Identifying LLS Utilised among Upper Primary ESL Pupils to Enhance Vocabulary Acquisition

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Abstract
It is crucial for upper primary pupils in Malaysian schools to acquire a good grasp of the English language, as the transition from primary to secondary school education requires a solid foundation in English language skills. English serves as the medium of instruction for many subjects in higher education. Good language learners tend to employ a variety of language learning strategies (LLS) according to their preference. The range of language learning strategies adopted by Malaysian primary school pupils could be further explored through reviewing the range of methods employed by these learners. Hence, this research seeks to identify language learning strategies utilised for improving vocabulary, among high proficiency English language learners in a primary school located in Selangor, Malaysia. A quantitative research design was utilised using the survey method to collect research data. Thirty upper primary school pupils of high proficiency level were selected using a purposive sampling technique to participate in this study. The findings indicate that high proficiency upper primary pupils mostly prefer utilising cognitive and metacognitive strategies in language learning, while memory-based strategies were least favoured. These findings will provide primary ESL educators with valuable insights on the implementation of effective vocabulary acquisition strategies to optimise their pupils' learning outcomes.
Keywords: Vocabulary, Language Learning Strategy, Primary Students, Chills, Esl

Introduction
        Language is developed more easily and effectively when the learners are young (Ma et al, 2021). The English language is no exception as many children and students are learning them at home holistically. From parents introducing names of animals in English, until having full blown conversations with them about simple topics. Critical Period Hypothesis suggests with evidence that for language acquisition, there is a certain period in which a child's brain is the most responsive and attuned to learning language (Dollmann et al. 2020). Singleton and Le´sniewska (2021) claimed that there is a consensus where the critical period is between birth and puberty.

Young children are very good at learning parts of language; sounds, vocabulary, and linguistic structure during that period. A research by He (2024) reaffirmed this hypothesis by proving that children are easier to be successful in acquiring a foreign language than normal adults. Thus, making them have a slide edge in second language acquisition. Language development is in conjunction with cognitive development. Language skills are the foundations of some cognitive processes like reasoning, problem solving and memorisation. The reason is that through language, young children gain an understanding to classify things, to communicate or convey feelings and thoughts, as well as to grasp intricate ideas.

Based on research by Botes et al., (2020), language skills and confidence are closely related to academic success. In school, children need good language proficiency to comprehend instructions, join class discussions, and most importantly read and write. Across multiple subjects in school, language is being used thoroughly to explain complex academic concepts. It is being done through text and oral explanation by the teachers. In addition, language allows children to convey the desires, needs as well as desires. As a result, they promote mindfulness, awareness and empathy towards people close to them. Based on past study, the ability to express oneself effectively correlates with physical restlessness and acting out. Daily complex communication from peer relationships and acceptable manners for the society could only be achieved if the child has the ability to comprehend language and articulate oneself fluently (Kalland, M & Linnavalli, 2022).

In the context of globalisation, Malaysia emphasises the importance of language and second language at a young age. This is aligned with the Critical Period Theory and cognitive development at a young age. This is even more so true for ESL learners because they will have multiple lingual competence in the second language. Malaysia has been using the Dual Language Programme (DLP) until now. The programme allows each school to choose whether to use their native language or English language as an option to teach Mathematics and Science. With the opportunity to use both languages, the Malaysian Ministry of Education is hoping that students are able to thrive in their academics. Students are somewhat forced to read and learn new vocabulary as they learn Mathematics and Sciences. Besides the four skills, vocabulary plays a bigger role as it is the prior knowledge to be mastered. Tong et. al. (2023) has stated that vocabulary fluency should be focused on more than the basic word and meaning. It could immensely improve reading proficiency depending on the benefits of the target language knowledge of vocabulary.

Acquiring and maintaining English vocabulary is a crucial part in the early part of learning a language. This lays the foundation for the young learners' language skills in the future. The vocabulary acts as building blocks for their sentence structure and consequently sets as a springboard for further language learning process, Laubscher and Light (2022). Since it is crucial, numerous studies and research has been done on how to improve language proficiency. There is a large number of researches and studies done to improve the low proficiency learners, especially primary level learners. Just to list a few; *Learning Through Play: Utilizing Board Games to Enhance English Vocabulary for Early Students* (Novita Kurnia Ningrum, Ardiawan Bagus Harisa, Liya Umaroh, 2024), *Home Language Practices that Support Children's English Language Learning: A Case of Makuyu Zone, Muranga County, Kenya* (Jane Wamaitha Wachuru, Anashia Nancy Ong'onda, Evelyn E. Simiyu, 2024), *Using an Augmented-Reality Game-Based Application to Enhance Language Learning and Motivation of Elementary*

