

SUCCESSFUL LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY SUCCESSFUL YEAR 5 ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT: Research on language learning strategies in Malaysia has been carried out extensively since mid 1990s. However, these studies have not covered the language learning strategies among native pupils in suburban primary school in Mukah, Sarawak. The main objective of the study was to identify the language learning strategies used by English as Second Language (ESL) learners. Data was collected using a survey questionnaire with 20 outstanding Year 5 ESL Iban learners in one of the suburban schools in Mukah, Sarawak. The instrument used in this study include a Language Strategy Use Questionnaire adapted from Language Strategy Use Inventory by Cohen, Oxford and Chi (2002). The adapted version of Language Strategy Use Questionnaire consists of 60 statements concerning the four major English language skills, namely listening, speaking and reading as well as acquisition of vocabulary and grammar. Data was analyzed through mean, frequency, percentage and standard deviation. The findings revealed that these learners were moderate users of listening, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary strategies and low users of speaking strategies. There were variations in responses with regard to the use of language learning strategies among primary school learners. The pedagogical implications of the findings are also discussed.

KEYWORDS: Language learning strategies, primary school, Iban, English as a Second Language (ESL)

INTRODUCTION

In this 21st century, a typical classroom context is no longer restricted to the teacher's dominant role as the source of knowledge. There is a gradual shift towards more students' autonomy in language learning. Hence, diversity in teaching and discovering learners' language learning strategies (LLS) is being prominent as the limelight in our education. In the teaching-learning context of a typical classroom, both teachers and students play an important role in establishing fruitful learning in the classroom. The reason is, teaching and learning is as important as having a good curriculum (Norzila, Ahmad & Shah, 2007). Thus, bridging the gap between both teachers' and learners' perception would contribute to successful language learning.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Mohamed Amin (2000), the understanding of what students do in the language learning process and how it affects language success is important in assisting students in learning the English language. Low proficiency in English among students has been a significant issue in our education system. The debate on

students' inability to grasp the English language even after eleven years of both primary and secondary education continues to be a hot topic among scholars (Nor Hahsimah, Norsimah & Kesumawati 2008). Numerous possible strategies have been implemented by our Ministry of Education so as to tackle this problem yet to no avail. Hence, some researchers have changed their direction into investigating learners' learning strategies preferences. According to Kupper, O' Malley, Chamot, Russo and Stewner-Manzanares, (1985) language learning strategy is an extremely powerful learning tool. The term language learning strategy has been defined diversely by many researchers. For instance, Wenden and Rubin (1987) defined learning strategies as steps, plans and routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information. On the other hand, Richards and Platt (1992) stated that language learning strategies are intentional behaviour and thoughts used by learners during learning to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information. Hence this lead to the aim of this study which was to find out the successful language learning strategies used by successful Year 5 ESL learners.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research objectives of this study were to identify the frequency of language learning strategies (LLS) used by successful primary 5 successful language learners in Sekolah Kebangsaan Sungai Penipah, Mukah according to four language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing as well as vocabulary and grammar acquisition. This study also identified the overall language learning strategies used by successful language learners in a year 5 classroom.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guide the present study:

1. What are the frequency of language learning strategies (LLS) used by successful primary 5 successful language learners ?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language learning strategies (LLS) have become one of the most popular seek after researched topics in the field of both English as second language (ESL) or English as foreign language (EFL) education. Many studies have contributed to our understanding of the significant aspects that LLS shown in the learning and acquisition of a second or foreign language. This section defines the LLS as well as the significant roles LLS plays in facilitating language learning and promoting learner autonomy. According to Cambridge University Dictionary Online (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, Retrieved 1/3/16) the word "strategy" refers to "a detailed plan for achieving success in situations such as war, politics, business, industry, or sport, or the skill of planning for such situations". Without doubt, learning requires strategies in order to learn effectively

The success of ESL language learners are often affected by various factors. Apart from factors like age, intelligence, aptitude, motivation, attitude, personality and learning styles, learning strategies play a significant role to improve learners' learning ability. Learning strategies are the preferable methods used by learners for learning. However, there are many definitions of learning strategies by different scholars like Oxfod, Cohen, Hosenfeld, Macaro, O'Malley & Chamot, Rubin and Stern. Many researchers shared their thoughts about learning strategies and their purposes in the process of second language learning. They defined the strategies as essential techniques intentionally and consciously used by language learners for effective understanding, remembering, and using information. Thus, a number of researchers have focused on the strategic process of learning and the types of strategies most frequently used by successful language learners as well as the conditions under which these strategies are employed by proficient learners

