

Identifying Language Learning Strategies Employed in Reading Skills by Upper Primary ESL Learners

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Abstract

Quality education addressed in United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is immersively considered by Malaysia. Various government policies and practices have been integrated in Malaysian education curriculum, especially in English language teaching as people's competence in English as Second Language (ESL) are important in ensuring the country to become globally competitive. Among all the skills in the English language, reading skills is the foundation of learning the English language. However, pupils nowadays find reading as an obvious obstacle in learning English. Hence, the aim of this research is to identify the Oxford's Language Learning Strategies (LLS) employed by upper primary school ESL learners in reading skills within the context of Malaysia. The participants of this research are 60 pupils from a selected Chinese vernacular school in an urban area. The questionnaire used in this research is the combination of both Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and Survey of Reading Skills (SORS). While the data collected is analysed using Oxford's LLS. The results from the questionnaire reveals that the favoured strategies used by ESL learners in reading skills are Affective, Memory and Cognitive strategies.

Keywords: Language Learning Strategies, Reading Skills, Language Learning, English as Second Language (ESL) Learners

Introduction

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of global objectives designed to address various social, economic and environmental problems facing the world with the effort of achieving sustainable development (Tulder et al., 2021). Along with the "quality education" addressed in SDGs, inclusive and equitable education for all, promoting lifelong learning opportunities and fostering the acquisition of essential skills has been implemented in the educational system across the world (Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2019). Therefore, governments, policymakers and educators worldwide have worked together to ensure that

education becomes a transformative force for building more inclusive, equitable and sustainable societies.

In the context of Malaysia, various government policies and practices have been integrated into its education curriculum fostering environmental awareness, global citizenship and social responsibility among the learners due to the influence of SDGs. According to Tan et al (2022), Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013-2025 aims to equip and prepare pupils to be globally competitive in the global economy and society in the 21st century. Besides, Malaysia has identified people's competence in English as Second Language (ESL) has become the need to achieve all these objectives in pupils. With the quality of education, pupils' English proficiency enables them to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) has been introduced for English language education in Malaysia, which focused more on a communicative approach in the process of teaching and learning English language and encouraged pupils to use language in their real-life communications. This involves focusing not only on reading comprehension, but also on the grammar, vocabulary acquisition and language usage. Reading is a process that involves extracting meaning from written language. Pupils retrieve the information from their memory and use it to construct interpretations of the reading text (Muhamad, 2019). However, pupils nowadays find reading as a difficult and boring task for them as they did not see the significance of learning English for their daily life. This has become an obvious obstacle to cultivate a love for reading in the pupils. Besides, Baba and Affendi (2020) has reported that pupils' reading habits, purposes and the types of reading materials has a great impact on the development of pupils' reading skills. Hence, fostering a supportive environment for learning, promoting independent reading skills and providing access to a wide range of English language reading materials and resources are important to encourage and instil a lifelong love for reading and language acquisition in pupils.

Since the development of reading skills plays a central role in pupils' language acquisition, mastering reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition is essential for academic success and language fluency. Understanding the specific language learning strategies (LLS) utilised by the upper primary ESL learners in reading tasks can provide valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers to optimise ESL instruction. According to Oxford (1996a), different LLS are cognitive and socio-affective techniques employed by learners to enhance their language learning process. Oxford's language learning strategies are a comprehensive framework for understanding and categorising the various strategies learners use to acquire a new language effectively (Oxford, 2002). It is divided into two main classifications, which are direct strategies (Memory, Cognitive and Compensation strategies) and indirect strategies (Metacognitive, Affective and Social strategies). Therefore, the aim of this research is to identify the language learning strategies employed by upper primary ESL learners in the context of reading skills development. This research answers the following research question

1. What are the most favoured Oxford's language learning strategies employed in reading skills by the upper primary ESL learners in Chinese vernacular school?