School EFL Students: A Comparative Study in Rural and Urban Areas, (Chin-Huang Daniel Liao, Wen-Chi Vivian Wu, Venny Gunawan & Tin-Chang Chang, 2024), *Reading with Understanding in a Lower Primary Classroom: A Learning Journey to Improve Teacher Practice and Student Learning Outcome* (Shomal Prabhashni Chandra & Satish Prakash Chand, 2024), and *An Insight into Mall-Integrated Language Learning Strategies of Good Language Learners* (Kaliswari Kaliappan, Munira Abd Rahman, Nor Syazliana Sharifuddin, Siti Hanisah Abdul Rahman, Harwati Hashim, 2023).

These are just a few from 2024 and one from 2023. There are unimaginable numbers of them if we really look for them from any year. Among all of the previous research, there is a lack of study on the high-proficiency ESL students. The way they learn and their Language Learning Strategies is one of the main topics that can be further explored. High proficiency ESL learners among primary level school students have their own Language Learning strategies regardless of class environment. The reasons behind the success of this student group need to be looked into. There are cracks and gaps in the literature regarding this specific topic. Few past studies and observations found out that they managed to achieve those good results and excellent proficiency without an intervention or major help from the teachers. This study could be viewed as a new or unique perspective on what works and what does not work for different kinds of young learners. To clarify, the one we are going to study is the language learning strategies (LLS) of the upper primary high proficiency ESL students in urban areas. The study is designed to identify language learning strategies employed by high proficiency English language learners in a primary school in Banting, Selangor for improving vocabulary.

Literature Review

Kashefian-Naeeini et. al argue that language learning approaches play a crucial role in establishing communicative competence as they serve as effective tools for active, self-directed engagement. In addition to enhancing student's ability to communicate, teachers who train students to employ language learning strategies can help them become better language learners by improving their vocabulary. One of the important qualities of a good language educator is their ability to assist students in comprehending effective language learning techniques and instructing them on how to develop and employ such tactics (2011). There are several language learning strategies used by the teaching staff of ESL primary schools in assisting the pupils to acquire language learning skills.

Vocabulary Learning

Tiing et al. (2021) asserts that the English language is regarded as an international language throughout the world. According to Lim et al. (2021), English holds significant importance in Malaysia and is commonly acquired as a second language. In Malaysia, English language learning begins in primary school as part of the official education curriculum. The Malaysian government prioritises the enhancement of English language skills in classrooms, as of 2021.According to Irwandi, Hudri, and Apriana,the use of vocabulary learning methods (VLS) to English as a second language (ESL). The articles in this review were chosen to help readers understand and explore language learning strategies (LLS), definitions of LLS and classifications, VLS, definitions of VLS and taxonomies, previous studies on using VLS in ESL learning, and how good language learners are associated with the use of VLS (2022)

According to Tiing et al.(2021) lexical chunks are phrases made up of two or more words. Thus, vocabulary refers to a language's words, which contain both single lexical items and phrases or chunks of words that carry a certain meaning, similar to individual words. This demonstrates that learning a second language requires acquiring its vocabulary, as lexical knowledge is an essential component of communicative language ability (2021). According to Irwandi, Hudri and Apriana (2022) ESL students face numerous problems while learning English. Learning strategies are one of the ways they conquer their obstacles. Learning strategies are defined as procedures employed by learners to comprehend, store, and retain information and skills. Similarly, learners use certain ways to learn and increase their vocabulary.

Language Learning Strategies For Esl Teaching And Learning

Tiing et al. (2021) affirmed that, "strategy" refers to modifying a learner's behaviour to increase performance in both language use and learning. Griffiths (2015) defines language learning strategies as intentional or unintentional behaviours used by learners to acquire or manage language skills. According to Jirinet al. (2023) to overcome the problems of teaching and learning English as a Second Language, instructors and ESL learners should use effective language mastery practices. Implementing effective learning strategies can lead to both academic performance and language ability improvement.

