# Exploring Language Learning Strategies to Enhance ESL Writing: A Quantitative Study of Year 6 Pupils in Sarawak

**Aishwarriya Sasi, Ayu Haniezyea Ramzi, Nur Syahadha, Preyangka Karunakaran, Thivyah Thiruchelvan, Harwati Hashim**

**Faculty of Education, University Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi 43600, Selangor, Malaysia**

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the language learning strategies (LLSs) used by Year 6 pupils in a suburban primary school in Sarawak to improve their English as a Second Language (ESL) writing. It identifies preferred and underused strategy categories by examining their frequency and variety. Using a quantitative approach, the study adapted Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) to survey 30 selected pupils, focusing on memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Findings showed that metacognitive strategies like planning and self-monitoring were most frequent, indicating a strong focus on cognitive regulation in writing. Cognitive strategies, such as using authentic English media, were also common. However, affective strategies, related to emotional regulation, were least used, suggesting a need to address emotional aspects of learning. The study highlights the importance of metacognitive and cognitive strategies in ESL writing development, urging educators to integrate them into teaching. It implies that adding emotional support and reflection could further enhance students' writing skills and confidence. These findings add to the limited research on LLS use among primary ESL learners in Sarawak by providing evidence of their learning strategy preferences and offer practical ideas to teach writing which suggest an emphasis on thinking and learning strategies alongside emotional support for better writing development.

**Keywords:** ESL Writing, Language Learning Strategies (LLSs), Year 6 pupils, Sarawak, Primary Education

## INTRODUCTION

Researchers have studied language learning strategies (LLSs) as prime subjects within second language acquisition analyses since ancient times. The strategies people use either knowingly or unknowingly are thought to create essential conditions for language acquisition between different learning environments (Wood, 2020). Under the scope of LLS research lies an examination of Good Language Learners (GLLs) who obtain this status through their motivational characteristics combined with resourceful thinking and reflective behavior to support learning (Kakamad et al., 2024). Past research has enhanced knowledge about adult and tertiary GLLs yet primary school-based investigations of Malaysian GLLs are lacking particularly those situated in rural or suburban locations (Rahmat et al., 2024). The domain of writing skills enables special attention because ESL students in early grades face difficulties with vocabulary retention and mastery of sentence construction as well as content development (Zakaria & Sulaiman, 2024).

Writing stands as one of the most difficult language skills for second language acquisition that necessitates learners to excel in grammar and vocabulary knowledge and achieve the ability to structure information in logical and coherent ways (Bhowmik & Kim, 2022). The teaching of writing falls behind oral instruction activities in Malaysian primary education which produces underdeveloped written aptitudes in learners. Year 6 pupils face greater struggles with their writing skills because Ujian Akhir Sesi Akademik (UASA) requires them to take a national-level examination including English writing elements. When deployed within the described context LLSs can fill the gap between what learners currently know in English and what they need to write. The gap becomes evident at the Year 6 level, where pupils must sit for the Ujian Akhir Sesi Akademik (UASA), a national exam that includes English writing components. The high-stakes nature of this exam shifts teaching priorities towards formulaic writing, rote memorisation, and test-taking techniques, which may enhance short-term

performance but hinder creativity and strategic thinking. As a result, students may lack the autonomy needed for meaningful writing. Language Learning Strategies (LLSs), particularly metacognitive strategies like planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation, are essential in this context. They improve students' ability to produce coherent texts, foster independence, and build confidence, supporting both UASA performance and long-term language development.

The LLS taxonomy proposed by Oxford (1990) established two main groups of strategies including direct (memory, cognitive, compensation) and indirect (metacognitive, affective, social) categories which continue to guide LLS research foundations. The classification of LLSs made significant strides when research proved that effective outcomes in writing along with other language skills are realized by learners who use metacognitive and cognitive strategies among others (Hardiyanto et al., 2024; John Peter & Hashim, 2023). MALaysian primary school pupils show inconsistent exposure and training in academic strategies according to Rahmat et al. (2024) and Hashim (2023) which hinders their ability to participate effectively in writing assignments. The shortage of affective and memory strategies reveals the necessity to properly handle emotional and psychological writing dimensions including anxiety, motivation and confidence (Dewaele & Li, 2020).