Literature Review

Importance of Reading in Learning English as Second Language

According to Banditvilai (2020), reading is a lifelong skill which is crucial for language learning. Reading skills are indispensable for English language learning as it provides a foundation for vocabulary acquisition, language comprehension, critical thinking and lifelong learning. In reading, pupils need to use various skills to help them in understanding and interpreting written texts. Developing effective reading skills enable pupils to actively participate in the reading process and be aware of the processes they use to understand while they are reading (Banditvilai, 2020). Reading exposes pupils to a wide range of vocabulary in context. By encountering new words in various contexts, pupils can infer meanings, understand nuances and expand their vocabulary more effectively than through direct instruction alone. Through reading, pupils naturally absorb the structure and the grammar of the English language. According to Gustanti and Ayu (2021), exposure to well-written text helps pupils internalise grammatical patterns, sentence structures and language conventions, leading to improved English language proficiency. Moreover, Banditvilai (2020) mentioned that reading involves skills, such as analyse, evaluate and interpret written information. Through reading, pupils make connections between words, sentences and paragraphs, which leads to a deeper understanding of the language (Hassan et al., 2021). It promotes skills such as inference, deduction, identifying main ideas, drawing conclusions and synthesis of ideas, which are valuable for English language learning.

Categorisation of Oxford's Language Learning Strategies

According to Oxford (1990) as cited in Lestari & Wahyudin (2020), the full Language Language Strategies (LLS) includes six main categories, which are memory strategy, cognitive strategy, compensation strategy, metacognitive strategy, affective strategy and social strategy, which then generally grouped into direct and indirect strategies. The direct strategy consists of memory strategy, cognitive strategy and compensation strategy. Meanwhile, indirect strategy involves metacognitive strategy, affective strategy and social strategy. According to Widharyanto and Binawan (2020), direct strategies are in the direct use of the target language, meanwhile indirect strategies are not directly to the use of the target language. Below is the type of LLS shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Oxford's Language Learning Strategies categorisation

Direct strategies	Memory strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creating mental linkages ● Applying images and sounds ● Reviewing well ● Employing actions
	Cognitive strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practice, rehearse and send messages ● Analysing and reasoning ● Creating structures for input and output
	Compensation strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Guessing intelligibly ● Overcome limitations in speaking and writing
Indirect strategies	Metacognitive strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Centering learning ● Planning and arranging learning ● Evaluating learning
	Affective strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lowering anxiety ● Encouraging own selves ● Managing own emotional temperature
	Social strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Asking questions ● Cooperation ● Emphasising with others

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is the first designed instrument for assessing the frequency of the use of language learning strategies Oxford (1996b) and it is the most widely used and best strategy questionnaire for learners and educators (Kucukler, 2020). It is a questionnaire with five Likert scale responses which aims to assess learners' use of LLS in several categories, including cognitive, metacognitive, memory, compensation, affective and social strategies. The reliability of the SILL is proven through Cronbach alpha, in which Oxford (1996b) reported high reliability in ESL/EFL SILL that is translated in various languages for ESL/EFL learners. On the other hand, the validity of the SILL is also proved by a number of studies. The studies showed that SILL portrayed significant correlations with a range of language learning assessments and measures. A study done by Kucukler (2020) also proved that learning strategies helps the learners to boost memory and mastery of vocabularies.

Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS)

The Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) is an instrument that is widely used to assess the learners' awareness on the use of various strategies in a reading task. It is developed by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002), which is able to provide valuable insights into cognitive and metacognitive processes employed by the learners. SORS comprises a series of Likert-scale items across multiple dimensions, such as global reading strategies (GLOB), problem solving strategies (RPOB) and support strategies (SUP). GLOB strategies refer to intentional

techniques in which the learners have a purpose in mind when reading and previewing a text. PROB strategies are the actions taken by the learners to comprehend a reading text. Meanwhile SUP strategies are basic support materials to aid comprehension, such as dictionaries (Zhang & Zheng, 2020).

