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Language learning strategies employed by successful year 4 primary schools pupils in Shah Alam

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ABSTRACT

Research on language learning strategies has been conducted in Malaysia as well. However, these studies did not include the language learning strategies employed by the successful primary school pupils in Shah Alam. The aim of the study is to identify language learning strategies employed by successful Year 4 primary school pupils in Shah Alam. A total of 30 Year 4 pupils who are 10 years old were chosen from a primary school located in the industrial area in Shah Alam, Selangor by using the purposive sampling method. Data was collected using a quantitative method approach. The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire with 35 items which is adapted from the Language Strategy Use Survey by Oxford and Chi, 2004 and also Gursoy, 2003. Collected data were analyzed using the descriptive approach. The findings portrayed that vocabulary enhancement strategy is employed mostly by the pupils compared to other learning strategies. The implication of this study may benefit ESL teachers, learners, and other researchers to enhance the effectiveness of English language teaching.

Keywords— Language learning strategies, Primary school, Successful, Industrial area

1. INTRODUCTION

There are abundant of research on language leaning strategies conducted since 1970. The researchers' interest on this topic begins with the work of J. Rubin (1975) entitled "What the" Good Language Learner "can teach us" (Ranjan and Philominraj, 2019). Rubin was so curious to discover why some learners are able to perform better than others when they learnt second language and also to identify what are the characteristics they possessed (Panzachi and Luchini, 2015). Researchers in Malaysia are also contributing their attentiveness to this field of area too. Due to the introduction of 21st century learning concept among all schools nationwide, teachers are demanded to shift from teacher-centred approach to learner-centred approach. Learners are now playing a new role in school which is "self-directed learners" to get them ready for life-long learning (Hashim, 2014). Apart from that, pupils in Malaysia are also encouraged to be proficient in Bahasa Malaysia and English language as what has been outlined in shift 2 of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education, 2013). Thus, when there is a significant shift on teacher's and students' role in teaching and learning processes, more priority is given to the language learning strategies (Rajasekhar, 2019). It has also leads to the increasing amount of research conducted by language teachers regarding this topic (Mukminin et.al, 2018). Teachers are expected not to have a doubt on language learning strategies and to use them regularly to improve the learner's performance (O'Malley's, 1987 as cited in Akter, 2019). Despite the high interest on language learning strategies, the English language achievement among primary school pupils in Malaysia is still below average. Their inability to grasp English language after eleven years of learning has become a big issue among the scholars (Weng, Yunus and Embi, 2016). Griffiths and Oxford (2014) stated that reason being is lack of exposure about language learning strategies. Hence, this leads to the aim of the study which is to identify language learning strategies employed by successful Year 4 primary school pupils in Shah Alam.

This study is conducted to identify what are the language learning strategies employed by successful language learners of Year 4 pupils in Shah Alam in accordance to their writing skills, reading skills, listening skills, speaking skills, vocabulary enhancement and grammar improvement. This study will also identify the overall frequency of language learning strategies employed by successful language learners among year 4 primary school pupils. This research study will be guided by the following research questions:

- (a) What are the strategies employed by the successful Year 4 primary school pupils to improve:
- Writing skill
 - Reading skill

- Listening skill
- Speaking skill
- Vocabulary enhancement
- Grammar improvement

(b) What is the frequency of language learning strategies employed by successful Year 4 primary schools pupils?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will first discuss on the definitions of language learning strategies and the emergence of variety terms for language learning strategy. Secondly, it explores problems faced by scholars to categorize the language learning strategies plus the classification will be explained too. Thirdly, characteristics of successful language learners and the purpose of identifying successful language learners' learning strategies will be presented. Finally, the importance of language learning strategies will be elaborated.

2.1. Language learning strategy

Each learner in school is unique and has own individual charm. They come with a different educational experiences, knowledge, cultural background and personal beliefs towards English language learning (Akter, 2019). Therefore, the use of language learning strategies among them will differ too according to their own social context (Flora and Raja, 2019). Teachers must cater to individual differences among learners in order to provide the best learning experience. Hong Shi (2017) depicted individual differences influence the nature and the frequency of language learning strategies being employed. Nevertheless, regardless of learners' individual differences, all of them are actually employing language learning strategies consciously or subconsciously when processing information in the language classroom (Ranjan and Philominraj, 2019). Besides, strategies are also being used at all stages of learning though the language learners might not mindful of them (Lavasahi and Faryades, 2011).

