



RESEARCH PAPER

Language Learning Strategy Usage among BS English Students at University of Sindh Jamshoro: A Quantitative Analysis of Strategy Preference and Education Level of ESL Learners

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to determine which language learning strategies are most frequently employed by ESL students enrolled in BS English program at university of Sindh Jamshoro as well as to investigate the differences in preferred strategies between students in different academic years. Lack of awareness and application of effective language learning strategies causes many students to struggle in attaining desired proficiency levels in English. Thus, in last decades second language acquisition (SLA) research has placed a great deal of emphasis on language learning strategies. Using the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) data were gathered from 100 undergraduate ESL students and 80 valid responses were examined through SPSS 20. The results show that metacognitive, compensatory and cognitive strategies are commonly employed by students. It was found that junior students favored cognitive strategies while senior students used metacognitive strategies more frequently. Future studies may carry out and assess focused educational interventions that take proficiency and demographic variables into account in order to improve the use of efficient language learning techniques.

KEYWORDS Educational Level, Effective Learners, ESL Learners, Language Learning Strategies, Tailored Instruction

Introduction

Learning a language involves intricate cognitive processes as well as social and emotional challenges (Rababah, 2013). The process through which language learners acquire a language has received a lot of attention in recent decades. Numerous facets of language learning have been investigated thus far such as language learning motivation, language environment, language strategies, anxiety related to learning a foreign language and so on. The focus of some studies in the field of teaching and learning second languages (L2) has shifted from instructional methods to learning strategies in the last few decades. Since the mid-1970s in particular language learners have placed greater emphasis on their own responsibility to become aware of the language learning process and recognize the value of specific strategies that have the potential to be an extremely powerful learning tool for language acquisition. In order to support the achievement of language learning objectives each learner uses specific strategies and styles (Mandasari and Oktaviani 2018; Wahyudin and Lestari, 2020; Wulandari, 2018). This assertion is consistent with the findings of Abdelheim (2015) who notes that there was an awareness that language instruction was not the governing factor in language learning success implying that language achievement depends quite heavily on the individual learners endeavors.

In many countries around the world English is regarded as the language of the twenty-first century. It has status of international language and used in almost every domain in global world (Rao, 2019) Similarly, English holds a significant place in Pakistan especially in education system. In addition to being the medium of instruction in prestigious private schools and cadet colleges it has the distinction of being the official language (Rahman 2001). According to Rahman (1997) the fact that English language instruction has been offered at all educational levels – from primary to higher education – as a compulsory or elective subject since the creation of the country. The national curriculum for English language places a strong emphasis on learning English from grade one because it recognizes its significance (Ministry of Education 2006). English language learning should be accessible to all not just the privileged as it is a necessary skill for getting into reputable universities and gaining better jobs. Existing research on language teaching and learning shows while there have been recent attempts to provide English teaching training to educators in the public and private sectors it is still lacking in many aspects and language learning strategies are rarely taken into account.

For learners, especially in multilingual contexts like Pakistan, learning a new language pose a major challenge. This problem is exacerbated in situations where students are exposed to the language only in formal educational settings like classrooms without any prior exposure at home. Students using the target language outside of the classroom still presents a challenge even after years of formal education. In addition language serves primarily as a teaching tool for social communication (Javed, 2017). Studies in language education frequently highlight the methods used by teachers attributing most of the blame for students' achievement to teachers. It seems that little progress has been made with this teacher-centered approach. Examining language learning strategies (LLSs) cause the emphasis to change to one that is learner-centered. In light of this disparity the current study intends to investigate the function of learning strategies in an EFL classroom particularly among BS students in English department at the University of Sindh Jamshoro.

Literature Review

In language education research the strategies of language learning has received a lot of attention. This is especially true when determining the traits and strategies used by proficient language learners. The goal of the groundbreaking research by researchers like Rubin Stern and Naiman (1987) is to develop their understanding of what constitutes a useful strategies used by good language learner that can be applied by any individual. The literature on language learning strategies (LLS) and learner characteristics is reviewed with an emphasis on numerous studies that investigate these components in ESL classrooms especially with English as Second Language (ESL) learners in Pakistan and foreign contexts.

Several factors that set proficient learners apart were discovered in early research on effective language learning strategies (LLS). After classifying these factors Rubin Stern and Naiman (1987) proposed that learners who were less successful might gain from using comparable strategies. The significance of emphasizing learner attributes that support successful language acquisition overall was brought to light by this seminal work. A thorough definition of LLS was given by O Malley and Chamot (1990) who defined them as the steps learners take to verify the efficacy of their learning and to choose analyze monitor organize elaborate and assess new information. This way students can better control their anxiety and feel more confident during the learning process.

Theoretical Foundation

Oxford (1990) divided LLS into direct and indirect strategies each of which served a particular purpose.

