

Learners' Language Learning Strategies in Rural Secondary School

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Language is the medium of communication and instruction among learners around the globe. Successful language learners employ various language learning strategies. This survey aims to explore the suitable language learning strategies and categories applied by Form 2 learners in a rural secondary school in the Cameron Highlands district in enhancing their listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary skills. Respondents replied to the self-administered questionnaires, which were adapted from the study (Rose & Yunus, 2016). Data were collected, analysed, and administered descriptively using valid percentages. Significant findings revolved that most learners favoured the writing and memory strategies in developing their language competencies. Based on the results, they were highly identified as memory and audiovisual learners in performing language skills. The researcher believes that the results would be a turning point for language practitioners and educators in devising and conducting suggested materials and tasks considering the best language learning strategies preferred by the learners.

Keywords: *Language Learning Strategies, Writing Strategies, Memory Strategies, Audiovisual Learners, Rural Learners*

Introduction

Language is known as the communication tool through which learners spread knowledge, share information, and develop an understanding of a situation. Working towards an efficient means of language usage among learners, there are strategies (He & Hutson, 2018) involved in enhancing their listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary skills. However, rural learners' language abilities differ from the urban (Lahmar, 2019), as the ones living in the townships are infused with facilities and technology, and they are very exposed to various forms of language skills and vast opportunities in discovering their language performances (Arulchelvan, Veramuthu, Singh & Yunus, 2019; Karim, 2019; Phung, 2017).

Language learning is also highly related to the attitudes of the learners towards the language

(Anlimachie, 2019). When they passionately look upon learning a language whole-heartedly, there begins the journey of a successful language learner. It is easy as they make it practical to be learned and they use it in a daily routine by means of conversation within their circles (Kormos, 2019). Acceptance of the language is a foremost step to be done before untying its underlying learning strategies.

In Malaysia, rural learners face a lack of exposure to the English language (Zulkefly & Razali, 2019), only having minimal chances of communicating in it. Though English is accepted and acknowledged as a second language in secondary schools, rural students especially still possess an alienated feel towards it. Their perception is all about using English in English Language lessons and exams (Khokhar & Sangi, 2018). The learners almost forget its role as a language of communication.

Researches are being conducted vastly in this area, so the findings would be useful for educators in understanding learning strategies for successful learning as well as the factors affecting these preferences and how to deal with them (Tabrizi, 2018). However, there are still gaps that educators need to discover in this field. Among them are finding specific ways to facilitate the rural language learners to learn a language efficiently and successfully (Halsey, 2018) and modifying and infusing the learning strategies that comply with each student (Kormos, 2019; Lahmar, 2019). For that, a collaboration between teachers and students is always needed to work on the appropriate learning strategies (Vaish, 2018) so they could together achieve the learning objectives (Khokhar & Sangi, 2018).

Chamot (2001) initiated the word learning strategy and clarified it as techniques, methods, or actions that are intentionally taken by learners to promote the learning and recall of knowledge (Chang, Liu & Paas, 2018). About both linguistic and content areas (Kumaresan & Yunus, 2016; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1987). Some of the good linguistic learners' primary features are that they discover their capacity in using the language and be accountable for their studying (Peter, Yunus & Mohamed, 2016). They are creative, as well as experimenting with grammar and phrases (Thomas, 2019). They will be using their time productively and use independent activities to improve their practice, such as reading extensively and freewriting (Sumaiya, 2019; Manprit & Mohamed, 2011).

In a rural context, most learners prefer metacognitive learning strategies, a more structured designated language learning way. As explained by Gani, Khairisman & Samad (2018), metacognitive learning was desired by rural learners in all language aspects such as listening, speaking, and vocabulary. It is very much related to the ease of language learning strategies, where learners seek for faster, instant, more self-directed, enjoyable and productive, and transform themselves into better surroundings (Maureen, 2018; Tabrizi, 2018; Purwanti, 2015). Therefore, offering more learner-centred pedagogy would make them better language learners as well as fulfilling the local needs (Halsey, 2018).

