashim (2021) where the students less prefer the compensation strategies because they are not fond of guessing or using synonyms. According to Zou and Lertlit (2022), compensation strategies are meant to make up for knowledge gaps that may arise during language use. Based on the findings, the specific strategies that the students are less favour of are reading without looking up every new word, making up new words to write if they do not know the right ones in English and making guesses to understand unfamiliar English words. This reveals that the students may prefer to learn through other learning strategies. As stated by Chanderan and Hashim (2022), the LLS used by students are more to their own preference of learning style and method. Some students may find the compensating system useful in particular situations, while others may prefer different strategies based on their learning styles and preferences.



Graph 1: Language learning strategies used for language skills.

Based on the Graph 1 above, there are two most preferred strategies employed by the students in their writing skill, which are the cognitive and metacognitive strategies. As mentioned previously, during the writing process, students will go through a lot of mental

processes as they generate and organise ideas, think critically and choose the right words to convey the ideas before putting it into words (Abdullah et al., 2020; Diana et al., 2020; Hasan, 2023). Students also employed metacognitive strategy as they plan, monitor, and evaluate their own writing, thus making it one of the most preferred strategies in their writing skills. As for the reading skill, affective strategy is the most preferred strategy employed by the students. This result is in line with the study done by (Dawi et al., 2021). As affective strategy deals with students' emotions and feelings during language learning, it is important to note that motivation and a positive learning environment are needed for students to learn the language better. For speaking skill, students preferred social strategy the most. As students are required to speak and produce the language, it can be done effectively through interaction with their other peers. Speaking can be intimidating for some students and by promoting collaboration and interaction among the students, they will be able to use the language confidently without having to worry about making mistakes (Zakaria et al., 2022). The result also revealed that students mostly employed cognitive strategy for their listening skill. As aforementioned, during the listening process, students actively match what they have heard to what they have already known (Srirejeki & Darmayanti, 2019). This process is related to cognitive strategy as they need to match the new information to their existing schemata for them to understand the language content being heard. As for vocabulary, students preferred to employ memory and cognitive strategies, as indicated in the graph above. By remembering unfamiliar words, making mental associations (imaginary) and repeating it, students would be able to acquire new vocabularies effectively (Chanderan & Hashim, 2022; Lestari & Azizi, 2021)

RQ2- To what extent do the students' preferred language learning strategies affect their English language learning?

Semi-structured interview was used as an instrument to answer the research question number two. The questions were carefully curated to dig deeper understanding towards students' language learning strategies for effective language output. The findings of the interview are described interpretively.

Question 1: What are the most effective practices you do to enhance your English language skills?

Two students claimed they find listening to English songs enables them to learn the language better. The students further elaborated that they could acquire new words and structure of the sentences without them realising it due to the catchy repetitive beats and interesting rhythm of the song. This is aligned with Srirejeki & Darmayanti (2019) who claimed that listening is a complex active interpretation process in which listeners actively compare what they hear to what they already know. Another student said that she loves to read comics and English novels as they can learn many new words and indirectly acquire the sentence structure. Thus, with the use of these examples of cognitive strategy, students are motivated to build mental schemata of new words, increase their repertoire of vocabulary and pick up correct syntax in a less threatening way. This is because songs and extensive English reading material emphasises on students' cognitive and memory aspects (Zamin et al., 2020; Stanlee & Bikar Singh, 2021; Šakić & Bobić, 2021). One of the students had also elucidated through reading, she is able to learn the metaphorical language and idiomatic expressions which she sees as interesting and meaningful. She claimed that it helps her in the production of language

especially in enhancing her essay writing and story narration. This is most relevant to the metacognitive strategy where the student proved to be an independent student who takes up reading as her initiative in learning the language effectively. Her reading habit is deemed effective in her language production since it enabled her to indirectly organise, plan and monitor her own language learning process to achieve her learning goals (Pamangin, 2022). On the other hand, there was one student who prefers to do group discussions to excel his language skills. He explained that he does not only get to share his views, he is able to learn the language structures, new words from their peers, especially the high-proficient students. The feedback he gets from the discussions, closely linked with social strategy, is deemed to be helpful in correcting his language and it provides opportunities for him to do self-reflection. Another student deemed the importance of questioning skills as well as visualising the story they read. This is because questioning skills helps the students to dig in-depth comprehension towards a listening and reading task. It promotes critical thinking while attempting to make connections to the texts which is essential for the students to be able to answer comprehension questions and produce effective language output (Santi et al., 2021; Gedik & Akyol, 2022).

