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Improving Reading Skills Using Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

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ABSTRACT

Language learning strategies are regarded as one of the most classic and conventional learning methods to be employed by language learners. In language learning, reading is regarded as one of the most resourceful method to be employed by language learners to improve their productive skills namely writing and speaking. However, little attention has been given to the aforementioned strategies to be as a mean to improve language proficiency in general. The study aims to discover language learners' most preferred strategies to be employed in improving their reading skills in general. Distribution of questionnaires was conducted to 37 secondary school students participated in this study. Results revealed that cognitive and planning strategies are the most preferred strategies by the students as the students were given more time and flexibility in planning their own reading. Further investigation is suggested to be conducted to a different context such as in tertiary institution.



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Introduction

English language proficiency has become one of the primary concerns of every individual especially in countries that regards English as second language. One of the most concerning issues in language learning and teaching are, firstly the unsatisfactory level of language proficiency among language learners and secondly, the fact that despite so many methodologies have been used by language teachers, there have been no significant changes to students' English language proficiency (Bergey et. al, 2017). Considering the factors contributed to the issues, previous scholars reported that one possible reason to this phenomenon is that the students do not have appropriate learning strategies. In most of the studies on second language learning, is reported that students' performance can be improved by following certain strategies and that the appropriate use of strategies enables learners to learn effectively and efficiently (Tang & Tian, 2015). ESL learners in Malaysia, especially the Malays, realise the importance of English in their academic as well as social life (Kamaludin, 2005). However, an inadequate amount of attention was given to the language despite the official status of second language that English possesses. Malay students especially in a rural geographical setting do not utilise the strategies as much as the students in urban areas (Arthi & Srinivasan, 2018). The situation resulted an unsatisfactory proficiency of English among students from rural areas. The phenomenon caters an agitating

notion to language teachers as English language will be widely used in a tertiary education after the students graduated from secondary school.

In the earlier studies of language learning strategies, most scholars were inclined to investigate the strategies used by successful language learners in order to apply the similar strategies to unsuccessful language learners. Studies among that period were mainly about listing the features of successful language learners (Mat Teh & Embi, 2010). Around 1980s, scholars had started to widen a new dimension of language learning strategies (Starks, 2018; Monos, 2016; Wigfield et.al., 2016). Those scholars developed a newly established taxonomies and theories by classifying the strategies according to main categories. Studies related to the relationship of language learning strategies and the achievement in language were also being established. By employing the SILL and personal achievement report as the main instruments, Wharton (2000) conducted a study of relationship between the performance in language and the strategies employed by the students. 678 students from Singapore who learnt Japanese or France as a foreign language became the participants in this study. The study indicated that the most frequently used strategies employed by the students are social, compensation and metacognitive. On the other hand, the least frequently used strategies by the students are cognitive, memory and affective. The analysis from ANOVA and Post Hoc Scheffe reported that students who regarded their performance in language as “excellent” tend to use language learning strategies significantly as compared to the students who regard themselves as “mediocre”. Wharton proposed that students who acknowledged their decent performance will employ language learning strategies more frequently, thus will improve their performance in English significantly. Therefore, the higher the use of strategies, the better their performance in learning a language is. A scholar, Supian (2003) has also conducted a study concerning language learning strategies. The study was conducted to form four students who were learning Malay language grammar. The researcher was using a number of instruments such as thinking aloud, observation, interview, survey and pre-test and post-test study to the students, 20 students were chosen in obtaining the data. The most frequently used strategies by the students were cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies. In addition, the researcher has also found out several new strategies employed by the students in learning the language namely spiritual strategies and attitude strategies.

The current study was conducted provides the insights to the teaching of English in Malaysia particularly in secondary schools. By involving the students of secondary school, the study illustrated several effectiveness of language learning strategies that can be employed to improve the students’ learning of English. Since the study centralizes the strategies employed by language learners’, it enhanced the motivation of employing language learning strategies that can directly or indirectly facilitate the language learning. This study may also benefit the teachers, students and the researchers of this field.

The main objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between the reading skills strategy use and the students’ performance in English language. Another objective is to identify most frequently used language learning strategies by the students to improve their reading skills.

Method

The current study employed a survey research design comprising of data obtained from a survey questionnaire namely the Language Strategy Use Survey adapted by Oxford (2003). 37 form four students from a secondary school located in a suburban area in Selangor were purposely selected to participate in this study. These students were from different classes and possessed varied proficiency in English. Data were collected to investigate the preferred strategies used by the students in enhancing their speaking skills. Distribution of questionnaire for quantitative data was carried out according to the respondents’ convenience and completed set of questionnaires were returned to the researchers on the same day. Data from the questionnaire were gathered, quantified and presented in the form of computed frequencies, means and standard deviations. A Pearson Correlation analysis was conducted to identify is there is any relationship between the use of reading skills strategies and students’ performance in English language.

Results and Discussions

The study aims to identify the use of reading skills strategies and their correlation to students’ proficiency in English language. Students’ proficiency was identified through their achievement in the monthly English language test. In response to the aforementioned research objective, the data were further analysed to figure out whether there is a positive correlation between strategy use and achievement.