This study aims to explore the language learning strategies employed by Year 6 pupils in a suburban primary school in Sarawak as they work to improve their ESL writing skills. The research probes both the preferred and underused strategy categories as well as the frequency and variety of strategies to understand the strategic language behavior of English Second Language learners. This research explores strategies that Year 6 pupils use in their ESL writing process while suggesting educational methods that English teachers can use to develop independent and strategic and confident writers among their students. The research findings will help expand knowledge about language strategy use in Malaysian primary education to improve writing instruction quality with better outcomes for ESL students in classroom settings.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies (LLSs) are generally defined as the conscious or unconscious thoughts and behaviors that learners employ to facilitate their language learning process (Oxford, 1990). This definition is further supported by Wood (2020) in which he defined LLSs as various intentional strategies or techniques taken by the learners to improve their learning experiences. These strategies include a wide range of actions that the learners use to understand, learn and retain new language information and skills. The effectiveness of LLSs in the language learning acquisition has been extensively investigated across various language learning contexts. Studies have consistently shown that more proficient language learners tend to use various strategies effectively as compared to the less proficient learners (John Peter & Hashim, 2023; Radwan, 2022; Khalil, 2024).

There are several eminent taxonomies that have been proposed by the experts in order to categorise LLSs. Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is a widely recognised taxonomy in relation to the LLSs. This inventory classifies learning strategies into direct and indirect groups. Direct strategies consist of memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies whereas indirect strategies encompass metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. Cognitive strategies involve mental work like summarizing and practicing to understand better (Hardiyanto et al., 2024). Metacognitive strategies involve thinking and self-reflection on learning such as planning and checking progress (Baltabayeva, 2023). Social strategies involve interaction with other people which can greatly improve language skills (Li, 2023). Affective strategies deal with feelings and emotions such as managing anxiety (Hardiyanto et al., 2024). Compensation strategies help learners to work around what they don't know, like using different words when they lack vocabulary (Hardiyanto et al., 2024). Another LLSs taxonomy was proposed by Rubin (1981) in which he identified learning, communication and social strategies as the most significant strategies for learning a language.

## Attributes of good language learners

Good language learners take control of their own learning. According to Zhang & Li (2021), it is suggested by many recent studies that more proficient learners usually utilize various learning strategies more effectively. Good language learners practice self-directed learning so that they can learn the English language effectively

(Rana, 2023). Although there are no fixed attributes that make a good language learner, research has identified several characteristics and behaviours which are commonly associated with successful language learners. Atmowardoyo et al. (2023) proposed several key characteristics of good language learners such as being highly curious and motivated, being resourceful and using effective learning strategies to learn the language. This is also further supported by Kakamad et al. (2024) in which they stated that successful language learners share similar personality traits like being responsible, cooperative as well as utilizing various techniques and approaches to acquire the language. They also have a positive attitude and mindset towards learning English which keeps them motivated and persistent in learning the language (Chen & Shu, 2024). In essence, a good language learner is often characterized by their active engagement in the learning process, their awareness of their own learning, their willingness to take risks and experiment with the language, their strong motivation and persistence and their effective use of a variety of language learning strategies. Thus, good language learners are not passive recipients of information in the ESL classroom but rather proactive individuals who take ownership of their learning journey.

**Writing skills and LLSs**

The English as a Second Language (ESL) acquisition involves the development of four fundamental skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Each skill plays a vital role in communicative competence and learners typically progress through stages of development in each area. While initial focus in primary ESL classrooms often centers on oral communication such as listening and speaking skills to build a foundational understanding of the language, the development of writing skills is also a crucial subsequent step. Writing allows learners to solidify their understanding of grammar and vocabulary, express more complex ideas, and is particularly essential for future academic and professional success (Bhowmik & Kim, 2022). Successful ESL writing requires mastery of content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics (Ghosh & Sen, 2023). (However, primary ESL learners face many challenges in grasping and mastering the writing aspects. One of the challenges in the writing process is due to the ESL learners' limitations in their vocabulary and grammar knowledge (Zakaria & Sulaiman, 2024).