Direct Strategies

Memory Strategies: Connecting ideas in the mind using pictures and sounds going over material thoroughly and using actions.

Cognitive Strategies: Putting practice into practice sending and receiving messages deducing and applying logic and organizing information.

Compensation Strategies: Making educated guesses and getting over speech and writing obstacles.

Indirect Strategies

Metacognitive Strategies: Organizing and planning learning assessing learning and centering learning.

Affective Strategies: Controlling emotional temperature motivating oneself and lowering anxiety.

Social Strategies: Questioning collaborating and showing empathy.

Affective memory social metacognitive cognitive and compensatory strategies are among the strategies that most students employ (Mandasari and Oktavianis, 2018).

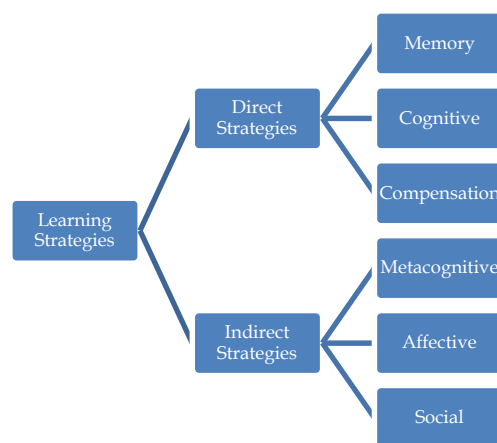


Figure 1 Taxonomy of language learning strategies by Oxford (1990)

With an emphasis on the necessity of independent learning and the integration of content instruction with language learning Javed (2017) examines the changing teaching strategies in ESL classrooms. The study emphasizes how the use of cognitive academic language learning approaches (CALLA) and content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is becoming more popular in order to improve the efficacy of ESL instruction. It reviews numerous models and theories that have been developed over the past three decades that link ESL learning with curriculum concepts and emphasizes the growing significance of learning strategies in ESL success.

In order to investigate the connection between Pakistani ESL learners attitudes regarding language acquisition and their utilization of learning strategies Sibtain Masroor

and Qasim (2020) carried out a quantitative study on one hundred participants. The study which employed the Beliefs about language learning inventory (BALLI) and Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) instruments discovered that learners primarily employed compensatory strategies and had positive beliefs about learning English. The study found relationships between different strategic elements and learners beliefs about formal oral practices indicating that beliefs affect the application of strategies. Effective language learning strategies in Pakistan can be gained insights from the findings for educators and curriculum designers.

Bashir Mehmood and Khan (2021) used a mixed-method approach with 250 preparatory school students to investigate language learning strategies among English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Cyprus. Significant relationships between strategy use gender and language proficiency were found by using Oxford's SILL to analyze language learning strategy usage. The success of language learning was positively correlated with memory cognitive and social strategies but negatively correlated with metacognitive affective and compensatory strategies. In order to enhance EFL instruction the study emphasizes how crucial it is to comprehend the variables influencing LLS.

The autonomy and language learning strategies of 76 Indonesian EFL university students were studied by Sulistiyo and Kamil (2022). The study found that students had positive perceptions of their autonomous learning abilities and were high users of metacognitive strategies using the SILL and an adapted autonomy questionnaire. Use of strategies and autonomous learning behaviors were found to be significantly correlated. According to the study learners' autonomy and strategic language acquisition can be fostered in English language classes in Indonesia.

In Karachi Ali Mankash and Ullah (2022) concentrated on vocabulary learning strategies among multilingual undergraduate ESL students. To determine the effect of vocabulary strategies on language proficiency the study examined data from 350 respondents using a cross-sectional descriptive survey design. According to the findings vocabulary learning should take into account each students individual needs and cultural background. Intensive reading strategies were also highly rated. In order to increase the language proficiency of ESL learners the study highlights the necessity of providing them with varied and pertinent vocabulary instruction.

Using a quantitative survey with 200 freshmen Chandaran and Hashim (2022) investigated language learning strategies among ESL undergraduate students in Malaysia. Students typically employ their preferred strategies to enhance their language skills according to the study which identified preferred LLS using the SILL. In order to improve students English language learning language educators should concentrate on facilitating programs that correspond with students LLS according to the findings.

An overview of language learning strategies was presented by Ahmad, Mohammad and Yaad (2022) who emphasized the strategies contribution to improving learners' motivation, confidence and control over their learning. According to the study affective strategies were used the least frequently and cognitive, metacognitive, memory, social and compensatory strategies were the most preferred. The results highlight, how critical it is to employ a variety of tactics in order to promote effective language learning.

The preferences of language learning strategies among Pakistani ESL undergraduate students were investigated by Qadir, Fareed and Brohi (2023). The study used the SILL to compare how high and low achievers used different strategies. The strategies that high achievers favored were cognitive and metacognitive while low

achievers favored affective and compensatory. The findings emphasize the necessity of customized strategy training to assist a wide range of learners.