On the other hand, rural learners are also keen to use the memory strategies which can be classified towards traditional ways and are less motivated to know and try different approaches. Hence, memorising becomes a routine to achieve grades but not to excel in terms of language proficiency (Khokhar & Sangi, 2018). However, some researches proposed that a learner's belief about their different capabilities influences the strategies that they choose to employ in learning the language. It often includes good memory power, ability to guess, predict, and figure out events (Yunus & Saifudin, 2019; Rutherford, 2014), which are usually based on prior knowledge and previous learning experiences.

Rural language learners prefer a writing strategy by pre-planning or drafting ideas, and asking others for the words and phrases (Febriyanti, Dewi & Dewi, 2018; Wolf & Phung, 2019). They read the written product again for clarity and use a dictionary and glossary to get sufficient vocabulary, synonyms, and new words to write more (Karim, 2019; Rose & Yunus, 2016; Manprit & Mohamed, 2011). This also relates to the metacognitive strategy (Febriyanti, Dewi & Dewi, 2018), thus emphasising students to have a grip on their work, get hints on their weak points and think critically to produce better writing pieces. Hence, learners become aware of their steps and strive to be independent learners of the language (Zhang & Lu, 2015).

Therefore, the survey was designed to explore the suitable language learning strategies applied by Form 2 learners in a rural secondary school in enhancing their listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary skills. The study also aims to identify the categories of language learning strategies preferred by Form 2 learners.

Methods

This survey research design study involved 35 Form 2 secondary respondents aged 14 from the rural demographic location in Cameron Highlands, Pahang. The survey instrument consisted of self-administered questionnaires about language learning strategies, namely Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Vocabulary adapted from (Rose & Yunus, 2016). The descriptive statistics of valid percentages for each category were tabulated and discussed below.

Results and Discussion

The strategies used by respondents to listen more to the language: 42.9% of them frequently listened to a radio show, followed by 40% watching movies screened in the language in cinemas and 25.7% watching TV shows in literature. This is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Listen More

Strategy	Frequent	Seldom	Never
I listen to the radio show in the language	42.9	40	17.1
I watch TV shows in the language	25.7	71.4	2.9
I go to the movies that use the language	40	25.7	34.3

Strategies used by respondents in understanding the information heard: Data analysed reveal 60% of respondents frequently listened to essential words, followed by 40% listened to things that appeared attractive to them, and 25.7% tried hearing words that were repeated. This is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Understand Information Heard

Strategy	Frequent	Seldom	Never
I listen to important words	60	34.3	5.7
I look for what seems interesting	40	45.7	14.3
I listen for words that are repeated	25.7	60	14.3

Respondents' use of strategies to overcome difficulties in listening: 60% of respondents frequently asked questions to improve listening, followed by 57.1% requested for repetitions, and 37.1% required for slow speech rate. This is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Overcome Difficulties in Listening

Strategy	Frequent	Seldom	Never
I ask the person to repeat	57.1	34.3	8.6
I ask the person to slow down	37.1	54.3	8.6
I ask questions	60	28.6	11.4

57.1% of respondents frequently made sounds until they could say them well, followed by 48.6% watched TV shows to practice speaking, and 40% went to the cinema to watch the movies in the target language. This is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Practice Speaking

Strategy	Frequent	Seldom	Never
I make the sound of the language until I can say them well	57.1	34.3	8.6
I watch TV shows in the language	48.6	45.7	5.7
I go to the movies that use the language	40	28.6	31.4

The strategies used by respondents when talking with others: 62.9% of them frequently started a conversation with peers, followed by 57.1% requested for the person's help in

conversing, 45.7% needed correction from their friend, and 42.8% planned their speech beforehand, whereas 37.1% tried using mother-tongue words, and 31.4% attempted speaking their mind in different ways frequently. This is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Talking with Others

Strategy	Frequent	Seldom	Never
I start conversations	62.9	31.4	5.7
I plan what I am going to say	42.8	45.7	11.4
I ask the other person to correct me when I talk	45.7	37.1	17.1
I ask the person to help me	57.1	34.3	8.6
I try to say it in different ways	31.4	48.6	20
I use words from my mother-tongue	37.1	31.4	31.4

Reading strategies, as can be seen in Table 6: 57.1% of respondents frequently looked at pictures and texts under them to assist them with more reading. 45.7% preferred to mark text using various colours to comprehend better understanding. Moreover, 42.9% read things more than once to grasp the meaning, and 37.1% frequently underlined essential parts in the text to keep them in mind. Understand the read: 60% often chose easily readable materials, followed by 54.3% read a lot in the language preferred, and 31.4% looked for fun elements in reading. 54.3% frequently guessed meaning through clues from other passages, and 40% used a dictionary to reach meanings to overcome reading difficulties.