Fortunately, the effective application of language learning strategies (LLSs) offers a powerful means to bridge this gap and enhance their writing abilities. Several categories of LLSs play a vital role in supporting the development of this crucial skill. Cognitive strategies can be applied to support early writing. For instance, primary ESL learners can visually brainstorm using drawings or structured organizers, and they might briefly use their first language to recall English vocabulary. Graphic organizers can help the learners to organise their thoughts effectively (Rakhimovna & Urozova, 2020) meanwhile the first language support can help to bridge the gap in the learners's language proficiency (Rahmat et al., 2024).

When second language learners lack specific vocabulary or grammar, compensation strategies help them express their ideas in alternative ways. For instance, high-proficiency learners often use synonyms or paraphrasing when they cannot recall specific words (Tahmina, 2024). As for the less proficient learners, they can utilize compensation strategies by guessing the meaning of the words when faced with new words, which also potentially boost creative thinking and problem-solving skills in writing (Tahmina, 2024).

Social learning strategies also help to enhance the ESL learners' writing skills. According to Hashim (2023), the ESL learners' writing skills can be enhanced through social learning strategies as it involves collaboration and communication among the learners, which allows the feedback and clarification process. This leads to a conducive environment for the learners to practice their writing skills effectively. For instance, collaborative learning environments such as peer feedback by using social media platforms can improve the learning writing accuracy and fluency (Rahmanova et al., 2025). Hence, the instances provided show that LLSs play a big role in determining the learners' success in their writing process.

Despite the established importance of LLSs in ESL learning and writing development, there are several key gaps identified. Firstly, there is a limited body of research that specifically investigates the range and frequency of LLSs employed by Year 6 ESL pupils in Sarawak, Malaysia when they engage with writing tasks. While studies have explored LLS use among ESL learners generally, the specific strategies utilized by this younger age group, with their unique cognitive and linguistic developmental stages require more attention. Secondly, there is a lack

of in-depth understanding regarding the contextual factors that influence LLS use in writing among pupils within the Malaysian context. Crucial factors such as access to resources, teacher training, curriculum design and cultural influences may significantly influence their learning strategy preferences and effectiveness. Finally, there is a need for more research that examines the relationship between specific LLS use and different aspects of writing proficiency such as fluency, accuracy, complexity and content in this specific age group. By understanding these relationships, curriculum designers and educators can be informed on the suitable interventions to enhance the learners' writing skills.

# METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative approach to examine the language learning strategies employed by Year 6 pupils in Sarawak to enhance their writing skills. A structured survey was used to collect measurable data, enabling the identification of patterns in strategy use and offering insights into how young ESL learners approach writing tasks (Neuman, 2000).

## Participants

This study involved 30 purposively selected Year 6 pupils from a suburban primary school in Sarawak, chosen for their relevance as final-year learners preparing for the *Ujian Akhir Sesi Akademik* (UASA), which includes English writing components. Participants reflected varied writing proficiencies and engagement in writing tasks. While most were assumed to have moderate proficiency, some showed higher competence. Due to the specific context and sample size, findings are not generalisable. Variations in language ability, motivation, and English exposure beyond the classroom are recognised as influencing factors.

## Instruments

The instrument used in this study was a set of questionnaires adapted from Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (1990), which categorises language learning strategies into six distinct groups: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. The original inventory was adapted to focus specifically on writing-related strategies and simplified linguistically to suit the cognitive and language proficiency levels of Year 6 pupils. The final version consisted of 30 clear and age-appropriate statements related to ESL writing strategy use. Each statement was rated using a five-point Likert scale to capture the frequency of strategy use: (1) Never or almost never true of me, (2) Usually not true of me, (3) Sometimes true of me, (4) Usually true of me, and (5) Always or almost always true of me. A five-point scale was selected to allow for more nuanced responses while maintaining clarity and reliability in pupils' self-assessment.
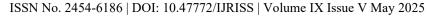
## Data Analysis