Khuram Sarwat and Jabeen (2023) identified language learning strategies used by graduate ESL learners in Pakistan. The study combined a quantitative design with descriptive analysis. The results demonstrated that students used cognitive, affective, social and metacognitive strategies to enhance their language learning. Teaching and learning outcomes may be improved according to the study by identifying and supporting effective LLS.

In rural Malaysian primary schools Joachim and Shah (2023) looked into the language learning strategies used by grade six students. Using the SILL the study discovered that compensatory and memory strategies were most commonly employed whereas affective and metacognitive strategies were least. The results imply that in order to facilitate successful language acquisition ESL teachers in rural areas must modify their pedagogical approaches.

The body of research emphasizes on the Importance of language learning strategies for ESL instruction. Effective language learners use a variety of tactics to effectively manage their learning process. The selection and efficacy of these strategies are greatly influenced by the cultural background and personal beliefs of each learner. Teachers can create more successful culturally sensitive language learning programs by taking these dynamics into account. This will eventually help ESL students become more proficient in the language.

Material and Methods

The study achieves its objectives through quantitative research approach. According to Creswell (1994) quantitative research entails the utilization of numerical data and statistical procedures to test hypotheses or theories and establish their validity. This method is impartial and objective offering a wide population results that are accurate dependable and efficient – along with being more authentic and efficient (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002). A cross-sectional survey design is used for this investigation. In educational research surveys are a tried-and-true technique that gather information via questionnaires to comprehend views and opinions regarding particular phenomena (Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2012). Compared to other techniques like field experiments or case studies the cross-sectional design is thorough and requires less time because it enables the researcher to analyze multiple variables simultaneously from a large number of participants.

Population and Sample

Undergraduate students at the Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh Jamshoro make up the population of study. A sample of first-year and final-year students are selected based on particular attributes pertinent to the study via non-random sampling. The participants equally represents 50 male and 50 female students.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data is collected by the help of questionnaire adopted from Oxford (1990). To make data analysis easier and for authentic and specific responses, close-ended questions were used (Bryan, 2012). The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

questionnaire was created by Oxford University in 1990. It is widely used worldwide and is renowned for its thorough categorization of language learning strategies (Cohen, 2002).

1. **Descriptive Analysis:** To examine how frequently and how the participants use language learning strategies descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation is computed using SPSS for Windows 20.0. Questions about who what when where and how much a phenomenon occurs can be answered with the aid of descriptive analysis (Loeb et al. 2017).
2. **Demographic Analysis:** in order to find trends in the choice and application of language learning strategies, the demographic data gender and educational attainment is examined (Hauser 2000).
3. **Reliability Analysis:** Cronbach alpha is used to measure internal consistency and determine how reliable the data are. A reliability coefficient of 0.5 or higher signifies that the questionnaire meets the objectives of the study (Joshi and Watt, 2016).

Table 1
Reliability of questionnaire

Cronbach Alpha	Number of items
0.841	50

4. **SILL Classification Analysis:** Using a Likert scale (1-5) responses on the SILL will be categorized according to mean values. Using Oxford (1989) classification, language learning strategies is indicated by mean values ranging from 4.5-5.0 to 3.5-4.4 (high usage) 2.5-3.4 (medium usage) and 1.5-2.4 to 1.0-1.4 (low usage).

Table 2
Classification of the SLL (based on likert scale)

Classification	Frequency of use	Average score
HIGH	Always or almost always true	4.5 to 5.0
	Usually used	3.5 to 4.4
MEDIUM	Sometimes used	2.5 to 3.4
	Generally not used	1.5 to 2.4
LOW	Never or almost never used	1.5 to 2.4

The analysis determines which strategies are most commonly employed by ESL students in English department at University of Sindh, Jamshoro. The mean and standard deviation were used as indicators to compare language learning strategies between students with high and low proficiency. To comprehend their influence on the choice and application of language learning strategies the role of demographic factors such as gender and academic year are assessed. By using this methodology language learning strategies among ESL students are thoroughly and objectively analyzed effectively addressing the research questions.

1. What are the most commonly used language learning strategies among undergraduate ESL students at the University of Sindh?
2. What are the variations in preference of learning strategies among students in different academic years?

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the procedures and purpose of the data collection. The participants confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing personal

information. Participants were given debriefing of the results. The study followed ethical considerations to protect the rights of participants and maintain research integrity.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of the study is to examine the language strategies (LLS) employed by ESL learners. It also identifies the distinctions between students with high and low proficiency levels as well as the influence of education level of students on their preference for strategies. Eighty of the one hundred questionnaires that were sent out were returned these answers serve as the foundation for the analysis.