Rubin (1975) stated that learning strategy is the strategy used by the learners. Oxford (1990) mentioned learning strategy as steps taken by the learners to enrich their own learning. In terms of second language learning strategy, Oxford defined it as any measures taken by students to increase their language skills in the second language. Meanwhile, Cohen (1998) explained language learning strategy as the processes undertaken by the learners in order to improve their learning through storage, retention, recall and application of knowledge about the language. Similarly, Ellis (1994) suggested language learning strategy as any mental or behavioural activity related to the process of language acquisition. For instance, a learner uses synonym to guess the meaning of new words is a form of mental activity while repeating new words to remember them is a form of behavioural activity (Ellis, 1997). Apart from that, Chamot (2004) pointed out being conscious to achieve learning goal as a form of learning strategy. Due to the different definitions provided by the scholars, research on language learning strategy has been difficult. Akter (2019) portrayed several terms in his article related to the learning strategy like 'tactic' by Seliger (1984), 'procedures' by O' Malley et.al (1985) and 'learning behaviour' by Politzer and Macaro (2006). Hence, the issue of various definitions for language learning strategy is called "definitional fuzziness of language learning strategies" (Tseng, Dornyei and Schmitt, 2006).

2.2 Classification of language learning strategy

In order to differentiate successful language learners with unsuccessful language learners, a classification of language learning strategies is needed. However, most scholars find it difficult to classify the learning strategies accordingly. Ranjan and Philominraj (2019) demonstrated several reasons to this issue which are the individual difference in learning, variables among the learners, environmental factors, unnoticeable strategies and non-existence of theoretical framework for classification. Ellis (1986 as cited in Rajasekhar, 2019) talked about the problem too as learning strategies could only be assumed from one's language behaviour and is not obviously seen. Furthermore, classification of language learning strategy is a bit problematic because there is no agreement on what it constitutes and how it should be recognized and measured (Sykes, 2015).

Nevertheless, the Oxford classification of language learning strategy is deemed to be the best among all. It is because it provides clear description of what a good strategy should consist. A strategy should be relatable to the L2 task, a strategy must suits students' learning style and a strategy must also able to be utilized effectively by the learners and linkable to other relevant strategies (Oxford, 2003 as cited in Hong Shi, 2017). Oxford (1990 as cited in Thomas, 2019) categorized learning strategies into two; direct strategies and indirect strategies. Direct strategy provides direct leaning and support mental process of language in contrast indirect strategy support learning indirectly but still significant for learning. Memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies fall into direct strategies meanwhile metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies goes into indirect strategies. Another classification of learning strategy was proposed by Joan Rubin (1981). She divided them into strategies which affect learning directly and indirectly. There are clarification, monitoring, memorizing, guessing inductive inference, deductive rea-soning and practice which affect learning directly. On the other hand, creating op-portunities for practice and production tricks are what affect learning indirectly. Other than that, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) suggested three main strategies; metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and affective strategies. Metacognitive strategy involves selective attention, planning and monitoring; cognitive strategy includes rehearsal, organization, inferencing, summarizing, reducing, imagery, transfer and elaboration and lastly affective strategy comprises cooperation, clarification and self-talk. Apart from that, Cohen (2000) divided the learning strategy into 4 groups which are cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies.

2.3. Characteristics of successful language learners

The notion of successful language learners has becomes significant day by day. According to Hong Shi (2017) successful learners employ many strategies regularly in learning and they adapt the strategies according to the suitability. Oxford (2008 as cited in Weng, Yunus and Embi (2016) indicated that a good language learner differed from the weak learner in terms of their ability to

use various learning strategy and select the most appropriate one which is helpful to solve the given task. Rubin (1975) portrayed characteristics of good language learners which are accurate guesser, strong desire to communicate using the language learnt, not afraid of making mistakes, attend to form, practicing the language, monitoring others and own speech and also attend to meaning. Naiman, Frohlich, Todesco and Stern (1978) suggested that good language learners are those who are taking part actively in language learning, aware of the language system, perceive language as a form of communication, always in control of their own emotion and evaluate their language performance. Stern (1983 as cited in Othman, 2017) described good language learners are ready to study and practice, persistent in revising the language until the process is complete and they also analyse language to use suitable learning techniques.