This study analyzed data from the adapted SILL (Oxford, 1990) using descriptive statistics to examine Year 6 pupils' use of language learning strategies in developing ESL writing skills. Based on Mohamed Amin et al. (2001), strategies were categorized as low (1.0–2.4), medium (2.5–3.4), and high (3.5–5.0) usage. This classification helped identify patterns in the use of memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies in writing tasks. Table 1 shows the frequency levels and response options.

| Frequency of Use | Responses | Mean Scores |
|---|---|---|
| High | Always true of me | 3.5-.4.0 |
| | Usually true of me | 2.5-3.4 |
| Low | Usually not true of me | 1.5-2.4 |
| | Never true of me | 1.0-1.4 |

Table 1: Level of Frequency Rating for Strategy Use

Table 1 shows the interpretation scores adapted from Mohamed Amin et al. (2001) to assess strategy use among

Year 6 pupils in ESL writing. Response percentages highlight patterns in strategy use and their impact on writing proficiency.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Overall Strategy and Category Strategy Use

The analysis revealed that Year 6 ESL pupils relied most on metacognitive strategies when developing their writing skills, as reflected by the highest mean score (M = 2.85). These strategies facilitated goal-setting, planning, and self-monitoring, which are essential processes in managing the cognitive demands of second language writing (Oxford, 1990). Although affective strategies were also part of the indirect strategy group, their relatively lower mean (M = 2.30) suggests less frequent use. Table 2 presents the detailed results.

| Strategy Category | Mean | S.D. | Frequency of Use | Rank of Use |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Memory | 2.48 | 0.54 | Low | 5 |
| Cognitive | 2.84 | 0.54 | High | 4 |
| Compensation | 2.11 | 0.49 | High | 3 |
| Metacognitive | 2.85 | 0.42 | High | 1 |
| Affective | 2.30 | 0.55 | Low | 6 |
| Social | 2.22 | 0.54 | High | 2 |
| Overall | 2.60 | 0.51 | | |

Table 2: Mean Scores and Frequency of LLS According to Category

As shown in Table 2, the overall mean score of M = 2.60 indicates a generally high level of strategy use among the 30 ESL participants. Metacognitive strategies were most frequently used (M = 2.85), followed closely by cognitive (M = 2.84) and compensation strategies (M = 2.11). Social strategies also showed moderate use (M = 2.22). In contrast, affective strategies—related to emotional regulation (Chamot & O'Malley, 1990)—were least used (M = 2.30). The descending order of strategy use was: metacognitive, cognitive, compensation, social, memory, and affective.

### Overall Individual Strategy Used

The analysis showed that metacognitive strategies (M = 2.85) were most frequently used, highlighting their role in planning and regulating writing tasks. In contrast, memory (M = 2.48) and affective strategies (M = 2.30) were least used, suggesting limited reliance on memorization and emotional regulation. Overall, pupils favored strategies that support cognitive and metacognitive processes in writing.

### Memory Strategy

The analysis of memory strategies for Year 6 ESL learners, presented in Table 3, reveals that four strategies were used frequently, with mean scores ranging from M = 2.721 to M = 2.567. The highest mean score, M = 2.721, was for the strategy "I imagine a picture in my head of how to use the new word." In contrast, five strategies were used less frequently, with mean scores ranging from M = 2.471 to M = 1.586, with "I use flashcards to remember new English words. I use flashcards to remember new English words." having the lowest mean score of M = 1.586.

| Memory Strategies | Never True of Me | Sometimes True of Me | Usually True of Me | Always True of Me | Mean | Level of Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I think about what I already know to help me learn new | 3 (10%) | 13 (43%) | 12 (40%) | 2 (7%) | 2.625 | High |