Question 2: Have you realised any differences in your English learning when utilising various language learning strategies?

Three students realised that their confidence and abilities in oral communication has increased since they applied a combination of a few techniques of improving their speaking skills such as imitating through movies and looking for opportunities to practise speaking in English. It is noticed that students can build a more thorough and well-rounded approach to language acquisition by integrating several strategies (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990). One of the students further explained that he often repeats the sentences and mimics the accent of the speaker to ensure he could pronounce the words correctly besides finding it helpful in picking up the language. Two of the students mentioned they found that their writing performance has shown gradual improvement from their previous test. One of the students highlighted his ability to write short poems as requested by his English teacher since he is creative and has been enthusiastic in expanding his potential in using English. Both students asserted that they appreciate their teachers' comments whenever they made errors. Having feedback from the teachers or peers is a great way to boost confidence among students to speak better (Wang & Xu, 2020). Besides that, all students agreed that language is all about practice and they claimed the more they practise the language, they become better at using the language.

Question 3: Have you used technology or internet tools to help you learn English? How has this influenced your English learning?

Two of the students expressed that learning from YouTube enabled them to learn English better. They named a few YouTubers that they were hooked on and managed to acquire the correct pronunciations and new words through the Youtube channel. For example, one of the students stated that they watched a lot of videos made by Mark O'Dea and Arrief Yong as he found the videos are not only entertaining but meaningful for him to pronounce words accurately. The other student stated that YouTube videos with subtitles or captions are helpful in acquiring the spelling of the spoken words. This auditory and visual learning portrays it to be helpful for the students' memory retention (Arulchelvan et al., 2019; John, et al., 2021). Meanwhile, another student described her level of reading proficiency as having

shown some improvement due to her addiction to reading stories on Kindle. Her interest in digital English reading materials demonstrated that she is an independent and autonomous student who can attain her individual language learning goals which is closely linked to metacognitive strategy (Adan & Hashim, 2021). There was one student who claimed that he discovered TikTok videos, especially by Sir Asai has quite an impression in his pronunciations of English words. He said it somewhat facilitated him with the fluency and accuracy in speaking test and class presentation. Another one student highlighted her interest in posting stories and reels on Facebook and Instagram with short narrative captions at times. She also explained that her friends or relatives would often comment on her post in English and through this simple technique she found that it helped with her sentence structure for better communicative writing purposes. On the other hand, all the students asserted that Whatsapp and Telegram are their most frequently used tools for classroom discussions. They further agreed on the efficacy of Whatsapp for enabling them to send voice notes and instant messages in English to their peers. This has eventually contributed to social strategy which promotes the ease of online collaboration among students, boosting their self-esteem while interacting with their friends and teachers that incidentally influences their language performance (Zakaria et al., 2022).

Question 4: Have you ever faced challenges or setbacks while learning English? How have you adjusted your language learning strategies to overcome these challenges?

Two students stated that their major challenge is to remember the words learned during the lesson. One of the students revealed that she usually writes down the new words in a notebook and draws relevant images related to the words as she finds it easier to remember. This is closely linked to visual students as the student can reinforce the new words with the image representation for a long-term memory (Gedik & Akyol, 2022). There was one student who claimed that she preferred to write down the new words she learned but she prefers to make associations with other similar words like synonyms, mnemonic or even homophones. By associating the new words to something that they already know, students are more likely to remember the new words better (Mauliza et al., 2019). Another three students said they would attempt to use the new words repetitively to overcome their problems. One of them elaborated that he prefers to use the new words as much as possible in conversations. Another student explained that he would use a drilling exercise where he repetitively applied the new words in various sentences based on the guidance from the dictionary, teachers and peers. This portrays a great tool for the students to familiarise with the new word and encourage them in applying the words learned in different contexts. This eventually is beneficial for their fluency and accuracy in essay writing and speaking performance.

