# Exploring Language Learning Strategies of Good Language Learners in Malaysian ESL Contexts

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of language learning strategies (LLS) among good language learners in Malaysia, addressing a gap in research on how successful learners employ these strategies to enhance their own language acquisition. It explores the use of metacognitive and cognitive strategies, along with digital tools, to enhance student outcomes, aligning with Malaysia's emphasis on student-centered learning and digital literacy. Using a quantitative descriptive research design, the study examines the frequency and types of LLS employed by good language learners, and their relationship to perceived language proficiency and achievement. The theoretical framework combines Oxford's Strategy Classification Model with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of strategy-based language learning practices. The findings contribute to ESL education literature and offer actionable insights for language learning development, supporting the integration of self-regulated learning, digital literacy, and communicative competence in line with national education goals.

**Keywords:** Language Learning Strategies (LLS), Good Language Learners, Metacognitive Strategies, Digital Tools Integration

## INTRODUCTION

The process of acquiring a second language is complex and continuously evolving, influenced by cognitive, social, and emotional elements. In Malaysia, where English functions as a second language (ESL), the purposeful application of language learning strategies (LLS) has become essential for promoting learner independence, enhancing memory retention, and boosting overall language proficiency [1] [27]. These strategies consist of intentional actions and techniques employed by learners to aid their language learning. They include metacognitive strategies such as self-monitoring and setting goals, as well as cognitive strategies like summarizing and repeating information [15]. Utilizing these strategies helps learners manage their learning journey effectively while also increasing their motivation and ability to persist through language learning difficulties [2] [32].

Oxford's Strategy Classification Model categorizes LLS into direct strategies: memory, cognitive, and compensation and indirect strategies such as metacognitive, affective, and social approaches [25]. Direct strategies focus on engaging with language materials through retention techniques, deeper processing, and overcoming linguistic gaps. Indirect strategies emphasize self-regulation, emotional control, and collaborative learning. Recent studies highlight the efficacy of metacognitive and cognitive strategies in enhancing ESL proficiency, particularly within digital learning environments that promote autonomy and real-time collaboration [17][29].

Despite extensive research on learner-centered applications of LLS, limited attention has been given to how ESL Good language learners implement these strategies in classroom settings. This gap is particularly significant in Malaysia, where national education policies emphasize student-centered learning and digital literacy integration to develop 21st-century skills [37]. The role of educators in operationalizing LLS is crucial for bridging theoretical frameworks with practical applications in ESL instruction. Furthermore, the integration of digital tools has reshaped teaching practices, enabling innovative approaches to strategy-based instruction [7][13].

This study seeks to address this research gap by examining the use of LLS among in-service ESL Good language learners in Malaysia. Specifically, it explores how educators employ metacognitive and cognitive strategies in their teaching practices while leveraging digital tools to enhance student outcomes. By aligning Oxford's framework with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of strategy-based teaching practices [24][8][36]. The findings will contribute to the growing body of literature on ESL education while offering actionable insights for teacher training programs and policy development within Malaysia's Ministry of Education [33][9][38].

## Research Objectives

To investigate the frequency and types of language learning strategies (LLS) used by good language learners in Malaysia.

## Research Questions

What types of language learning strategies (LLS) do good language learners in Malaysia most frequently employ?

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Acquiring a second language involves a multifaceted process shaped by cognitive, emotional, and social elements. In the Malaysian context, where English functions as a second language (ESL), the use of effective learning strategies is vital for students' academic achievement [16]. Language learning strategies (LLS) significantly support second language development by fostering learner independence, enhancing memory, and boosting language proficiency [26]. The study of LLS has progressed from focusing on characteristics of successful learners to developing various strategy classification models [27]. These strategies extend beyond specific tasks to include learner behaviours that are continuously developed, maintained, or adjusted. When applied consciously, they serve as intentional learning efforts that promote learner engagement and accountability.

Studies suggest that learners who actively employ a range of LLS tend to exhibit greater motivation and resilience in overcoming language learning challenges [4][13][15]. Metacognitive strategies, such as self-monitoring and goal-setting, enable learners to regulate their progress, while cognitive strategies, like summarization and repetition, enhance comprehension and retention [5]. Additionally, social strategies, including seeking help from peers or engaging in collaborative learning, further facilitate the development of language proficiency. Study [1] found a positive correlation between strategy use and academic achievement, reinforcing the need for effective integration of LLS in ESL instruction. However, few studies have examined how ESL Good language learners themselves implement these strategies in classroom instruction. This study addresses that gap by exploring good language learners' application of metacognitive and cognitive strategies and their influence on student outcomes.