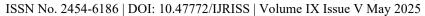| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| English words. | | | | | | |
| I make sentences with new English words so I can remember them. | 2 (26.7%) | 15 (50%) | 12 (40%) | 1 (3.3%) | 2.567 | High |
| I listen to new English words and look at pictures to help me remember. | 3 (10%) | 16 (53.3%) | 9 (30%) | 2 (6.7%) | 2.471 | Low |
| I imagine a picture in my head of how to use the new word. | 4 (13.3%) | 10 (33.3%) | 12 (40%) | 4 (13.3%) | 2.721 | High |
| I use words that sound the same (rhymes) to help me remember new words. | 7 (23.3%) | 9 (30%) | 10 (33.3%) | 4 (13.3%) | 2.144 | Low |
| I use flashcards to remember new English words. | 17 (56.7%) | 9 (30%) | 3 (10%) | 1 (3.3%) | 1.586 | Low |
| I act out the meaning of new words with my body. | 4 (13.3%) | 16 (53.3%) | 7 (23.3%) | 3 (10%) | 2.269 | Low |
| I go over my English lessons many times. | 4 (13.3%) | 18 (60%) | 6 (20%) | 2 (6.7%) | 2.173 | Low |
| I remember new English words by thinking about where I saw them — on a page, the board, or a sign. | 5 (16.7%) | 9 (30%) | 13 (43.3%) | 3 (10%) | 2.567 | High |

Table 3: Memory strategies

Over half of the respondents (56.7%) reported never using flashcards to remember new English words, indicating limited use of this memory strategy in the context of writing instruction  (Nguyen & Boers, 2019). Although flashcards are widely recognized as a vocabulary learning tool, their effectiveness in supporting writing development may be constrained by the traditionally teacher-centred approaches commonly found in some Malaysian classrooms. In contrast, interactive methods such as games and simulations may offer greater opportunities for language use and engagement.

Additionally, flashcards typically promote surface-level memorization rather than deep processing or active use, which are crucial for internalizing vocabulary for writing. According to Schmitt (2000), vocabulary learning strategies that involve elaboration, such as using new words in context, making associations, or creating mental images, are more effective for long-term retention and productive use. Flashcards, when used in isolation without interactive elements, may fail to support this level of cognitive engagement, making them less appealing or effective for writing development.

Therefore, the findings suggest a tendency among pupils to adopt more dynamic strategies that promote active participation and support the development of writing proficiency. Encouraging strategic, meaningful vocabulary use through varied and interactive tasks can better support students' development as competent and confident writers.

**Cognitive Strategy**

Table 4 presents the response percentages, mean scores, and usage levels of cognitive strategies. Eight items were frequently used, with "I watch English shows or movies to help me learn" rated highest at M = 3.200, with
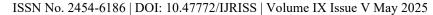
80% of respondents indicating frequent use. This aligns with Izawati's (2008) findings on the effectiveness of authentic English media. The data suggest that such strategies, which involve listening, speaking, and vocabulary practice, contribute to writing development through increased exposure to the language.

| Cognitive Strategies | Never True Of Me | Sometimes True Of Me | Usually True Of Me | Always True Of Me | Mean | Level of Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I say or write new English words many times. | 3 (10%) | 14 (46.7%) | 9 (30%) | 4 (13.3%) | 2.467 | Low |
| I try to speak like native English speakers. | 1 (3.3%) | 12 (40%) | 10 (33.3%) | 7 (23.3%) | 2.700 | High |
| I practice how English words sound. | 2 (6.7%) | 7 (23.3%) | 12 (40%) | 9 (30%) | 2.900 | High |
| I use English words I know in different ways. | 1 (3.3%) | 13 (43.3%) | 10 (33.3%) | 6 (20%) | 2.600 | High |
| I try to start talking to others in English. | 4 (13.3%) | 14 (46.7%) | 7 (23.3%) | 5 (16.7%) | 2.300 | Low |
| I watch English shows or movies to help me learn. | 0 (0%) | 6 (20%) | 12 (40%) | 12 (40%) | 3.200 | High |
| I read English books or stories for fun. | 1 (3.3%) | 9 (30%) | 11 (36.7%) | 9 (30%) | 2.800 | High |
| I write short notes, messages, or reports in English. | 2 (6.7%) | 15 (50%) | 9 (30%) | 4 (13.3%) | 2.350 | Low |
| I quickly read an English passage first, then read it again slowly to understand better. | 1 (3.3%) | 8 (26.7%) | 12 (40%) | 9 (30%) | 2.820 | High |
| I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English | 4 (13.3%) | 12 (40%) | 9 (30.0%) | 5 (16.7%) | 2.560 | High |
| I try to see patterns or rules in English. | 7 (23.3%) | 13 (43.3%) | 9 (30%) | 1 (3.3%) | 2.030 | Low |
| I break long English words into smaller parts I understand. | 3 (10%) | 12 (40%) | 8 (26.7%) | 7 (23.3%) | 2.410 | Low |
| I try not to translate every English word into my language. | 2 (6.7%) | 13 (43.3%) | 8 (26.7%) | 7 (23.3%) | 2.120 | Low |
| I make short summaries of what I hear or read in English. | 6 (20%) | 14 (46.7%) | 6 (20%) | 4 (13.3%) | 2.600 | High |