Reading Skills Strategies and Students’ Performance in English Language

In analyzing the relationship of reading skills strategies and students' performance in English language, Pearson Correlation coefficient (r) for the bivariate analysis of the English language performance was correlated to the language learning strategies used. These correlation coefficient analyses were established to identify if trends existed in the relationship between the independent variable (the students' language learning strategies preference) and the dependent variable (the students' performance in English subject) in the current study. The survey was conducted to 37 secondary school students from a suburban secondary school. The respondents' responses were scored and a consistency score was calculated. Pearson Correlation was used to analyse the direction of relationship between language learning strategy used and the students' performance in English language. However, the correlation generated by Pearson Correlation does not imply causality. However, it provides an insight about the relationship between two variables. The fundamental objective was to identify whether the direction of relationship is negative or positive and how strong the relationships were.

Table.1. Correlation Between Reading Skills Strategies and Students' Achievement

		Correlations	
		Marks	Reading
Marks	Pearson Correlation	1	.291*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025
	N	60	59
Reading	Pearson Correlation	.291*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	
	N	59	59

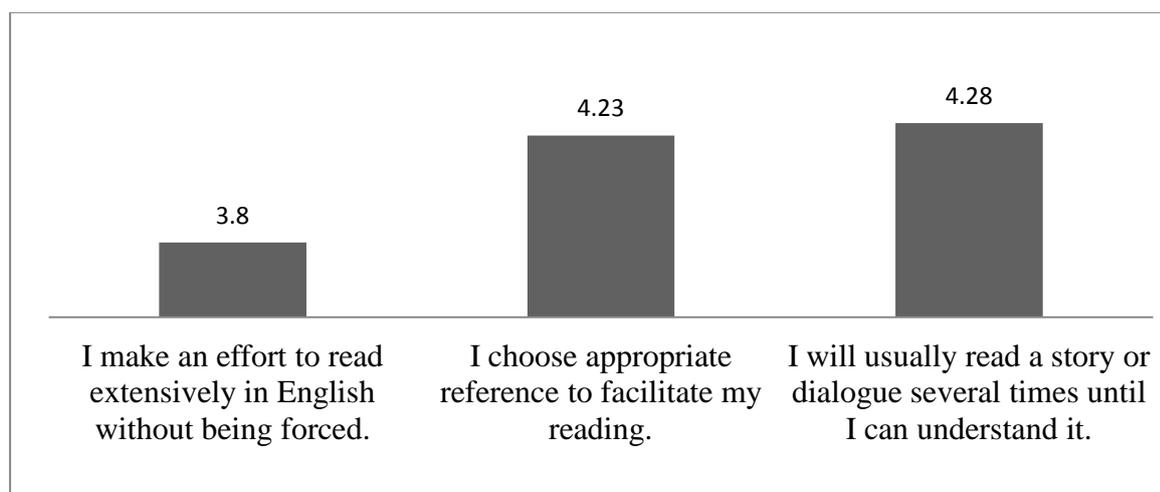
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

From the analysis of the aforementioned skills in learning language, there is also a positive correlation of variables between the amount of language learning strategies used and the students' performance in English language. From the table above, it can be assumed that there is a positive value of correlation (r) of .291 has been noted between the use of strategies and the students' performance in English language. The significant value (p) was .025. which was lower than the established significant level of 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between the increase of language learning strategies and the students' improvement in English proficiency. However, the strength of the correlation is considered as weak.

The Use Reading Skills Strategies

Analyses of the data revealed that respondents prefer to use planning strategies and cognitive strategies more than other strategies. Three most frequently employed strategies are cognitive strategies and planning strategies. The highest value of mean which is 4.2 is possessed by planning strategy in the statement: *i) I choose appropriate reference to facilitate my reading.* From the statement, it can be concluded that the respondents prefer to plan their own reading to facilitate their reading process. Another planning strategy preferred by the respondents is being depicted in the statement: *i) I make an effort to read extensively in English without being forced.* Henceforth, it can be concluded that the respondents prefer to read extensively on their own to improve their reading skills.

Figure.1. Most Frequently Used Reading Skills Strategies



Another strategy employed by the respondents is cognitive strategy. However, the strategy is quite similar to practising strategy with a slight difference in terms of mental exercise involved. The statement: “I will usually read a story or dialogue several times until I can understand it.” Showed that the respondents prefer repeated exercise in improving their English of whenever they encounter difficulties in the language. Three least frequently used strategies which marked the means ranges from 2.8.3.3 have also been identified in the current study. The strategies marked the responses ranging from “unsure” to “agree” and not “strongly agree”. The strategies include two cognitive strategies and one interpersonal strategy. Two least frequently used cognitive strategies were identified in the statements: *i) I often look for how the text is organized and pay attention to headings and subheadings.* and *ii) It is common for me to make ongoing summaries either in my mind or in the margins of the text.* Since the strategies are quite challenging and rarely used by students in schools, therefore the data of the survey showed a lower mean of the likert-scale.

Conclusion

Generally, positive correlation of the language learning strategies used and the students’ performance in English subject existed with a total correlation (r) of .255. The significant relationship value is established at .49. The existence of positive relationship depicted by the findings showed that the use of language learning strategies has impacted the students’ language performance. A correlation between each type of strategy was also noted by researcher to identify which of the strategy is preferred by the students the most. The findings revealed that planning strategies and cognitive strategies are the most highly employed strategies by the students to improve their reading skills. The analysis of the study provides some pedagogical implications to the teachers as well as the students. The information pertaining language learning strategies provides significant recommendations for the students to employ those strategies for future language learning. The execution of recommended strategies in this study will allow the students to learn the target language in the most effective way and thus will increase their achievement in the language. Researchers of the current study suggested a thorough analysis of the effectiveness of the language learning strategies used and the students’ performance in English. A pre-test and post-test study will also provide an added value and information to the researcher to assess whether the implementation of language strategies has a positive influence to the students’ performance in English language.

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