There are various definitions of language learning strategies. According to Brown (2007), learning strategies are specific approach that learners make to solve the problems by second language input and output. Whilst, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) viewed language learning strategies as the special thoughts or behaviours of

processing information that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information. Meanwhile, Chamot (2005) also states that language learning strategies are procedures that facilitate language learning task and those strategies are most conscious and goal given. Moreover, Cohen (1998) defines the language learning strategies as being language learning processes which are consciously selected by the learner. He also highlights that the element of choice is important. This is because these choices give a strategy its special character. At the same time, Oxford (1999) specifies learning strategies as specific actions, behaviours, steps or techniques that learners use to improve their own progress in developing skills in a second or foreign language. These strategies help to facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval or use of the new language found. While for Reid (1995), language learning strategies are external skills that learners use consciously to monitor and improve their own learning. In other words, we might describe them as study skills that learners can be taught that can expand their existing learning styles.

Some researchers believe that more capable ESL learners tend to use various strategies and engage them more frequently than less capable ESL learners (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 1996, 2008). According to Oxford (2008), a capable English learner not only coordinating different kinds of strategy to solve complicated tasks but also making sure that the chosen strategy is appropriate for tasks-solving; but, a less capable learner always tends to use learning strategies hastily without knowing how to identify the most suitable strategies for learning. McLaughlin (1978) stated that different learners use different strategies to solve the problems. Thus, their successful of learning depends on selection of most suitable strategy in solving the problems. From this perspective, learners are regarded as being able to administer their own learning. Hence, the learning of language becomes a cognitive process

Nonetheless, according to Chamot (2001), learning strategies are important in second language acquisition for two main reasons. First, by investigating the strategies used by second language learners during the learning process, better understanding into the cognitive, social, and affective process in language learning can be gained. Second, it may be possible to teach less successful language learners to use the strategies successful learners use so that they can become better language learners. Chamot also asserted that the two main goals in language learning strategy research are to first identify and compare the strategies used by more and less successful learners, and then give instruction to less successful ones so as to help them to learn second language more successfully.

METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to determine the language learning strategies used by 20 successful primary 5 ESL learners in the school. The chosen pupils were from Iban ethnicity who studied in Sekolah Kebangsaan Sungai Penipah, Mukah. Most of the learners in year 5 were moderate performing learners with grade B as their best grade in previous English assessments. The best 20 learners with grade B were chosen as a sample. This study occupied a quantitative survey method in collecting and analyzing data. A total of 20 respondents from a year 5 class were chosen for this study. The ages of the learners were 11 years old. The instruments used in this study include a background information questionnaire and Language Strategy Use Questionnaire adapted from Language Strategy Use Inventory by Cohen, Oxford and Chi (2002). The adapted version of Language Strategy Use Questionnaire consists of 60 statements concerning the four major English language skills, namely listening, speaking and reading as well as acquisition of vocabulary and grammar. There were ten statements for each language skill, vocabulary and grammar acquisition strategy. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 is used in this questionnaire. The 5-point Likert scale is (1) Never true of me, (2) Usually not true of me, (3) Sometimes true of me, (4) Usually true of me and (5) Always true of me. The data was coded and analyzed using statistic calculators. Pilot test was carried out for the survey questionnaires. Year 4 successful Iban pupils with grade B in their previous English examination were chosen for the pilot test.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

To determine the frequency of language learning strategies used, an interpretation mean score was employed. Students' responses were categorized into three categories, which is high, moderate and low frequency use of language strategy. Table 1 showed the frequency ratings for strategy use. These ratings were adapted from Oxford (1990).

Table 1: Frequency Ratings for Strategy Use

Frequency of use	Responses	Mean scores
High	Always true of me	4.50 – 5.00
	Usually true of me	3.50 – 4.49
Moderate/medium	Sometimes true of me	2.50 – 3.49
Low	Usually not true of me	1.50 – 2.49
	Never true of me	1.00 – 1.49

Listening Skill

Table 2 - Listening Strategies used by Year 5 Outstanding Language Learners.