Table 6: Read More, Understand Reading & Overcome Reading Difficulties

Strategy	Frequent	Seldom	Never
Read More			
I look at pictures and the text under it	57.1	31.4	11.4
I read things more than once	42.9	54.3	2.9
I underline parts that seem important	37.1	34.3	28.6
I mark the reading in different colours to help me understand	45.7	31.4	22.9
Understand Reading			
I read a lot in the language	54.3	31.4	22.9
I read for fun in the language	31.4	57.1	11.4
I read easy materials	60	25.7	14.3
Overcome Reading Difficulties			
I guess the meaning by using clues from other parts of the passage	54.3	42.9	2.9
I use a dictionary to find meaning	40	48.6	11.4

The findings in Table 7 explore writing strategies used by respondents. About 51.4% frequently took class notes and wrote letters while 42.9% jotted notes outside the classroom in the target language. To write more, respondents of 57.1% frequently pre-planned their writing, followed by 42.9% approached a dictionary or glossary to get words, and 28.6% read their production to see if it was good enough. 68.6% of respondents frequently requested others' guidance to perceive the words or phrases intended for better writing. While 40% of them often tried saying the ideas in different ways and used mother-tongue words.

Table 7: Writing, Writing More & Writing Better

Strategy	Frequent	Seldom	Never
Writing			
I take class notes in the language	51.4	34.3	14.3
I write other notes in the language	42.9	48.6	8.6
I write a letter to other people in the language	51.4	31.4	17.1
Writing More			
I plan what I am going to write	57.1	34.3	8.6
I use a dictionary or glossary	42.9	37.1	20
I read what I wrote to see if it is good	28.6	51.4	20
Writing Better			
I ask someone for the word or phrase I want to write	68.6	28.6	2.9
I try to say it in a different way	40	48.6	11.4
I use words from mother-tongue	40	42.9	17.1

Respondents used vocabulary strategies to memorise new words. 57.1% matched the sound of new terms with the sound of words known earlier, followed by 51.4% pictured new words in their minds, 42.9% grouped the words by type, and 40% looked over the new words several times. Furthermore, 37.1% used rhymes to remember new words and wrote the words on a card, followed by 31.4% recalled words learned, and 28.6% tried writing sentences using the new terms. This is shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Vocabulary – Memorizing New Words

Strategy	Frequent	Seldom	Never
I group the words by type	42.9	37.1	20
I match the sound of the new words with the sound of a word I know	57.1	31.4	11.4
I use rhymes to remember new words	37.1	48.6	14.3
I make pictures of new words in my mind	51.4	34.3	14.3
I write the new word in a sentence	28.6	42.9	28.6
I write the new word on a card	37.1	37.1	25.7
I go over new words several times at first	40	45.7	14.3
Later I recall words I learned earlier	31.4	42.9	25.7

Findings revealed that most students listen to essential words and ask frequent questions to develop their listening skills (Rose & Yunus, 2016). By focusing on the terms, they can grasp the meaning and comprehend a better understanding of what others intend to say. Besides, questions led to curiosity where they were interested in knowing more about the listened content; they probably listened again to repeated words and, of course, perceived broader knowledge in the area (Rutherford, 2014). The questioning strategy also portrays that the listener was concentrating on the conversation and developed a sincere interest to continue listening. This allowed the interconnection of ideas to respond positively towards a communication through gestures like nodding, humming, expressing emotions and feelings, agreeing, and denying a fact (Thomas, 2019).