Descriptive statistics is used to identify the most popular language learning strategies with particular attention to the six categories of memory cognitive compensatory metacognitive affective and social strategies found in the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). At a mean score of 3.4375 metacognitive strategies were the most often used showing that students regularly plan monitor and assess their learning processes which aligns with Sulistiyo and Kamils (2022) findings that Indonesian EFL university students use metacognitive strategies frequently. Cognitive strategies came next with a mean score of 3.1748 indicating a preference for methods that require repetition and the application of mental processes in order to comprehend and generate the new language. This is in line with the findings of Ahmad Mohammad and Yaad (2022) who emphasized the value of cognitive strategies in boosting learners mastery of their subject. The use of techniques to fill in knowledge gaps like guessing and using synonyms was reflected in the compensation strategies mean score of 3.1854. This result is consistent with the findings of Sibtain Masroor and Qasim (2020) who observed that the majority of Pakistani ESL students employed compensatory techniques. Social strategies were used moderately as seen by their mean score of 2.9917 especially when it came to clarification and questioning. Emotional regulation received a mean score of 2 points indicating a relatively low usage particularly when it came to controlling anxiety and emotions. With a mean score of 2.8361 memory strategies were the least used indicating that students are less likely to favor methods like rote memorization and the use of imagery. This is in contrast to the findings of Joachim and Shah (2023) who discovered that grade 6 students in rural Malaysian primary schools regularly employed memory strategies. This disparity can result from variations in language proficiency and educational environments.

Table 3
The overall result of the strategies used Descriptive Statics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Memory Strategies	80	2.11	3.89	2.8361	.46807
Cognitive	80	2.36	3.93	3.1748	.41207
Compensation	80	1.67	4.83	3.1854	.72865
Meta	80	2.11	4.89	3.4375	.64434
Effective	80	1.50	4.67	2.9208	.69506
Social	80	1.00	4.83	2.9917	.71595

By using independent samples t-tests the study examined how LLS are used by students with high and low proficiency levels. When comparing the mean score of metacognitive strategies to their counterparts with lower proficiency high proficiency students exhibited a significant preference for them. This is consistent with Qadir, Fareed and Brohi (2023) who discovered that high achievers preferred cognitive and metacognitive techniques. This implies that learners with high proficiency levels are more independent and self-reliant. High proficiency students also employed cognitive and compensatory strategies more frequently demonstrating their active participation in

language understanding and production despite challenges. Research conducted by Bashir Mehmood and Khans (2021) which indicates a positive correlation between language learning success and cognitive strategies is consistent with this. Conversely although the difference is not statistically significant low proficiency students appear to have a slightly higher preference for social strategies. In contrast to the findings of Khuram Sarwat and Jabeen (2023) who found that graduate ESL learners regardless of their proficiency level engaged in social strategies to support their language learning, the results of present study suggest learners sometimes prefer social interactions to aid in their learning.

Table 4
Variation of preference for learners strategies among students of different academic year

Education level	Descriptive analysis	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Meta cognitive	Affective	Social
BS#2	Mean	2.91	3.22	3.16	3.48	2.87	3.10
	St.Deviation	.489	.497	.715	.618	.725	.695
BS#4	Mean	2.72	3.12	3.22	3.38	2.99	2.83
	Std. Deviation	.417	.516	.761	.690	.649	.730

The application of cognitive and metacognitive strategies varied noticeably between the different educational level. Fourth-year senior students used metacognitive strategies more frequently probably as a result of their increased familiarity with and understanding of efficient learning methods. Junior students (2nd year) were more likely to use cognitive strategies emphasizing language understanding and production. The findings of Khalil et al. (2024) show that teachers use eclectic teaching approaches to meet the various needs of ESL students are consistent with this pattern.

Conclusion

In summary, the study show that metacognitive techniques are most frequently employed by ESL Learners studying BS English in University of Sindh Jamshoro, especially by those with high proficiency levels. Academic year also have a big impact on the strategies that students choose and use to learn a language. Students of different academic levels have different preferences for cognitive and metacognitive strategies and male and female students clearly prefer affective and social strategies. In order to improve language learning outcomes, these findings highlight the significance of tailored instructional strategies that take demographics and proficiency levels into account. The findings of the study are consistent with other studies. Overall the study advances knowledge about language learning strategies used by ESL students enrolled in BS English program at University of Sindh, Jamshoro and emphasizes the significance of taking academic year and proficiency levels into account when creating successful language teaching interventions. The strategic needs of ESL learners in Pakistan can be better understood by teachers and curriculum designers with the help of these insights which will ultimately improve language learning process.

Recommendation

Future researchers may put into practice and assess targeted educational interventions intended to improve the application of successful language learning techniques. Examine the effects on students language skills and general academic performance of focused instruction in metacognitive cognitive and compensatory strategies.

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