The reliability and validity of the SORS are consistently demonstrated by various empirical studies, particularly in assessing the learners' metacognitive engagement and strategy use. For instance, Zhang and Zheng (2020) conducted a study to investigate the theoretical Structure of the Survey of Reading Strategies. It utilised Cronbach's alpha to evaluate the internal consistency among items of scale. It has reported high internal consistency reliability, suggesting that the instruments consistently measure the metacognitive strategy. On the other hand, a study done by Par (2020) reported that SORS effectively captures the learners' reading strategies and shows statistically significant positive relationship between the reading strategy and the EFL students' learning scores. Similarly, Khellab et al (2022) also proved that SORS significantly improves EST students' metacognitive awareness and shows statistically notable gains in reading comprehension.

This SORS instrument places significant emphasis on cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002), but relatively less focus on the affective strategies. Hence, it has been widely used in research studies to investigate the metacognitive awareness among the learners as well as the role of metacognitive strategies in reading comprehension and proficiency. Metacognitive strategies play a crucial role in reading comprehension and proficiency because they empower learners to take control of their learning process. For example, when learners are aware of their own understanding and can adjust their reading strategies as needed, they are better equipped to tackle complex texts and improve their overall literacy skills.

Finding of Previous Study

Previous researchers have identified various language learning strategies utilised by ESL learners across different language skills, including reading. The strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) developed by Oxford (1990) is a widely used instrument to assess language learners' use of various language learning strategies. According to Salam et al (2020), the cognitive strategies of practising, receiving and sending messages in Oxford's LLS were most frequently used by successful English language learners in college. Besides, the participants of Urai Salam et al.'s research also used compensation strategies, such as guessing intelligently in listening and reading and using different strategies to overcome limitations in speaking and writing.

On the other hand, a study conducted by Sunggingwati and Ungau (2023) shows different findings from (Salam et al., 2020). Most of the participants in this study, who were the students from Indonesia, employed metacognitive learning strategies in reading comprehension. Among the three main sets of metacognitive strategies, monitoring is mostly used by the students. This study further shows that the metacognitive strategy used by the participants is significantly related to their reading score. The findings of this study is similar to the result found by (Chanderan and Hashim, 2022). In the study, metacognitive strategy is frequently employed by the participants. Most of the participants selected items about paying attention while others are speaking, noticing English mistakes made and using that information to improve themselves and also thinking about their progress in learning English

language, which is categorised as metacognitive learning strategy.

Moreover, Par (2020) conducted a research among 56 English as Foreign Language (EFL) university students in Indonesia to discover the relationship between the use of reading strategies and reading achievement using SORS. Par (2020) discovered that EFL students prefer problem-solving strategies more than global and supporting strategies. Besides, the findings indicate the change of reading strategies affected the reading achievement of students and the problem solving strategies plays a more prominent role among all the other strategies.

Ahmed (2020) explored the reading strategies preferred by students who studied in different areas of profession using SORS. Finding showed problem solving strategies are more preferred by EFL learners than other two strategies in SORS. This finding is consistent with the research studies conducted on EFL learners by Par (2020), which reported that the problem solving strategies were the most preferred category of strategies of EFL learners.

However, in the same year, a study done by Rabadi et al. (2020) showed contradictory results as the both study by Par and Ahmed. The metacognitive reading strategy that is most selected by the participants is Global reading strategy, while the least preferred reading strategy is the problem-solving strategy. The result showed that the participants employed monitoring strategies the most to help them in better comprehension of the reading texts.

Methodology

Participants

This study included 60 upper primary ESL learners ranging from 10 years old to 12 years old, Year 4 to Year 6. All participants are from a Chinese vernacular school in Selangor. 20 pupils are selected through purposive sampling from each year of upper primary learners to participate in this study. All the selected participants are pupils with English language proficiency ranging from average to above average based on their latest assessment results.

Research Instrument

Quantitative data collection methods are used in this study, which is a questionnaire. The questionnaire is adopted from 'Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS)' by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) and 'Strategy of Inventory Language Learning (SILL)' by (Oxford, 1990). The SORS questionnaire focuses more on identifying the learning strategies through cognitive and metacognitive categories in reading skills, while the SILL questionnaire focuses on the direct and indirect learning strategies used by language learners as a whole rather than just focusing on reading skills.