Most students preferred starting a conversation with their peers (Karim, 2019; Wolf & Phung, 2019), probably because they had a topic to begin with and enough ideas to deliver. They also sought others' help to improvise speaking (Thomas, 2019). Speech guidance usually motivated (Wolf & Phung, 2019) them to speak and participate in the conversation. They could ask for suitable words (Karim, 2019) appropriate for the intended situation. Students also tried making the sounds of words several times until they could say them well. This strategy involved repetition in the memory, so students went through trials and error processes to gain a stronger base in pronouncing the words and used them to speak.

Students looked for easily readable materials (Peter, Yunus & Mohamed, 2016) that usually contain fewer pages, fewer words, large fonts, and simple words. In this way, they were more attracted to the reading materials and showed an interest in reading habits (Manprit & Mohamed, 2011). They looked at pictures and texts under it to comprehend meaning and understanding of the reading materials (He & Hutson, 2018; Rose & Yunus, 2016). Through images, students could illustrate characters and happenings besides building prediction skills to know passage content.

Colourful and attractive pictures (Kumaresan & Yunus, 2016) with texts relate to content and

hold students' attention span in reading. It further enhances their imaginary skills in promoting language learning opportunities (Peter, Yunus & Mohamed, 2016). They can imagine the words related to the pictures in their mind before proceeding with the reading. The pre-reading strategies interest students to explore knowledge in more profound means. Moreover, students make reading easier by guessing (Sumaiya, 2019) the meaning by using clues from other parts of the passage. Hints are keywords that provide some ideas (Arulchelvan, Veramuthu, Singh & Yunus, 2019) about what the reading text is all about. In this way, they look for easily understandable words from other passages. They use them as clues to predict and understand the meanings of compound words (Wolf & Phung, 2019).

Furthermore, they read a lot (Sumaiya, 2019; Kumaresan & Yunus, 2016) to gain a better understanding of reading materials. When they are exposed to a variety of reading materials such as storybooks, non-fictions encyclopedias, magazines, newspapers, and articles, they go through thousands of similar and different words, phrases, and sentences. So, they spend more time reading various materials, try to connect the knowledge, and practice reading skills in beneficial ways (Sumaiya, 2019). They also might come across similar content in two or three different languages. Therefore, their vocabulary power in more language can be strengthened as well as increasing pronunciation, intonation, and comprehension skills.

Students usually seek guidance to get the word or phrase they intend to write (Karim, 2019; Wolf & Phung, 2019; Kumaresan & Yunus, 2016). When they ask for a friends' help, they receive ideas, words, and phrases that kindle their interest to write. Before writing, they plan and make class notes in the language. In this way, students brainstorm ideas and draft the flow to be transferred into neat, legible writing (Arulchelvan, Veramuthu, Singh & Yunus, 2019). They are planning to always craft ways to organise ideas and turn them into meaningful write-ups by adding more details, examples, and language modifiers in the drafts (Febriyanti, Dewi & Dewi, 2018).

Significantly, students opt to write letters to friends to improve their writing skills (Chamot & Robbins, 2005). When they receive a response from their peers, students read the letter content and study the sentence structure and patterns as well as identify new words to be used in their next writing pieces. Writing letters also encourages students to pour out their feelings in informal ways. They feel motivated (Phung, 2017) to express their mind as they have someone to read their write-ups and respond. The continuing writing process makes them better independent writers in the language (Febriyanti, Dewi & Dewi, 2018).

Students use vocabulary strategies to memorise new words. They prefer matching the sound of the new words with the sound of words they have known earlier. Possibly, words beginning and ending with similar letters would be their choice to link the sounds (Kumaresan & Yunus, 2016). Like this, they can recognize the words' pronunciation and store in memory to be retrieved later. Importantly, students picture new words in their mind

(Peter, Yunus & Mohamed, 2016). They probably build the spelling of words in their mind before uttering them. So, they compare and contrast words learned earlier, connect with its graphemes and phonemes to identify new words' systems.