There are some prominent strategies which are studied and conducted in terms of language learning strategies for ESL teaching and learning. According to Jirin et al. (2023) meta-cognitive processes in language learning refer to a learner's ability to set goals, plan activities, notice challenges, and change strategies. Meta-cognitive strategies play a critical role in successful language acquisition. As a result, meta-cognitive strategies in ESL courses are critical for these students to comprehend their learning process. These students are more likely to recognize any areas they need to focus on or receive assistance for if they have a better understanding of their learning. As per the theory of Vygotsky and Cole's (2018) learning a language is largely a social activity, hence social interaction is essential. Effective social language learning strategies include using interpersonal communication to improve language skills. Vygotsky and Cole's (2018) theory of Social Constructivism suggests that knowing is a collaborative process in which learners actively engage in social and communicative interactions to develop their understanding. Methods for learning a language include speaking chances, interacting with native speakers or learners, and participating in group activities or language exchange efforts. Jirin et al. (2023) highlighted affective methods, which entail managing students' emotions and motivation to create a happy learning environment, are vital for language learning. These suggestions address how to stay motivated and regulate worry and emotions. Primary school pupils in this study used emotive tactics, indicating a recognition of the need of emotional control and motivation for language learning. According to Jirin et al. (2023) memory tactics help learners retain new vocabulary and grammar principles. These strategies employ techniques including association, repetition, and visualisation. This study found that primary school students used memory techniques, indicating their awareness of the need for memory for language learning. Compensation mechanisms are crucial for language learners who face challenges beyond their current knowledge and skills. Effective communication in the target language requires learners to adopt diverse tactics in various situations. Compensation schemes can help language learners stay engaged and progress in their language acquisition journey. Cognitive tactics help learners learn a new language by using their thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving skills.

The strategies include analysis, synthesis, and assessment. The study found that primary school pupils utilised cognitive methods less frequently, possibly due to a lack of understanding of their importance in language acquisition.

Research Methodology

This section elucidates the research design, population, sample, instrument, data collection procedure and data analysis.

Research Design

The research was conducted quantitatively using a survey method. According to Creswell, (2017), quantitative research is an approach of study that collects numerical information and uses statistical tools to examine it in order to explain events in question. Therefore, this research design is able to achieve the study's objective, which include identifying the most popular language learning strategies used by upper level pupils to enhance vocabulary in English language.

Population & Sample

The research was conducted in a rural national primary school in Selangor, Malaysia. Upper primary pupils ranging from Year 4, 5 and 6 were the targeted participants in this research.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of The Respondents

NO	ITEM	CATEGORY	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS (%)
1	Gender	Male Female	12 (40) 18 (60)
2	Primary	4 5 6	10 (33.3) 10 (33.3) 10 (33.3)
3	Race	Malay	30 (100)

The research involved 30 learners aged 10 to 12 years old. They were conveniently selected due to the pupils' availability whereby the researcher has easy access to the target respondents as stated by Creswell that they are willing and available respondents. 10 learners were selected from each level of upper primary pupils.

Instrument

The questionnaire for this research was adapted from Children's Inventory for Language Learning Strategies (CHILLS) by Esim Gürsoy in 2010. CHILLS was selected as the language level used in the inventory was intelligible to upper primary learners.

The questionnaire consisted of 30 items which were divided into four sections to cater all six language learning strategies. Language learning strategies were Memory Strategies, Cognitive Strategies, Compensation Strategies, Metacognitive Strategies, Affective Strategies, and Social Strategies. First section (Item 1 to 10) encompasses strategies for general study

habits whilst the second section (Item 11 to 18) consists of strategies to improve language learning. The third section (Item 19 to 25) includes strategies to facilitate the reception and production of the language whereas the fourth section (Item 26 to 30) is composed of strategies to consolidate knowledge in the target language. The Likert Scale was used in the questionnaire. It was designed in 3-point Likert scale with the responses Yes, Sometimes and No options to choose from.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. The researcher reviewed the questions with the respondents to ensure that they understood each statement. The survey was monitored to make sure that all questions were answered correctly.

Data Analysis

The findings were presented in percentages and the frequency of scores. Then, the results were then tabulated and discussed in the findings section.

Findings & Discussion

The table 2 from the "Children's Inventory for Language Learning Strategies (CHILLS)" provides insights into the frequency and popularity of different language learning strategies among children. By analysing the distribution of responses (Yes, Sometimes, No), we can infer the effectiveness, preference, and potential areas for improvement in language teaching methods.