The main reason why scholars investigate the characteristics of successful language learner is to give opportunities to all language learners to adopt and adapt similar strategies while learning (Sykes, 2015). Chamot (2001) explained two main goals of the research which are to make a comparison of the strategies practice by successful and less successful language learners and to help less successful learners improving their language skill. The significance of the research is further discussed by Oxford (1990 as cited in Rajasekhar, 2019) in which strategies are very favourable as they make learning simpler, faster, individualized, self-monitored, transferable and teachable. Besides, strategies are also important because people associate them with successfulness in learning. However, practicing similar strategies as successful learners does not guarantee a hundred percent success as there are other variables influencing the learners too (Hismanoglu, 2000).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study aimed to identify language learning strategies employed by successful Year 4 primary school pupils in a school located in the industrial area, Shah Alam, Selangor. The participants were chosen based on their English grade during the beginning of the year examination. The best 30 pupils with grade A and B were then picked as a sample. This study occupied a quantitative survey method in collecting and analysing data. The ages of the participants were 10 years old. The instrument used in this study is a survey adapted from Language Strategy Use Survey by Oxford and Chi, 2004 and also Gursoy 2003. It consists of 35 items regarding four major English language skills; reading, writing, listening, and speaking as well as acquisition of vocabulary and grammar. There were 5 to 6 statements for each language skill, vocabulary and grammar acquisition strategy. A 3-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 3 is used in this questionnaire. The 3-point Likert scale is (1) No (2) Sometimes and (3) Yes. The adapted survey was produced by referring to the survey invented by Gursoy (2013). He mentioned that most inventories created previously listed strategies used by adults and not quite suitable for children age 9 to 11. Thus, a new survey was created after combining items from Oxford and Chi (2004) and also Gursoy (2003). The data was organized in a table form and analysed using descriptive approach. A pilot test was carried out for the survey questionnaires where Year 5 pupils who score A and B in previous English examination were chosen.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research will be explored under different parts which are listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary and grammar. Discussion of strategies preferred by students will be further explained in the discussion section.

4.1 Writing skill

Table 1: Writing strategies

S no.	Items	Yes (%)	Sometimes (%)	No (%)
1	I always practice writing in English	33	50	17
2	I write notes in English	20	17	63
3	I use dictionary when I want to write	44	33	23
4	I read what I wrote to check if it is correct	37	57	6
5	I ask someone to correct my writing	50	20	30
6	I write in Malay words and then translate into English	50	17	33

Based on Table 1, pupils mostly preferred to ask someone to correct their writing and translate Malay words into English. Both items have the highest frequency of 50%. When pupils ask others to correct what they write, they use social strategy to facilitate learning. Zara (2012 as cited in Suran and Yunus, 2016) mentioned that asking others is a form of social behaviour which facilitates learning. The next strategy frequently used by the pupils is compensation strategy in which pupils use dictionary when writing with the percentage of 44%. On the other hand, the least preferred strategy to improve their writing skill is writing notes in English with 63% of the whole pupils. ‘Notes writing’ seems like a form text copying for them.

4.2 Reading skill

Table 2: Reading strategies

S no.	Items	Yes (%)	Sometimes (%)	No (%)
7	I read text/sentences more than once	43	50	7
8	I underline keywords when I read	30	20	50
9	I check to see how much I understand	37	50	13
10	I stop and think of what I have just read	50	33	17
11	I guess the meaning using clues from other part of the text	37	33	30
12	I use dictionary to find the meaning of words	50	37	13

From Table 2, we can see that two strategies which were employed frequently by the pupils are to stop and think of what they have just read and using dictionary to find meaning of words. Both items were chosen by 50% of the participants. When pupils stop to think of what they read, it shows a sign of successful learning strategy where they monitor their own progress (Stern 1975 as cited in Hong Shi, 2017). The second strategy with 37% goes to item 11 which is guessing meaning of words using clues from the text. Using dictionary and guessing the meaning of words are the strategies listed under compensation strategy. Research done by Mukminin et.al (2018) showed that young language learners use compensation strategies more due to their greater lack of knowledge. The least preferred strategy employed for reading skill is to underline keywords when reading with the score of 50%. It might be because young learners have limited cognitive abilities to identify keywords given in the text (Gursoy, 2013).

4.3 Listening skill

Table 3: Listening strategies

S no.	Items	Yes (%)	Sometimes (%)	No (%)
13	I watch TV shows in English	43	47	10
14	I listen when I heard people use English	40	43	17
15	I try to remember unfamiliar sounds I heard	47	40	13
16	I ask the person talking to repeat the words	37	23	40
17	I guess the meaning from the person's movement	17	57	26
18	I guess the meaning from the person's tone	30	20	50

From the data above, Item 15 where pupils try to remember unfamiliar sounds they heard has the highest percentage of 47%. The data shows that pupils employ cognitive strategy for listening skill. Oxford (1990) mentioned that cognitive strategy has the highest tendency of being used frequently by the language learner. Other than that, 57% of the pupils choose to sometimes guess the meaning of words they heard based on the person's movement. The compensation strategy is employed next after the cognitive strategy. Young learners age 10 to 11 do not have much sources of language thus using dictionary is another way of getting language input. Nevertheless, the least chosen strategy is Item 18 guessing the meaning of words heard based on the person's tone with 50% followed by Item 16 asking the person to repeat the words heard with 40% of the pupils.