Table 4: Cognitive strategies

Tools such as dictionaries and the internet are commonly used by learners to aid in understanding and producing

language, which is essential for writing tasks. However, the strategy "I try to see patterns or rules in English" recorded the lowest mean (M = 2.030), suggesting that learners may not frequently engage such as noticing grammatical structures, syntax, or collocations which is essential for developing writing fluency and accuracy. Recognizing language patterns facilitates the transfer of implicit language knowledge into explicit control over writing mechanics (Ellis, 2020). A limited focus on patterns may result in repetitive, structurally weak writing with reduced syntactic variety.

Furthermore, 20% of respondents reported never summarizing information heard or read in English. This may indicate a preference for direct translation or passive information intake rather than engaging in higher-order cognitive processes like synthesis, reformulation, and idea organization. These summarizing strategies are closely linked to academic writing competence, as they support coherence, logical flow, and content integration (Hyland, 2013). Without consistent practice in summarizing, learners may struggle to produce cohesive texts that reflect critical thinking and clear argumentation skills necessary for advanced writing proficiency.
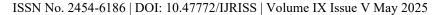
## Compensation Strategy

Table 5 shows that three compensation strategies are frequently used, with the highest mean score for "If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing" (M = 3.06). The least-used strategy, "I keep reading even if I don't know every word" (M = 2.35), was reported as "sometimes" true by over half of the respondents.

| Compensation Strategies | Never True Of Me | Sometimes True Of Me | Usually True Of Me | Always True Of Me | Mean | Level Of Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I try to guess the meaning of new English words. | 1 (3.8%) | 7 (24.0%) | 13 (44.2%) | 8 (27.9%) | 2.96 | High |
| I use hand signs or actions when I don't know the right English word. | 2 (6.7%) | 10 (33.7%) | 12 (41.3%) | 5 (18.3%) | 2.71 | High |
| I make up words when I don't know the correct ones in English. | 6 (20.2%) | 12 (39.4%) | 7 (25.0%) | 5 (15.4%) | 2.36 | Low |
| I keep reading even if I don't know every word. | 3 (10.6%) | 17 (55.8%) | 7 (22.1%) | 3 (11.5%) | 2.35 | Low |
| I try to guess what the other person will say next in English. | 5 (16.3%) | 8 (27.9%) | 14 (46.2%) | 3 (9.6%) | 2.49 | Low |
| If I forget a word, I use another word or sentence that means the same thing. | 1 (1.0%) | 6 (20.2%) | 15 (51.0%) | 8 (27.9%) | 3.06 | High |

Table 5: Compensation strategies

Compensation strategies were commonly used by ESL learners to address challenges in writing and speaking. Strategies such as code-switching to the mother tongue, using body language, and employing synonyms were frequently mentioned (Chamot & O'Malley, 1990). These strategies reflect learners' efforts to maintain communication and task performance despite linguistic gaps, showing adaptability in real-time language use. In interviews, ESL learners indicated that selecting familiar topics for writing tasks, particularly in examinations, helped them feel more confident. Writing about topics they had prior knowledge of allowed them to draw on existing vocabulary and structures, facilitating a more effective and fluent writing process (Oxford, 1990). This approach suggests a preference for leveraging prior knowledge to overcome writing difficulties, a strategy that aligns with the concept of using compensatory techniques to bridge gaps in language proficiency (Weir, 2005). Additionally, Macaro (2001) notes that compensation strategies are especially important in classroom settings

where learners must negotiate meaning under pressure, and these strategies can empower learners to take risks and remain engaged in tasks even when their linguistic resources are limited.