Another huge challenge that all the five students faced was the difficulty to write in English. They all agreed that writing is the most difficult of all the skills. All of them also agreed that not having enough vocabulary to write is one major issue. Some writing requires them to use specific words which they have no command of. This is a huge problem among many students in our school as they are lacking in vocabulary (Husin et al., 2022). Two students mentioned that they do not practise writing often which resulted in poor writing. They prefer to avoid it than attempting to write. Drilling, a method closely related to memory strategy, is applied by the students to overcome their problem. It is a great tool to support writing among students (Arulchelvan et al., 2019). It helps the students to remember better the format as well as the process. Three students mentioned that they dislike writing as it is boring. They also explained

further that they prefer to copy essays from the Internet or even books. Even if they were given the practice and guidance to write, they refused to do so as they were not motivated in writing. One student even said looking at all the red inks on her essays made her feel worse.

The third setback that all the students faced was the ability to comprehend the text that they have read. Three students claimed that they try to look for contextual clues if they discover difficult words or unfamiliar phrases to comprehend the text better. The students are indirectly utilising compensation strategy to improve their understanding of the reading passage as well as in identifying the close-definition of the words (Mauliza et al., 2019). One of them added that they tend to ask and answer questions while reading as she finds that it's useful to consolidate her understanding of the text (Santi et al., 2021). This is normally done in an English classroom where the teacher gives a text and a few comprehension questions for the students to try. Two of the students claimed that they highlight the words that they find interesting or new when they read. Then, they write it down in another notebook and find the meaning so that the next time they can apply it. One of them even explained further that sometimes he asks the meaning from their teacher and how to use the words in sentences so that it enhances his understanding. One student mentioned that he reads a few times and tries to get the gist of the text. He also further explained that if the text is longer, he prefers to skim and scan the text to understand the meaning in general. Skimming and scanning are both effective techniques used to understand specific details or general meaning of a text. Therefore, these reading techniques used by the students have close resemblance to the study suggested by Bashir (2021) who posited that these techniques used in reading relates closely to cognitive and memory strategies. This is beneficial for the students to understand better what they have read and subsequently enable them to express and respond to the text accordingly.

Conclusion

Overall, it is proven that language learning strategies are crucial for language students' language acquisition as the impact is directly proportional to their learning process. The language learning strategies usually comprise actions, procedures, plans, or routines used by the language students to improve their language acquisitions. The two principal objectives of this study are to identify the language learning strategies that are mostly preferred by Form 5 students from a rural school and analyse to what extent the preferred language learning strategies affect their English learning. Findings in the study revealed that the students are average language learning strategies users as the large proportion of Form 5 students were ranged average to low proficiency in English. The most preferred language learning strategies are the memory strategies, followed by the cognitive strategies. The least preferred language learning strategies are the compensation strategies. The results also indicate that the students imply different language learning strategies simultaneously in order to acquire the language, which consists of four different skills.

In this research, the utilisation of language learning strategies positively attributes their learning process or in another word, learning acquisition. The students mentioned that the boost in their confidence and ability to communicate verbally, gradual improvement in writing performance and increase in amount of practice are the significant differences in their English language learning. The adequate use of technology or internet tools extensively improved the students' learning abilities in all four skills. However, there were certain challenges they faced such as remembering new words during lessons, the difficulty to write

in English and the ability to comprehend the text that they have read. The students managed to overcome all the above setbacks by the implementation of the right language learning strategies.

This research can further be carried out in a school with more diversified proficiency of the students from different streams. This can enable the visualisation of the different types of language learning strategies used by different proficiency level students. Besides, in depth study on factors affecting the students' willingness to apply the language learning strategies in language acquisition can also be considered in order to validate the use of language learning strategies among the students.

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