Students also grouped the words based on their types (Sumaiya, 2019). For example, they arrange words based on categories such as nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, conjunctions, subjects, and objects. Based on types, it is easier to remember and recall whenever necessary. Learners also go over new words several times so they could scan the words and save them in their memory (Sumaiya, 2019; Thomas, 2019). Repetition of the words allows students to have an intense connection with them and review them in speaking and writing purposes (Peter, Yunus & Mohamed, 2016).

Figure 1. LLS Categories

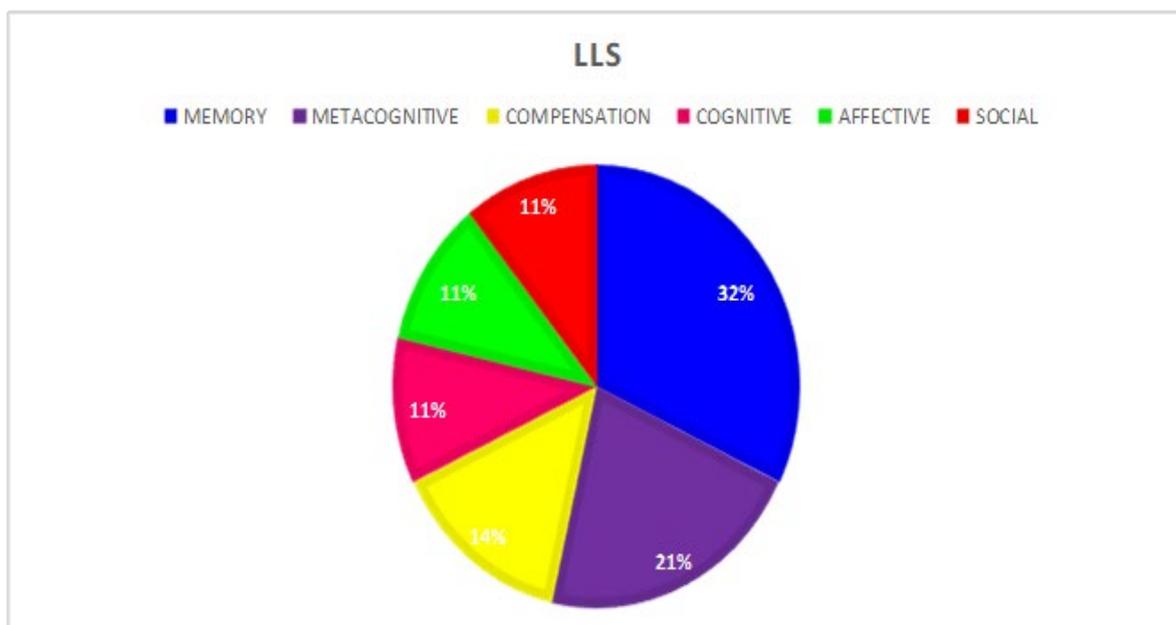


Figure 1 displays the language learning strategy categories employed by Form 2 learners. Based on the findings, memory strategy (32%) was prominently occupied by learners. They make sounds, use pictures, read a lot, match tones, do mental imagination, picture words, link different ways, use rhymes, and recall words. Similar findings were revealed by Gani, Kahirisman & Samad (2018) as rural learners apply pictures, sound similarities, and keywords in strengthening their language learning. For instance, students used sentences to remember the new English words easily, reviewed the lesson they have learned, remember the placings of the words to help them recall. Interestingly, they preferred using an online (Chang, Liu & Paas, 2018) or offline dictionary to grasp the meanings of new words (Kormos, 2019; Khokhar & Sangi, 2018).

Next, learners use the metacognitive strategy (21%) by doing self-learning, note-taking, letter

writing, planning, making a correction, and evaluating their work. They manage their learning (Febriyanti, Dewi & Dewi, 2018) by monitoring mistakes, evaluating tasks, and making a priority of needs and preferences (Maureen, 2018). These ways allow them to involve in self-exploration (Purwanti, 2015) and gain knowledge at their own pace without being bound by any restrictions (Maureen, 2018; Gani, Khairisman & Samad, 2018). They feel free to enjoy their learning tasks (Anlimachie, 2019; Tabrizi, 2018) without the need to worry about making mistakes. The more mistakes they make, the more they tend to assess and learn from it.