Rank	Item No.	Individual strategy	Mean	Frequency
1	A4	Pay special attention to specific aspects of the language	3.50	High
2	A9	Ask for clarification if I do not understand it the first time around	3.20	Moderate
3	A6	Listen for key words that seem to carry the bulk of the meaning	2.95	Moderate
4	A1	Listen to talk shows on the radio, watch TV shows or movies in the English language	2.75	Moderate
5	A3	Practice sounds in the target language that are different from sounds in my own language	2.55	Moderate
6	A2	Listening to people who are speaking in English and try to understand what they are saying	2.45	Low
7	A10	Draw on my general background knowledge to get the main idea.	2.35	Low
8	A5	Try to predict what the other person is going to say based on what has been said so far.	2.30	Low
9	A8	Ask speakers to repeat what they said if it wasn't clear to me.	2.00	Low
10	A7	Try to understand what I hear without translating it word-for-word	1.90	Low
		MEAN	2.60	Moderate

From the data we could conclude that the good language learners in year 5 always pay attention to specific aspects of the language in the classroom. During teaching and learning process, teacher always emphasizes on specific language aspects for example different types of tenses. Learners gave their best attention to understand what they had listened and imitated the way the English teacher used the language. In other words, the ESL learners applied receptive learning strategy which was associate with listening and reading when learning English. Nonetheless, according to item A7, learners depended on words translation to understand the target language. Hence, the learners' English language proficiency was low. Without word to

word translation, learners could not make sense of what they heard in target language. For this reason, learners took initiative to administer item A9: Ask for clarification if I do not understand it the first time around and Item A6: Listen for key words that seem to carry the bulk of the meaning. Both items occupied the second and third highest mean scores in the data. Strategies A4, A9 and A6 required learners' attention and alertness to pick up the language. Thus, learners were practicing direct learning. Overall, the listening strategies were used moderately with the total mean scores of 2.60.

Speaking Skill

Table 3 - Speaking Strategies used by Year 5 Outstanding Language Learners.

Rank	Item No.	Individual strategy	Mean	Frequency
1	B9	Ask for help from my conversational partner.	2.85	Moderate
2	B10	Make up new words or guess if I don't know the right ones to use.	2.70	Moderate
3	B2	Practice new grammatical structures orally in different situations to build my confidence level in using them.	2.65	Moderate
4	B8	Encourage others to correct errors in my speaking.	2.45	Low
5	B5	Plan out in advance what I want to say.	2.40	Low
6	B6	Ask questions as a way to be involved in the conversation	2.15	Low
7	B1	Practice saying new expressions to myself	2.05	Low
8	B3	Initiate conversations in the target language as often as possible	2.00	Low
9	B4	Direct the conversation to familiar topics	1.70	Low
10	B7	Try to talk about topics even when they aren't familiar to me.	1.65	Low
		MEAN	2.26	Low

From the data, we could assume that non-native English learners preferred to converse in their respective mother tongue which was Iban language. The most frequently used strategy to improve their English speaking ability was asking for help from conversational partners. Here, ESL learners seek help from their friends or the teacher for direct translation. The teacher and their friends helped the speaker by translating his/her messages in first language into target language by work of mouth. In fact, primary education was mainly about developing learners' language foundation. Whilst, speaking strategy was the least emphasized strategy in upper primary classrooms since speaking skill was not tested in the final public examination of primary education, Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR). Therefore, the speaking strategy for English was the least commonly used by learners. Furthermore, primary school learners prefer to speak in their own mother tongue as they can comprehend and converse better in their own language compared to English.

Reading Skill

Table 4 - Reading Strategies used by Year 5 Outstanding Language Learners.

Rank	Item No.	Individual strategy	Mean	Frequency
1	C6	Pay attention to the organization of the text, especially headings and subheadings.	3.35	Moderate
2	C3	Find reading material that is at or near my level	3.20	Moderate
3	C10	Use a dictionary to get a detailed sense of what individual words mean	2.90	Moderate
4	C1	Read as much as possible in the target language	2.80	Moderate
5	C5	Read a story or dialogue several times until I understand it.	2.55	Moderate
6	C8	Make predictions as to what will happen next	2.30	Low
7	C9	Guess the approximate meaning by using clues from the context of the reading material.	2.25	Low
8	C2	Try to find things to read for pleasure in the target language	2.20	Low
9	C4	Skim an academic text first to get the main idea and then go back and read it more carefully	2,0	Low
10	C7	Make ongoing summaries of the reading either in my mind or in the margins of the text.	1.85	Low
		MEAN	2.54	Moderate

From the data, we could conclude that the year five learners had poor comprehension skill which prevented them from using skimming and scanning when they were doing reading. Therefore, the learners looked at the headings and subheadings of the text without getting the main idea or content of the text. Besides that, the learners also using least making ongoing summaries of the reading in mind. This was because, the learners had not been taught of making summaries in the primary level.