**Theoretical Framework in Language Learning Strategies**

The study of language learning strategies (LLS) is anchored in Oxford's Strategy Classification Model, which categorizes LLS into direct and indirect strategies [24]. Direct strategies of memory, cognition, and compensation involve actively engaging with language materials. Memory strategies aid retention through association and visualization, cognitive strategies facilitate deeper processing through summarization and repetition, and compensation strategies help learners overcome linguistic gaps through inference or circumlocution.

Indirect strategies are metacognitive, affective, and social support learning through self-regulation, emotional control, and interaction [5]. Metacognitive strategies, such as planning and self-monitoring, promote learner autonomy, while affective strategies help manage anxiety and motivation [35]. Social strategies encourage collaboration, allowing learners to seek clarification and practice language through interaction [34]. Research has shown that metacognitive and cognitive strategies are particularly effective in enhancing ESL proficiency [2]. Many studies focus on how often good language learners use strategies, but not on which strategies are most

effective for specific tasks or outcomes. There is a need for research that assesses the impact and appropriateness of strategy use, not just its frequency [27]. Previous research also often overlooks how learners' existing vocabulary and grammar knowledge interact with their strategy use. Few studies controls for linguistic knowledge, making it unclear whether strategy use leads to proficiency or vice versa [11].

Oxford's framework corresponds with Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which underscores the importance of self-regulation and self-efficacy in the application of learning strategies, as well as with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, which stresses the significance of social interaction in the process of language acquisition [7][24][36].

**Impact Of Learning Language Strategies Among Good Language Learners in Educational Contexts**

Recent research highlights that good language learners are adapting their strategy use in response to evolving educational environments, particularly the rise of digital and blended learning. These learners consistently demonstrate a preference for metacognitive and cognitive strategies, especially when developing productive skills such as speaking. For instance, studies show that good language learners frequently employ planning, self-monitoring, and problem-solving techniques, while relying less on memory and affective strategies [15][22].

The integration of digital tools has further empowered good language learners to take greater ownership of their learning. With increased access to online resources and collaborative platforms, these learners are more likely to engage in self-regulated learning, using technology to track their progress, set goals, and collaborate with peers [18]. This shift toward learner autonomy is closely linked to higher levels of self-efficacy, as good language learners who believe in their ability to succeed are more persistent and motivated in their strategy use [10]. Academic achievement among good language learners is strongly predicted using cognitive and metacognitive strategies, while reliance on memory and affective strategies tends to correlate negatively with performance [32]. Moreover, research suggests that academic success itself reinforces the use of effective strategies, indicating a reciprocal relationship between proficiency and strategy deployment [6].

Social strategies also play a crucial role for good language learners, particularly in overcoming anxiety and expanding vocabulary through interaction. These strategies, combined with metacognitive approaches, foster greater confidence and engagement, supporting learners in navigating communicative challenges [29]. Despite growing interest in LLS, limited research examines how good language learners apply these strategies, especially with digital tools [19][23].

**Implications Of Malaysian Ministry of Education Policy for Good Language Learners**

Understanding policy directions is essential to examining how good language learners align their strategies with national education goals. The Malaysian Ministry of Education emphasizes student-centered learning and 21st-century skills to support language acquisition [21][22]. These goals align with the integration of LLS in ESL instruction, promoting self-regulated learning, digital literacy, and communicative competence [37]. Government initiatives such as digital literacy programs, teacher training, and competency-based curricula further support the use of metacognitive and social strategies [20]. As digital tools become more prevalent in classrooms, understanding how good language learners adapt their strategy used in response to these policies is crucial [22].

This study explores how national policies influence good language learners' strategy use, particularly in digital learning contexts. Using Oxford's (1990) Strategy Classification Model, it will examine the frequency and effectiveness of direct (memory, cognitive, compensation) and indirect (metacognitive, affective, social) strategies employed in Malaysian ESL classrooms [24].

# METHODOLOGY

## A. Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive research design to examine the use of language learning strategies (LLS) among good language learners pursuing postgraduate studies. The choice of a quantitative approach was

appropriate for obtaining measurable and generalizable data related to participants' frequency and types of strategy use [39]. The descriptive design enabled the researcher to systematically gather, organize, and interpret data without manipulating variables, thus maintaining the authenticity of participants' real-world learning experiences. The design also supported the identification of patterns and trends in language learning behaviour across multiple strategy domains.