The SORS questionnaire consists of 30 items which are categorised one by one based on Oxford's LLS by (Oxford, 1990). However, the items in SORS did not apply to all the strategies in Oxford's LLS, especially the Affective Strategies and Social Strategies. Hence, the questionnaire used in this research is a combination of both questionnaires to ensure all the strategies in Oxford's LLS are included for data analysis purposes. It is a Likert-type questionnaire which consists of 37 items with 3 Likert scales (1- almost, 2- sometimes, 3- never). This questionnaire is used to answer the research question, which is 'What are the most favoured Oxford's language learning strategies employed in reading skills by the upper

primary ESL learners in Chinese vernacular school?'.

Data Collection Procedure

This research utilises purposive sampling to select participants from the target population of upper primary ESL learners in the selected Chinese vernacular school. Purposive sampling ensures that participants possess the similar English language proficiency level to ensure the data collected are reliable. The questionnaire used in this research is adopted from SORS and SILL instruments. All the 37 items included in the questionnaire are categorised based on Oxford's LLS (Cognitive, Memory, Compensation, Metacognitive, Affective and Social Strategies) related to various reading strategies employed by upper primary ESL learners in reading skills. Next, the questionnaires are distributed to the selected participants in a classroom setting. Researchers provide clear instructions on how to complete the questionnaire and each item in the questionnaire is explained in the participants' mother tongue to ensure clarity and understanding. By emphasising the importance of honest and thoughtful responses, participants are given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire at their own pace. Besides, the data collection process adheres to the ethical guidelines, including obtaining the informed consent from participants and protecting their confidentiality. Necessary approvals from the school administrator are obtained before commencing data collection.

Data analysis for this research involves two main components, which are descriptive statistics and data analysis using Oxford's Language Learning Strategies (LLS) framework. After collecting the data from participants, the frequency is tabulated in a table based on each LLS employed by participants in reading skills. The mean score for each LLS category will be calculated to identify the preferred LLS applied by the participants while reading.

Findings and Discussion

Oxford's Language Learning Strategies (LLS) are classified into six categories, such as Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, Metacognitive, Affective and Social. This Survey of Reading Skills (SORS) is classified according to Oxford's LLS and the mean scores of each category are tabulated in Table 2.