4.4 Speaking skill

Table 4: Speaking strategies

S no.	Items	Yes (%)	Sometimes (%)	No (%)
19	I say the words many times until I can say correctly	57	40	3
20	I start a conversation in English	37	33	30
21	I ask a person to correct me when I talk	23	33	43
22	I use Malay words to help me when I speak	23	40	37
23	I use body language to help me when I speak	33	23	44
24	I plan what I want to talk	53	27	20

For speaking strategy, 57% pupils say the words many times until they can say it correctly. Cognitive strategy is being employed more than other strategies. Flora and Raja (2019) explained cognitive strategy is mostly preferred as it helps to directly process the language. 53% of the pupils also plan what they want to talk. Pupils are applying the metacognitive strategy too by preparing what they want to say beforehand. Texcan and Deneme (2016) described how young learners frequently applied metacognitive strategy such as planning when they are learning new language. On the other hand, 40% of the pupils sometimes use Malay words to help them while speaking. The least preferred strategy in speaking is using body language with 44% of them agreed with. Then, 43% of the pupils did not prefer to ask a person to correct them when they are talking. When the learners' speaking mistakes are corrected, they feel that their confidence and motivational level becomes low. Sykes (2015) found out that having a motivation is very important to ensure successfulness in learning.

4.5 Vocabulary enhancement

Table 5: Vocabulary enhancement skill

S no.	Items	Yes (%)	Sometimes (%)	No (%)
25	I use rhymes to remember new words	7	37	56
26	I make a picture of new words in my mind	27	43	30
27	I write the new word in a sentence	60	27	13
28	I write the new word on a card	7	27	66
29	I go over the new words many times	40	53	7
30	I recall the new words I learnt	27	27	46

The data in Table 5 showed that 60% of the pupils write the new words they learnt in a sentence. This finding is differed from Weng, Yunus and Embi (2016) where pupils did not favour using the new words in a sentence. The reason being might be because the pupils highly value the roles of practicing the language. Thu (2009) explained about Anderson's Adaptive Control of Thought Model where practice and a long time of study are effective in producing the language. Meanwhile, 40% of the pupils go over the new words many times and 27% recall the new words learnt and use rhymes to remember the words. The least favourite strategy for vocabulary enhancement is writing the new word on a card with 66% of the pupils agreed with.

4.6 Grammar improvement

Table 6: Grammar improvement strategies

S no.	Items	Yes (%)	Sometimes (%)	No (%)
31	I memorize grammar rules	20	40	40
32	I try to use grammar rules I learnt when I write	23	53	24
33	I correct my friends when they use wrong grammar	40	47	13
34	I do many exercises on grammar rules	23	40	37
35	I check whether I use grammar rules correctly	43	27	30

Table 6 portrays data collected for grammar improvement strategies. Among all strategies listed above, Item 33 is the most preferred strategies to learn grammar. 43% of the pupils learn grammar by checking whether they use grammar correctly while 40% of the pupils correct their friends if they use wrong grammar. Pupils are self-monitoring their own learning as well as others surrounding them. This is one of the characteristics of successful language learners explained by Rubin (1975). On the other hand, strategy which is least preferred is memorizing the grammar rules with 40% of them responded no. Yang (1992 as cited in Texcan and Deneme, 2016) also found out that young learners did not prefer memorizing when they learnt. It was followed by Item 34, doing many exercises on grammar rules with 37% of pupils.

5. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In a conclusion, the research provides enlightenments to teachers, learners and other researchers who are showing interests in this field. Lessard-Clouston (1997) mentioned good teachers are those who teach their learners how to use language learning strategies. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to expose learners with the language learning strategies and teach them how to make use of the strategies according to their needs and suitability. Besides, teachers must give rooms to the learners to try and practice various learning strategies. By providing appropriate learning context, it allows the learners to do some experiment with the learning strategies so that they will know what suits them best. Meanwhile, learners are being taught on how to become more autonomous in planning their own learning. They are given with a better insight on strategies they could employ when learning specific skills in the language. Each language skill comes with different learning strategies though some of them are overlapping. Nevertheless, the ability to adapt and adopt learning strategy is very helpful to improve the learners' language skill. Hopefully, the result of this study will be helpful to those researchers who want to have a better understanding of this topic. Future researchers are suggested to focus more on factors which influence language learning strategies use by the primary school pupils in Malaysia.

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