## B. Participants

The study involved 30 ESL good language learners enrolled in postgraduate programs at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). Purposive sampling was used to select participants who demonstrated high levels of English language proficiency and consistent academic performance, qualifying them as "good language learners" based on established research criteria. The group included learners from diverse educational and professional backgrounds, enhancing the generalizability of the findings across multiple learning contexts. Their engagement in postgraduate studies indicated familiarity with academic discourse and second language acquisition theories, strengthening the credibility of their self-reported responses regarding language learning strategies (LLS).

## C. Instrumentation

Data were collected through a structured 30-item questionnaire, adapted from Oxford's (1990) *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)* and revised to suit the Malaysian ESL learning context [28]. The instrument was designed to capture good language learners' implementation of six key categories of LLS:

1. Memory strategies (Items 1–5): Techniques that promote memorization through associations, imagery, and structured review.

2. Cognitive strategies (Items 6–10): Mental processes that aid in the manipulation and transformation of language input (e.g., summarizing, practicing).

3. Compensation strategies (Items 11–15): Methods used to overcome language gaps and maintain communication.

4. Metacognitive strategies (Items 16–20): Planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own learning processes.

5. Affective strategies (Items 21–25): Approaches to managing emotions, motivation, and anxiety related to language use.

6. Social strategies (Items 26–30): Interactional methods that promote learning through collaboration and cultural understanding.

Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, and 5 = Always. This scaling system provided a nuanced view of how frequently good language learners reported using specific strategies. The instrument showed strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .965, indicating a high level of reliability across the entire scale.

## D. Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms to accommodate participants' schedules and to ensure ease of access and submission. Participants were invited to take part in the study through email and WhatsApp communications, accompanied by a digital consent form outlining the study's objectives, ethical considerations, and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were given a two-week window to complete and submit their responses. Regular reminders were sent to encourage completion.

## E. Data Analysis

The data collected were examined using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The

analysis commenced with descriptive statistics—such as means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions—to identify general patterns in the use of language learning strategies (LLS) among the participants. Each category of strategy was assessed separately to identify the most and least frequently utilized strategies. Due to the sample size and the exploratory focus of the study, the analysis prioritized descriptive interpretation.

### F. Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, the research proposal underwent ethical review and approval through the Educational Research Application System (ERAS), under the oversight of the Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. The ERAS platform provided a formal letter of approval, which was included in all correspondence with participants. This ensured that ethical standards—including informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and data confidentiality—were maintained throughout the research process.

## FINDINGS

This section presents the findings obtained from the Oxford Language Learning Strategies (LLS) Teacher Questionnaire administered to good language learners. The questionnaires are divided into 6 sections which are memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. The questionnaire responses were analyzed to determine the frequency and emphasis placed on different LLS categories in the classroom.
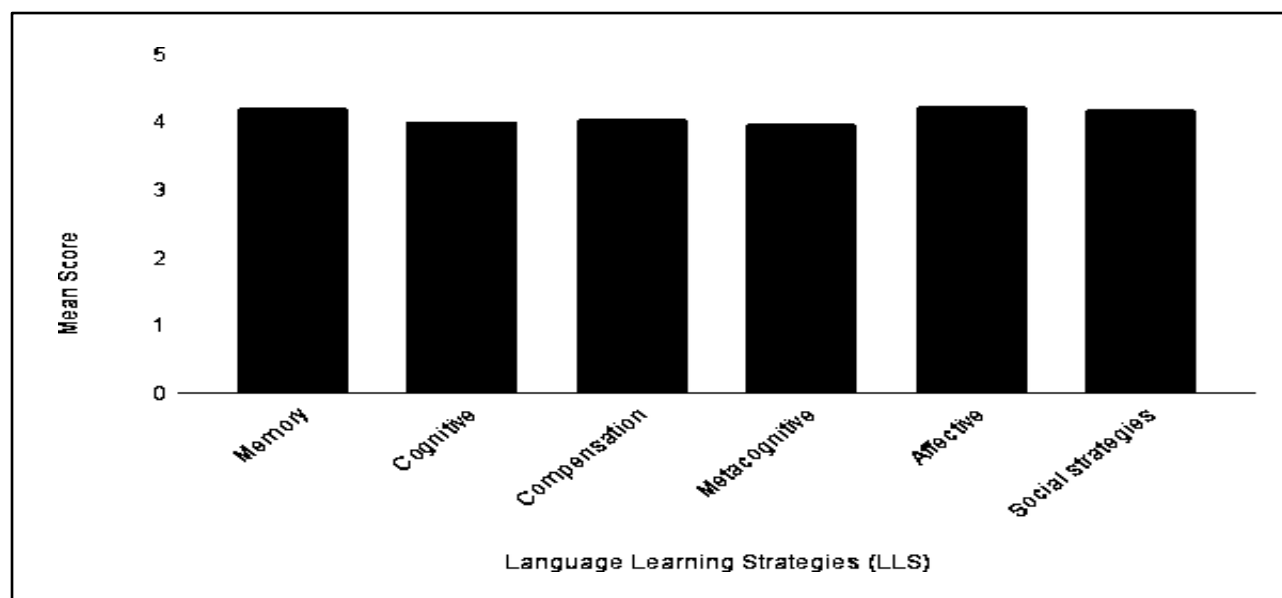