Table 2

Children's Inventory for Language Learning Strategies (CHILLS)

NO	ITEMS	RESPONSES		
		YES	SOMETIMES	NO
1	I try to speak in English with my teacher, friends, and parents.	5 (16.7 %)	17 (56.7 %)	8 (26.7 %)
2	In an activity I work with a peer, I share my notes and / or ask her/him the points I don't understand.	14 (46.7 %)	13 (43.3 %)	3 (10 %)
3	After writing or saying something in English I ask my teacher, friend or someone who is knowledgeable to correct my errors.	14 (46.7 %)	10 (33.3 %)	6 (20.0 %)
4	I use a new vocabulary in the sentence to pronounce it correctly.	12 (40.0 %)	9 (30.0 %)	9 (30.0 %)
5	Before I say something in English I check my book, notebook, to see what we learned about the topic.	7 (23.3%)	14 (46.7 %)	9 (30.0 %)
6	I test myself to improve my English.	16 (53.3%)	6 (20.0 %)	8 (26.7 %)
7	I revise the lesson, the notes I take at school, my old books and notebooks, unknown or newly learnt vocabulary by reading or writing.	6 (20.0 %)	13 (43.3%)	11 (36.7 %)
8	I practice with my parents or someone else before speaking activities.	14 (46.7 %)	6 (20.0 %)	10 (33.3 %)
9	I study my errors after my speaking activities.	10 (33.3 %)	11 (36.7 %)	9 (30.0 %)
10	When I think that I cannot learn I tell my parents I need help. Ex: Taking private lessons.	14 (46.7 %)	10 (33.3 %)	6 (20.0 %)
11	I read the books I read before to improve my English.	14 (46.7 %)	8 (26.7 %)	8 (26.7 %)
12	I use the words I learnt recently when speaking with tourists and native speakers to pronounce them correctly.	6 (20.0 %)	16 (53.3%)	8 (26.7 %)
13	I like to use English in fun ways. For example: I try to make jokes in English.	9 (30.0 %)	11 (36.7 %)	10 (33.3 %)
14	To improve my English I work with supporting materials such as books, CD's that teach English.	10 (33.3 %)	12 (40.0 %)	8 (26.7 %)
15	I do tests to improve my English.	11 (36.7 %)	5 (16.7 %)	14 (46.7 %)
16	While reading I try to guess the unknown structure by comparing it with the one that I know.	12 (40.0 %)	12 (40.0 %)	6 (20.0 %)
17	Before I write or listen in English I read about that topic, revise the unit, read a similar paragraph, try to find an example, prepare a draft or make sentences with the topic.	5 (16.7 %)	10 (33.3 %)	15 (50.0 %)
18	While speaking I coin words that might have a similar meaning instead of the one that I do not know.	7 (23.3%)	15 (50.0 %)	8 (26.7 %)
19	I try to keep the words in my mind by associating their pronunciation. For example, snake and sinek (a fly).	5 (16.7 %)	15 (50.0 %)	10 (33.3 %)

20	I take notes of unknown words, my peers questions, and/or things that I remember after drama activities.	7 (23.3%)	11 (36.7 %)	12 (40.0 %)
21	I use gestures when I have trouble in explaining meanings of things in English.	13 (43.3%)	12 (40.0 %)	5 (16.7 %)
22	While writing or speaking I draw the picture of an unknown word.	15 (50.0 %)	5 (16.7 %)	10 (33.3 %)
23	While speaking if I do not know the meaning of a word I say its native language and keep on talking.	2 (6.7 %)	13 (43.3%)	15 (50.0 %)
24	I repeatedly write the new word to be able to say it correctly.	8 (26.7 %)	14 (46.7 %)	8 (26.7 %)
25	While writing or reading I benefit from cognates to facilitate my writing and reading comprehension. For example, radio, television, leopard, chimpanzee.	13 (43.3%)	11 (36.7 %)	6 (20.0 %)
26	To facilitate my reading and listening comprehension, writing and speaking I use dictionaries, my course book, notebook or language teaching CD's.	12 (40.0 %)	12 (40.0 %)	6 (20.0 %)
27	I remember a word by thinking its location on a page.	14 (46.7 %)	12 (40.0 %)	4 (13.3 %)
28	I read or listen to an English text again after reading or listening to it once.	14 (46.7 %)	9 (30.0 %)	7 (23.3%)
29	Before writing something I identify the words and structures from my book and notebook.	9 (30.0 %)	16 (53.3%)	5 (16.7 %)
30	I revise the new information with regular intervals.	7 (23.3%)	12 (40.0%)	11 (36.7 %)

Each response percentage provides insights into how commonly these strategies are used among the surveyed children. For example, high percentages of "Yes" responses indicate popular strategies, while high "No" responses might suggest areas where children could benefit from additional guidance or motivation to adopt effective learning strategies. These strategies collectively represent a range of activities that support language learning through active use, social interaction, feedback, and personal reflection. Strategies with a high percentage of **"Yes"** responses indicate strategies that are well-adopted and possibly very effective. For instance, **item 6 (Self-testing to improve English)** shows that 53.3% of children regularly engage in self-testing, suggesting a strong inclination towards autonomous learning and self-assessment, which is known to enhance learning outcomes. **Item 22 (Drawing pictures of unknown words while writing or speaking)** with 50% "Yes" responses illustrates a creative approach to vocabulary learning, indicating that visual aids are highly effective for a significant portion of learners.