Table 2

Scoring for the Survey of Reading Skills (SORS) based on Oxford's LLS Categories

Participants	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
1	1.8	1.83	1.71	1.56	1.71	1.75
2	2	1.67	2	2	2	2.5
3	1.2	1.83	2.29	1.56	1.57	1.25
4	2	1.17	2.29	1.67	2	1.5
5	2.4	2	1.86	2.11	1.57	1.5
6	1.4	1.67	2	1.44	2.14	1.25
7	1.6	1.5	1.57	1.67	1.71	1.75
8	2	1.83	2.43	1.89	1.86	1
9	2.4	1.83	2.14	1.78	1.71	2
10	2.2	1.67	2.14	1.89	2.29	1.25
11	2.4	1.83	2.29	1.33	2	1.5
12	2	2.67	2.43	1.78	2.71	1.75
13	2.2	2.17	2	2.11	2.29	2
14	2.2	2.33	2.29	2	2.57	1.75
15	2	1.67	2.43	1.56	2.14	1.75
16	2	2	1.86	1.56	1.86	1.25
17	2.2	2.33	2.29	2.22	2.14	2.5
18	2.2	2.33	2.14	1.67	2.71	2.25
19	2.4	2.33	1.71	2	1.86	2.5
20	1.6	2.16	1.71	2.2	2.14	2.5
21	2.8	2	2	2	2	2.75
22	2.4	2.17	2.14	2.78	3	2
23	2.8	1.67	2	2.11	2.29	1.25
24	2.2	2.17	2	2	2.43	2.5
25	1.6	1.67	1.86	1.44	1.86	1.75
26	2.8	1.67	2	1.89	2.71	1
27	2.2	2.33	1.86	1.89	2.86	1.75
28	2.2	2.67	2.29	1.89	2.71	2
29	2	2.17	2.29	1.67	2.43	2
30	1.8	1.33	1.57	1.44	2	1.75
31	2.2	1.67	2.29	1.56	2.71	2
32	2.6	2.33	2.29	1.89	2.71	2
33	2.2	1.17	1.57	1.78	2.14	1.25
34	1.6	2.33	2.14	1.67	2	1.5
35	2.4	2.17	2	2	1.86	2.5
36	2.2	2.33	1.29	1.78	3	2.5
37	1.8	1.83	2	1.11	2.29	2
38	2.6	2.5	2	1.56	2.29	1
39	1.6	1.5	1.86	1.67	1.86	1.75
40	2.4	2	2	1.67	2	2
41	2	1.83	2.71	1.78	2.14	1.75
42	2.4	1.83	1.71	1.78	2.14	1.25
43	2.6	2.17	2.29	1.67	2.57	2
44	2	2.17	1.71	2	2.57	2.25
45	2.2	2	2.14	2	2	2.25
46	2.4	2.33	2.14	2.11	2.57	2.25
47	2.2	2	2.14	1.56	1.57	1.75
48	2.6	2.67	1.86	2.44	2.71	1.752
49	2	2.17	2	1.78	2.29	2
50	1.6	2	1.86	1.22	2.57	1.25
51	2.4	2.5	2.14	2.33	2.29	2.25
52	1.4	2	1.71	2.11	1.57	1.75
53	2.5	2.83	1.86	1.67	2.43	2
54	1.6	2.17	1.71	1.44	2.57	2.5

55	2.2	2.5	2.43	2.22	2.71	2.25
56	2.8	1.67	1.86	2	2.43	2
57	2.4	2.67	2.57	1.78	2.86	2.75
58	1.8	2	2.14	2.11	2.57	2
59	1.4	2.5	1.86	2.11	2.14	2.25
60	2.4	2	2.14	1.78	2.43	1.5
Total	127.50	122.51	122.01	109.49	135.26	112.50
Mean per Category (Total / 60)	2.13	2.04	2.03	1.82	2.25	1.88

Research Question: What are the most favoured Oxford's language learning strategies employed in reading skills by the upper primary ESL learners in Chinese vernacular school?

Table 3

Ranking of preferred Oxford's LLS

Oxford's Categories	LLS	Total Mean Score	Mean score per Category	Ranking of Preferred Oxford's LLS
Memory		127.50	2.13	2
Cognitive		122.51	2.04	3
Compensation		122.01	2.03	-
Metacognitive		109.49	1.82	-
Affective		135.26	2.25	1
Social		112.50	1.88	-

Based on the Table 2 and 3, Affective Strategies are the most preferred LLS used by the participants from Chinese vernacular school with the mean score of 2.25, followed by Memory Strategies (2.13), Cognitive Strategies (2.04), Compensation Strategies (2.03), Social Strategies (1.88) and Metacognitive (1.82). However, the top three strategies used by the participants are Affective, Memory and Cognitive strategies. This result is in line with several studies that looked into the strategies used by participants while learning a language. This study shows that Affective Strategies are the most popular strategies applied by the pupils while reading.

Affective Strategies

Table 4

Affective strategies used by the pupils

Strategy	Mean	SD
I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	1.6	0.21
I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of reading English.	2.51	0.36
I encourage myself to read English text even when I am afraid of reading it.	2.06	0.14
I give myself a reward or treat when I finish reading English text.	2.41	0.25
I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am reading English text.	2.38	0.32
I write down my feelings in a language learning diary after reading an English text.	2.66	0.05
I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am reading English text.	2.2	0.22

In general, pupils manage their emotions and attitudes towards their reading process. The survey items in the questionnaire, such as “I write down my feelings in a language learning diary after reading an English text.” with the mean of 2.66 and “I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of reading.”, with the mean of 2.51, are the two strategies that most participants chose as strategies they applied almost every time in reading. Pupils use various techniques to reduce their anxiety associated with reading tasks. According to Stander (2022), affective strategies show direct linkage to pupils’ language learning performances as pupils have a huge bearing on second language learning. Deep breathing exercises and positive self-talk help pupils to be more relaxed and motivate themselves to read a text with language they are not familiar with.