Fig 1: Mean scores of Language Learning Strategies used by ESL Good language learners

As shown in Figure 1, the results indicate that successful adult ESL learners employ a wide range of language learning strategies, with consistently high mean scores across all six categories. Among them, affective strategies were used most frequently, with a mean score of 4.28. These strategies include efforts to lower anxiety, develop a positive attitude toward learning, self-reward for progress, and take risks without the fear of making mistakes. The frequent use of affective strategies highlights the importance of emotional self-regulation and motivation in language learning success. Adult learners appear to be highly aware of the emotional challenges associated with second language acquisition and actively manage their feelings to sustain learning engagement.

Memory strategies followed closely with a mean score of 4.24. These strategies involve using visual aids such as charts and pictures, linking new words to prior knowledge, applying mental imagery, and utilizing physical movement to reinforce learning. The high usage of memory strategies suggests that adult learners rely heavily on associative and multisensory techniques to retain and recall vocabulary and grammatical structures. This reflects their proactive effort in building long-term language retention through meaningful connections and visual organization.

Social strategies were also rated highly, with a mean score of 4.23, indicating that successful adult learners frequently engage in collaborative learning. These strategies involve participating in pair or group activities, seeking clarification, interacting with English speakers, and incorporating cultural knowledge into learning. The high score reinforces the idea that social interaction plays a vital role in language acquisition and those adult learners value communicative opportunities to enhance their fluency and cultural competence.

Compensation strategies, with a mean score of 4.11, were also commonly used. These strategies include guessing meaning from context, using synonyms or descriptive phrases when forgetting a word, and continuing conversations even with limited vocabulary. These findings suggest that adult learners are equipped with adaptive techniques to manage gaps in their language knowledge and maintain communicative effectiveness in real-time situations.

Cognitive strategies were reported with a mean score of 4.07. These involve practicing language use through speaking and writing, analyzing sentence patterns, summarizing texts, and taking notes. While not the highest-rated category, the consistent use of these strategies indicates that successful learners regularly engage in active manipulation and application of language. These strategies form the core of language practice and demonstrate learners' effort to deepen their linguistic understanding through repetition and task-based activities.

Lastly, metacognitive strategies, although the least used among the six categories, still received a relatively high mean score of 4.04. These strategies include goal-setting, planning study time, monitoring comprehension, and evaluating performance. The lower score suggests that while successful learners do employ reflective and planning behaviors, these strategies may not be as deeply ingrained or consciously implemented as affective or memory strategies. This presents an opportunity to further support adult learners in developing structured learning plans and self-regulatory behaviors, potentially using digital tools such as language learning apps or personal progress journals.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that successful adult ESL learners tend to use a balanced combination of learning strategies, with a stronger emphasis on affective, memory, and social strategies. These learners demonstrate emotional resilience, collaborative engagement, and a strong ability to connect and retain language input. Although cognitive and metacognitive strategies were used slightly less frequently, their presence still reflects an overall structured approach to language learning. The results underscore the multifaceted nature of successful language acquisition among adults and highlight key areas for instructional support and learner development.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this research offer meaningful understanding of how Malaysian proficient language learners utilize language learning strategies (LLS). Affective strategies emerged as the most used (M = 4.25), indicating that educators place considerable importance on helping students regulate emotions, alleviate anxiety, and maintain motivation in the learning process. This observation is consistent with previous studies emphasizing the role of emotional regulation in second language acquisition, especially in environments where learners may experience linguistic insecurity or anxiety related to performance [11]. The prominent use of affective strategies highlights these learners' awareness of the impact of socio-emotional elements on language learning engagement and achievement.