A high number of **"Sometimes"** responses might indicate strategies that are situationally applied or partially integrated into the learning routine, where **item 12 (Using newly learned words with tourists and native speakers)** received 53.3% "Sometimes" responses, suggesting that while children see the value in this practice, it might be dependent on external factors such as the presence of native speakers. Followed by **item 29 (Identifying words and structures from learning materials before writing)**, with 53.3% "Sometimes" responses, which could indicate that learners use this strategy when they feel less confident about their material comprehension. Strategies with a high percentage of **"No"** responses could indicate areas where children are less engaged or find the strategies less applicable or difficult such as in **item 17 (Preparation before writing or listening)** received 50% "No" responses, suggesting that children might not see the value in extensive preparation or find it too time-consuming. Furthermore, **item 23 (Using native language when unknown in English during conversation)**, which has 50% "No" responses, indicates a reluctance or a lack

of necessity to switch to their native language, which could be seen as a positive sign of immersion and language confidence. The items related to **speaking, interacting with peers, and using English in practical situations** generally have higher **"Yes"** and **"Sometimes"** responses, suggesting these are engaging and effective. Whereas, the strategies that **involve extensive preparation** or **revision** show a higher tendency towards **"No"** responses, possibly indicating these are less favoured by children, perhaps due to the perceived effort or lack of immediate gratification.

These insights could help educators and curriculum developers focus on strategies that resonate most with children and potentially re-evaluate or introduce new methods to encourage less popular strategies, especially those involving preparation and revision, which are crucial for deeper learning. The most often used language learning strategies are cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Learners will have autonomy in learning. They identify the trouble, reflect on their own learning experience, spot the errors and finally develop the best solution for learning. As ESL learners, they are able to identify their weak areas and seek help. This is because they prioritise the inner mechanisms of learning rather than the external observable conduct of learning. Therefore, they are more self-directed learners. Conversely, memory strategy is the least favoured strategy adopted from learners. Lack of instant gratification and continuous effort are the obstacles for making memory strategy less favourable to language learners. They have to use external aids such as using a planner, to internal memory strategies like mnemonic devices, to facilitate storage and retrieval from long-term memory as stated by Carney in 2011. Hence, ESL learners have to put more effort if they need to acquire targeted language, especially in enhancing a huge amount of vocab.

Implications And Conclusion

Tiing et al.(2021) concludes, LLSs have been an important construct in ESL language learning research throughout time. Language academics have explored and explained many ways for developing different language skills. This research identifies the LLS utilised by ESL Year 4 , 5 and 6 learners at a rural primary school to enhance their vocabulary and grammar skills. As per Tiing et al.(2021), it is clear that all six LLSs are employed by learners. The survey results indicate that learners mostly use meta-cognitive methods, while cognitive strategies are rarely used. Educators can help learners create a thorough, independent, and effective approach to learning English, leading to good language acquisition outcomes. Additionally, the study found that learners lack critical thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving skills when learning a new language.

Ping, and Luan says LLS research can improve language learning results for learners of all ages and backgrounds. This wide area requires persistent study and investigation over time. The research on LLS provides a firm foundation for language development in the classroom and beyond, benefiting learners. Understanding how pupils approach language acquisition allows teachers to tailor their lessons to their specific needs. Learners can improve their effectiveness and independence by identifying their language learning strategies and implementing new ones.Although according to Jirin et al.(2023), some teachers and learners are aware of the presence of different LLSs and have tried to implement them in the teaching and learning process, the outcome may not meet expectations due to each learner's unique learning style and the inability to generalise findings to all types of learners. Researchers should continue to explore and prove the effectiveness of various linguistic methods in assisting ESL language learning. Continuous research is necessary to assess the effectiveness

of language learning programs. Practitioners should consider helping diverse learners and including additional topic areas based on the identified LLSs.

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