Moreover, the result from the questionnaire also shows that some of the pupils employ strategies to maintain and increase their motivation levels throughout the reading process. The survey item “I give myself a reward or treat when I finish reading English text.” shows that setting reading achievement goals and rewarding themselves for the reading are the strategies applied during the reading process. The pupils are also aware of their emotions when they read the English text. However, they seldom try to get back on track when they lose concentration in reading English.

Memory Strategies**Table 5***Memory strategies used by the pupils*

Strategy	Mean	SD
When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.	2.15	0.15
I review the text first by noting its characteristics like length and organization.	2.16	0.12
I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read.	1.86	0.22
I use typographical features like boldface and italics to identify key information.	2.53	0.05
I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it.	1.7	0.15

Memory strategies in Oxford's LLS refers to techniques that pupils use to remember and recall new information effectively. Strategy "I use typographical features like boldface and italics to identify key information." with the mean of 2.53, is the highest score of memory strategy. The typographical features aid pupils in readability and visual appeal (Kader, 2022). The typography helps pupils to link new information to key words which will later help pupils to recall the meaning of the words more easily.

While the strategy "I try to picture or visualise information to help remember what I read" (1.86) aids pupils in associating new words or concepts with familiar ones to facilitate memory. This could involve forming mental images and making connections to personal experiences. By employing memory strategies effectively, pupils can retain and recall new language knowledge and ultimately improve their overall reading progress.

Cognitive Strategies**Table 6***Cognitive strategies used by the pupils*

Strategy	Mean	SD
I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read.	2.28	0.3
I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	2.11	0.22
I use tables, figures, and pictures in text to increase my understanding.	2.1	0.13
I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text.	1.96	0.17
When text becomes difficult, I re-read it to increase my understanding.	1.66	0.14
When reading, I translate from English into my native language.	2.13	0.12

Cognitive strategies in Oxford's LLS are mental processes that pupils use to understand and learn a language. According to Oxford (1990), these strategies involve active engagement with the language, such as analysing, synthesising and organising information. Pupils frequently take notes while reading to help them in understanding the text. Other than that, strategies in the questionnaire, such as "I use tables, figures and pictures in text to increase my understanding." (2.1) and "I critically analyse and evaluate the information presented in the text." (1.96) are the strategies that pupils break down the language input into smaller components to understand its meaning and structure while reading. Besides breaking down the language, some of the pupils also tend to translate English language text into their native language in order to help them in understanding the text. However, not many pupils prefer to read the text again when it becomes difficult for them to understand. By applying these strategies, pupils draw conclusions or make interpretations based on incomplete information in the text, which involves using context, background knowledge and linguistic clues to fill in gaps in understanding the reading text (Urai Salam et al., 2020).

Compensation Strategies

Table 7

Compensation strategies used by the pupils

Strategy	Mean	SD
When reading, I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.	1.96	0.15
I use reference materials (e.g. a dictionary) to help me understand what I read.	2.23	0.16
I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading.	2	0.15
I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.	1.98	0.37
I try to guess what the content of the text is about when I read.	1.8	0.05
When I read, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	1.86	0.1
When reading, I think about information in both English and my mother tongue.	2.4	0.13

From table 7, it is observed that the pupils often use both their mother tongue and English language to think about the information while reading. The use of mother tongue is often practised by the pupils when reading and thinking, just like the strategies they used in cognitive strategy. According to Hardan (2013), compensation strategies allow the pupils to compensate for the missing knowledge with the linguistic clues. Hence, the use of the mother tongue allows the pupils to guess and understand the information in English. Apart from that, the pupils also use reference materials such as dictionaries to help them understand the reading text. The least strategies chosen by the pupils are "I try to guess what the content of the text is about when I read." (1.8) and "When I read, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases." (1.86). This shows that some of the pupils attempt to understand the reading texts by guessing the meaning of the words and contents of the text. The use of these strategies can help the pupils to overcome the limited knowledge in the language, allowing them to read and understand the text even when their knowledge is limited.