Memory (M = 4.22) and social strategies (M = 4.19) also featured prominently in the findings, with high mean scores indicating their regular use in classroom instruction. The preference for memory strategies such as using imagery, association, and repetition demonstrates a pedagogical focus on facilitating language retention through structured review and cognitive reinforcement. Meanwhile, the strong emphasis on social strategies reflects an instructional approach grounded in collaboration and communicative competence, consistent with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which proposes that social interaction plays a crucial role in cognitive development. Group activities, peer support, and cooperative learning environments are evidently prioritised by good language learners to promote active language use and mutual scaffolding among learners.

Metacognitive strategies recorded the lowest mean score (M = 3.98) among all six categories. These strategies,

which include goal setting, planning, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation, are widely recognized as essential for fostering learner autonomy and self-regulated learning [24][35]. Their relatively low frequency of use suggests that while good language learners are aware of their importance, they may lack adequate training or systemic support to effectively integrate these strategies into their instructional practices. Institutional constraints such as time limitations, rigid curricula, or prioritization of assessment tasks may also hinder the implementation of reflective and planning-oriented classroom activities. This gap reflects a broader challenge in operationalizing key constructs from Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory—namely self-efficacy and agency—in everyday teaching [7].

Cognitive and compensation strategies were employed at moderate levels (M = 4.01 and M = 4.06, respectively). Although these strategies are fundamental for processing and understanding language input such as summarising, analyzing, or inferring meaning, they appear to be less explicitly emphasized compared to memory and social strategies. This may indicate a need for more intentional integration of higher-order thinking tasks and problem-solving techniques within classroom instruction, particularly in line with 21st-century education goals that priorities critical thinking, creativity, and independent learning [22]

From a theoretical perspective, the results support the applicability of both Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) and Oxford's Strategy Classification Model (1990) in understanding good language learners' strategic choices [7][24][36]. Their preference for affective and social strategies suggests a strong orientation towards creating supportive, interactive, and motivational learning environments. However, the underutilization of metacognitive strategies highlights a gap in fostering the kind of learner autonomy that Bandura emphasizes, pointing to an area for professional development and pedagogical innovation [7].

These findings can be interpreted in light of recent educational reforms in Malaysia that emphasize student-centered learning, digital literacy, and the development of 21st-century competencies [22][37]. While good language learners appear to align with policy directions that priorities emotional support and collaboration, there is still scope to enhance their practice by equipping them with tools and pedagogical approaches to better implement cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The integration of digital technologies such as e-portfolios, reflective journals, and learning management systems may offer promising avenues for supporting metacognitive development and promoting reflective learning among ESL students.

The study reveals a balanced yet uneven application of language learning strategies among Malaysian ESL good language learners. While affective, memory, and social strategies are well embedded in classroom practices, cognitive and especially metacognitive strategies are comparatively underutilized. Addressing this imbalance through strategic training and policy alignment will be essential in empowering educators to support holistic and autonomous language learning experiences.

## CONCLUSION

This study on language learning strategies (LLS) among good language learners in Malaysia demonstrates that

metacognitive and cognitive strategies are most frequently and effectively utilized, supporting previous findings that these strategies enhance ESL proficiency among high-achieving learners [40]. The integration of digital tools has played a pivotal role in enabling good language learners to exercise greater autonomy, self-regulation, and real-time collaboration, further optimizing their language acquisition process. The results reveal a strong association between the use of specific LLS—especially cognitive strategies—and positive perceptions of learning outcomes among good language learners, highlighting the centrality of strategic behavior in their academic success [6].

These findings align with the Malaysian Ministry of Education's emphasis on student-centered learning and digital literacy, offering valuable implications for policy and the design of teacher training programs that aim to cultivate similar strategic competencies in all learners [30]. However, the study's reliance on self-reported data from good language learners may not fully capture the complexity of their strategy use in authentic classroom settings. Additionally, focusing primarily on advanced or postgraduate learners may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of ESL learners in Malaysia.

Future research should further investigate how technology can deepen and sustain strategy-based learning among good language learners and explore the long-term impact of these strategies across diverse educational contexts. Overall, this research underscores the importance of fostering metacognitive and cognitive strategy use, supported by digital tools, to maximize language learning outcomes among good language learners in Malaysian ESL education.

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