Compensation strategy (14%), on the other hand, has been used by learners to ask for help, guess the meaning, translate from the mother-tongue, and grouping words. Guessing is commonly used by language learners to handle their limitations (Sumaiya, 2019). They prefer predicting what will occur next in a conversation (Khokhar & Sangi, 2018). Similarly, surveys show that learners use gestures during an interaction if they face a lack of words to speak. Learners also acclaimed that they use synonym words to accelerate their vocabulary power in speaking. Simultaneously, compensation can reduce their anxiety while speaking, boosting maturity, and set a comfort zone to independently begin a conversation (Yunus & Saifudin, 2019; Zhang & Lu, 2015).

Other strategies, namely cognitive, affective, and social (11%), were equally applied by learners. By using the cognitive approach, they listen to words, repeat, and practise new words. Referring to cognitive strategies, students remembered new words by saying or writing them regularly (Jafari & Kafipour, 2013). However, notes, letters, messages, or reports were seldom used, more likely because rural learners had a lower vocabulary and less chances to interact with their surroundings (Lahmar, 2019). Therefore, they were eager to translate one word to another in understanding the sentences while reading.

Besides, they stabilise their emotions and portray a happy attitude by choosing accessible materials, doing exciting things, and adding fun elements through the affective strategy (Khokhar & Sangi, 2018; Mason & Payant, 2018). They overcame their fear by either relaxing or forcing themselves to speak instead of remaining silent. Students felt relieved and proud when they contributed somewhat in language skills (Vaish, 2018). By noticing their anxiety level in English lessons quite frequently, learners always tried to put it under control or divert towards overcoming it by facing the challenges.

Finally, they infuse social strategy in learning the language by asking questions, beginning a conversation, and asking for words or phrases from others. Through communication (Wette & Furneaux, 2018), learners always strive to attempt better fluency in learning English. They regularly wanted to hear constructive feedback from peers and teachers (Wette & Furneaux, 2018; Zhang & Lu, 2015) to improve their speaking skills. To perceive information well, students tend to find ways of bringing about topics into a discussion, arguments, negotiations



to make understandings brighter. As they exchanged queries in groups (Rutherford, 2014), students went through some phrases in repetitions and built stronger basics in communicating the language. In this way, they cooperated with friends and others (Zhang & Lu, 2015) in using the language successfully.

Conclusion

Learners are using more of writing and memory strategies, followed by metacognitive and compensation. Thus, educationists could use plenty of audiovisual based materials such as pictures, videos, rhymes, songs, poems, and movies in teaching language skills. Moreover, they can infuse various self-evaluation methods to gain instant feedback. Besides, including categorising, predictions of events and happenings and direct translations can be considered in the language classrooms. Educators should always promote language learning that incorporates fun, easy, and exciting elements. When learners encounter language from simple to complex with added humour values, they will be highly motivated, confident, and enthusiastic in using the language.

So, digital tools and authentic materials such as comics, graphics and social media could be integrated into the language learning processes. Learners can be exposed to authentic language usage environments and field trips for them to discover real usage. Significantly, their language learning would be more efficient when they fit into cooperative and collaborative tasks. Discussion, sharing, negotiating, and exchanging ideas will enable information transfer to take place effectively among peers. They will learn from mistakes while correcting others' errors. Simultaneous learning is crucial in lingual communication since learners provide and receive information in various ways.

Provided activities are encouraged to include communicative learning, this contains the present scenario in education and is attached to the learners' surroundings. Significantly, exposure to new language input in an absorbable amount would open the path for learners to dive into language discovery, so they can consistently upgrade themselves. A mutual understanding and trust-based relationship between educators and learners go hand in hand as to offer chances in recognising and implementing favourable strategies. It would be very beneficial for the students to approach language learning in as an appropriate and effective means as possible. Indeed, students themselves should employ the desired strategies to meet the necessary curriculum requirements while considering consistent progress in language development.

Acknowledgment

This project was supported by Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia under the research grant no. GG-2019-077 and GG-2018-001.

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