Social Strategies**Table 8***Social strategies used by the pupils*

Strategy	Mean	SD
I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading.	1.88	0.2
When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading.	1.71	0.29
I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text.	2.03	0.25
I try to learn about English culture through reading.	1.86	0.07

Pupils who learn with social strategies are more likely to ask questions for understanding. They often ask themselves questions they like to have answered in the text. This item scores the highest of 2.03 mean points. Social strategies involve interacting with peers and speakers of targeted language (Widharyanto & Binawan, 2020). Hence, the strategy "I try to learn about English culture through reading." (1.86) is employed by the pupils when reading a text. This shows that the pupils are aware that learning takes place the best when they are exposed to the environment. Other than that, the strategy "I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading." (1.88) and "When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading." (1.71) are also used by the pupils who employed social language learning strategies. This shows that the pupils realised their limitation in reading, and thus slowing down their reading rate can help themselves to understand the texts better.

Metacognitive Strategies**Table 9***Metacognitive strategies used by the pupils*

Strategy	Mean	SD
I have a purpose in mind when I read.	1.91	0.18
I think about what I know to help me understand what I read.	1.65	0.13
I take an overall view of the text to see what it is about before reading it.	1.8	0.43
I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose.	2.05	0.1
I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading.	1.7	0.18
I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading.	2.05	0.08
I check my understanding when I come across new information.	1.78	0.10
I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.	1.71	0.15

The strategy that is least employed by the pupils is metacognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategies allow the pupils to manage their learning by centering, planning, arranging and evaluating learning (Hardan, 2013). The most frequent strategies used by the pupils in metacognitive strategy are “I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose.” (2.05) and “I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading.” (2.05). This means that the pupils often plan and evaluate the suitability of the reading text. Besides that, the pupils employ purposive reading and they often take an overall view of the text before reading. Meanwhile, the least strategy employed by the pupils is ‘I think about what I know to help me understand what I read.’ (1.65). This shows that the pupils activate their prior knowledge in helping them to plan and organise their reading comprehension. Hence, the pupils who learn with metacognitive strategies are more likely to be in control of their own learning.

Implication and Conclusion

This research provides an insight to the educators on the strategies applied by the pupils in Chinese vernacular school, particularly in the English reading skills. By comprehending the strategies upper primary ESL learners use when reading, educators can refine their teaching methods. They can integrate these strategies into their instructions to provide a more effective support for pupils’ reading comprehension and language development. Personalised instruction can also be designed to meet the diverse needs of pupils. The tailored approach empowers pupils to optimise their language learning potential by addressing their unique strengths and challenges. Besides, findings from this research can inform the development of interventions designed to improve the reading proficiency in ESL learners. Understanding the strategies utilised by pupils can pinpoint the areas where pupils may require additional support. Schools can implement research-based interventions to address specific challenges and promote reading success among ESL learners. These interventions can be systematically evaluated for effectiveness and refined based on ongoing research and feedback, ensuring continuous improvement in language education practices. Moreover, insights gleaned from this research can guide curriculum development efforts aimed at enhancing reading skills in ESL learners. Curriculum designers can embed effective language learning strategies into reading materials and activities, thereby fostering more meaningful and impactful learning experiences. In conclusion, investigating language learning strategies employed in reading skills by upper primary ESL learners holds promise for advancing instructional practices, enhancing pupils’ outcomes and deepening understanding of how to facilitate language development in ESL contexts. By leveraging these insights, educators, researchers and policymakers can collaborate to create more equitable and effective learning opportunities for ESL learners.

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