Writing Skill

Table 5 - Writing Strategies used by Year 5 Outstanding Language Learners.

Rank	Item No.	Individual strategy	Mean	Frequency
1	D1	Practice writing the alphabet and/or new words in the target language.	2.95	Moderate
2	D8	Wait to edit my writing until all my ideas are down on paper.	2.90	Moderate
3	D6	Review what I have already written before continuing to write more.	2.90	Moderate
4	D2	Plan out in advance how to write essays by writing an outline of the essay first.	2.85	Moderate
5	D3	Try writing different kinds of texts in the target language	2.80	Moderate

6	D10	Try to get feedback from others, especially native speakers of the language	2.65	Moderate
7	D7	Use reference materials such as a glossary, a dictionary, or a thesaurus to help find or verify words in the target language	2.60	Moderate
8	D5	Find a different way to express the idea when I don't know the correct expression	2.50	Moderate
9	D9	Revise my writing once or twice to improve the language and content	2.30	Low
10	D4	Take class notes in the target language as much as I'm able.	2.25	Low
		MEAN	2.67	Moderate

Most of the learners used variety of strategies with moderate frequency to improve their writing ability. Since the learners were going to sit for public examination (UPSR) next year, their language proficiency was assessed mostly on writing performance. Their English papers grades were given on written paper. Therefore, English teachers emphasized a lot on learners' writing skills especially making sentences and essay writing. However, most of the learners were still preferring to take class notes using their own languages or Malay language which they think it would help them to understand the target language better. Hence, the education in the country was mostly exam oriented where written works played a significant role in grading the learners.

Acquisition of Vocabulary

Table 6 - Vocabulary Strategies used by Year 5 Outstanding Language Learners.

Rank	Item No.	Individual strategy	Mean	Frequency
1	E6	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	3.70	High
2	E10	I keep a vocabulary list of new words that I have learnt.	3.25	Moderate
3	E8	I go over new words several times at first.	2.85	Moderate
4	E9	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	2.70	Moderate
5	E7	I physically act out new English words.	2.65	Moderate
6	E3	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image of picture of the word to help me remember the word.	2.65	Moderate
7	E5	I use rhyming to remember new English words.	2.45	Low
8	E1	I group the words based on word categories (e.g. nouns, verb, adjectives).	2.30	Low
9	E4	I match the sound of the new word with the sound of a word I know.	2.15	Low
10	E2	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	2.05	Low
		MEAN	2.68	Moderate

Vocabulary was building blocks of the language. In primary school, learners learned different types of words to build up their language vocab. Learners with good vocabulary would become better speakers and writers. From the survey, most pupils preferred using flashcards to prolong vocabulary retention. Here, we could say that most year 5 learners were visual learners. They prefer to learn new words using flashcards which was colourful and associated with pictures. Besides that, the language teachers pasted a lot of language posters

and relies on the classrooms' wall for the pupils. In contrast, remembering new words by using them in the sentences did not seem favorable to the learners.

Acquisition of Grammar

Table 7 - Grammar Strategies used by Year 5 Outstanding Language Learners.

Rank	Item No.	Individual strategy	Mean	Frequency
1	F4	I do the grammar exercises in the revision/workbook.	3.35	Moderate
2	F9	I do correction for grammatical mistakes made in writing.	3.05	Moderate
3	F3	I study grammar books.	3.05	Moderate
4	F1	I read about simple grammar rules.	3.00	Moderate
5	F10	I use graphic or mind map to help me remember grammar rules.	2.80	Moderate
6	F6	I read grammar notes or exercises given by the teacher.	2.75	Moderate
7	F7	I ask my friends to correct my grammatical errors.	2.65	Moderate
8	F5	I take notes when teacher is teaching grammar.	2.65	Moderate
9	F8	I read English books, newspapers or magazine to improve my grammar.	2.40	Low
10	F2	I memorize rules of English grammar.	2.25	Low
		MEAN	2.80	Moderate

Learners preferred to do grammar exercises in the workbooks to improve their language. In other words, learners learned grammar through drilling to enhance their retention. In school, teachers are using deductive method to teach learners grammar. Hence, the learners were being briefed with grammar rules. However, the learners did not like to memorize the grammar rules. Instead, they preferred inductive method where they could learn grammar by doing exercises. If they did the grammatical mistakes in the exercises, they would do correction so that they could remember the rules.

IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS ON TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH

Table 8: Frequency of Language Learning Strategies.

Rank	Skills Category	Total Mean Scores	Frequency
1	Grammar	2.80	Moderate
2	Vocabulary	2.65	Moderate
3	Writing	2.67	Moderate
4	Listening	2.60	Moderate
5	Reading	2.54	Moderate
6	Speaking	2.26	Low

Based on data shown in Table 8, the frequency of year 5 ESL learners using language learning strategy ranged from low to moderate. Even though year 5 learners came from low performing school, they had their own learning preferences and strategies in learning English.

Among all the six skill categories, Grammar strategy was the most frequently used strategy. This showed that grammar teaching was being emphasised and lessons were more towards teacher-centred classroom. This illustrates a classroom in which teacher employed direct teaching of grammar rules and principles. As shown

in the table, most primary five pupils employ grammar, vocabulary, writing, listening and reading strategy frequently as the school teachers emphasized these skills more often than speaking skill in the language classroom. This was because these strategies were essential for examinations as examinees' written works were assessed. In this context, pupils' language proficiency were evaluated solely on their written performance. To highlight, speaking strategy was the least frequently used strategy. Undeniably, oral skills, particularly speaking skill was often being marginalised as it was not emphasised in examination. Learners' speaking reticence was high and thus making them to stay away speaking practice. Their speaking confidence was low too.

Looking into a typical ESL classroom, it was highly recommended that all the four language skills should be integrated into the lesson. In fact there should be equal instructional emphasis on all the four skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. In terms of constructivist view of language learning, language was perceived as 'whole-language'. Under constructivism, skills were taught in context, not in isolation. Skills were taught when learners were engaged in real-life tasks.

Grammar empowerment and Vocabulary acquisition would come in indirectly, alongside with the four language skills (macro-skills). In comparison to the four macroskills, grammar and vocabulary were dubbed as the micro-skills. Types of learning which focused merely only either receptive skills or productive skills did not appeal to students. There was a significant tendency among learners towards class content that observed both receptive and productive skills. A more communicative oriented approach could be promoted in the classroom. In communicative classroom, learners were given the opportunities to participate in free conversation, expressing their thoughts and ideas.

On the other hand, looking at the fact that primary school learners were often merely beginner English language users, the focus of language instruction should cater to building core vocabulary as well as developing grammar competencies. Grammar and vocabulary were the building blocks of language. Grammar referred to the rules used to describe the structure of a language whereas vocabulary denoted lexical items. Primary school kids were needed to understand grammar rules as well as master sufficient vocabulary words in order to use the language effectively. When people learned a language, they usually learned to listen first, then to speak, then to read, and finally to write. In this case, learners should be equipped with receptive language skills first before productive language skills. They gained access to language input through receptive skills which were listening and reading.

Moreover, the main objective of this study was to unveil the secrets of learning strategies among successful language learners and thus developed their autonomous learning. By revealing their learning strategies, teachers were able to guide learners during teaching and learning activities so that they became more efficient in learning English and more capable of self-monitoring. The findings in the study provided English teachers with pedagogical ideas as well as highlight the importance of knowing learners' language learning strategies (LLS). It was essential for teachers to understand LLS and the relationships between LLS and English language achievement. Hence, teachers were expected to know not only how to teach English but also how to strengthen learners' LLS in order to improve teaching and learning efficiency.

This study also allowed the teachers to understand the LLS used by capable learners and how it could be used to make English learning easier in their teaching. Besides that, teachers should know about the learners' LLS usage and paid attention to its tendency. In addition, teachers needed to adjust their teaching strategies according to LLS adopted by learners. Furthermore, teacher should give various LLS instructions to learners to meet their individual specific needs. Most subjects in the study wanted to know how to improve skills of speaking effectively. Therefore, related LLS training should be developed in class teaching. As for weak students, affective strategies needed to be instructed to them so as to lower their anxiety and took their emotional temperature. Third, metacognitive strategies had been demonstrated the strongest predictors to English achievement. Therefore, learners' use of metacognitive strategies such as paying attention, linking with already familiar materials, organizing, setting goals and objectives, considering the purposes, self-monitoring, self-evaluating and planning for a language task should be further strengthened. That was,

management of learning was vital to the whole process of English learning. On the other hand, it was essential for teachers to help learners learned how to control their English learning actively and efficiently. Finally, LLS instruction needed to be integrated, not only into the language learning scheme of work, but also more generally into the school curriculum as a whole.

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