## Metacognitive Strategy

Table 6 shows that eight metacognitive strategies were used frequently, with the highest mean for "I listen carefully when someone speaks English" (M = 3.200). This indicates active engagement with spoken input, supporting writing development. However, "I try to find people to talk to in English" had the lowest mean (M = 2.000), reflecting limited use of time management strategies. This suggests that while ESL learners actively monitor their language use, planning remains less emphasized.

| Metacognitive Strategies | Never True Of Me | Sometimes True Of Me | Usually True Of Me | Always True Of Me | Mean | Level of Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I try to use English in many different ways. | 1 (3.3%) | 13 (43.3%) | 11 (36.7%) | 5 (16.7%) | 2.667 | High |
| I notice my mistakes in English and learn from them. | 0 (0.0%) | 5 (16.7%) | 17 (56.7%) | 8 (26.7%) | 3.100 | High |
| I listen carefully when someone speaks English. | 0 (0.0%) | 5 (16.7%) | 14 (46.7%) | 11 (36.7%) | 3.200 | High |
| I make time in my day to study English. | 1 (3.3%) | 7 (23.3%) | 11 (36.7%) | 11 (36.7%) | 3.067 | High |
| I try to find people to talk to in English. | 8 (26.7%) | 16 (53.3%) | 4 (13.3%) | 2 (6.7%) | 2.000 | Low |
| I look for people I can talk to in English | 1 (3.3%) | 10 (33.3%) | 12 (40.0%) | 7 (23.3%) | 2.833 | High |
| I look for chances to read more in English. | 1 (3.3%) | 10 (33.3%) | 12 (40.0%) | 7 (23.3%) | 2.833 | High |
| I have clear goals to get better at English. | 3 (10.0%) | 12 (40.0%) | 11 (36.7%) | 4 (13.3%) | 2.533 | High |
| I think about how much I've learned in English. | 2 (6.7%) | 9 (30.0%) | 11 (36.7%) | 8 (26.7%) | 2.833 | High |

Table 6: Metacognitive strategies

As shown in Table 6, the item "I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better" received high responses, with 14 learners (46.7%) selecting 'Usually true of me' and 12 (40%) choosing 'Always true of me'. This suggests that a majority of the ESL learners actively reflect on their errors, an essential component in developing writing proficiency. The frequent use of this metacognitive strategy implies that learners are engaging in self-monitoring and self-correction during writing tasks. Such strategic behavior supports the development of more accurate and coherent written output, aligning with Chamot and O'Malley's (1990) view that metacognitive strategies are key to planning, monitoring, and evaluating language learning, particularly in productive skills like writing.

## Affective Strategy

Table 7 shows that two affective strategies were used frequently, while four were used less often (M = 2.833 to M = 1.667). The highest mean was for "I tell myself to keep trying, even if I might make a mistake" (M = 2.833), indicating that ESL learners use self-motivation to overcome language anxiety, potentially boosting writing confidence. In contrast, "I write about my feelings in a diary." had the lowest mean (M = 1.667), with 56.7% reporting it was never true for them, suggesting limited use of reflective writing to support emotional regulation and writing development.

| Affective Strategies | Never True Of Me | Sometimes True Of Me | Usually True Of Me | Always True Of Me | Mean | Level of Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I try to stay calm when I feel scared to use English. | 3 (10.0%) | 9 (30.0%) | 11 (36.7%) | 7 (23.3%) | 2.733 | High |
| I tell myself to keep trying, even if I might make a mistake. | 2 (6.7%) | 8 (26.7%) | 13 (43.3%) | 7 (23.3%) | 2.833 | High |
| I give myself a treat when I do well in English. | 10 (33.3%) | 13 (43.3%) | 5 (16.7%) | 2 (6.7%) | 1.967 | Low |
| I notice when I feel nervous while learning or speaking English. | 9 (30.0%) | 10 (33.3%) | 7 (23.3%) | 4 (13.3%) | 2.200 | Low |
| I write about my feelings in a diary. | 17 (56.7%) | 8 (26.7%) | 3 (10.0%) | 2 (6.7%) | 1.667 | Low |
| I talk to someone about how I feel when I learn English. | 14 (46.7%) | 10 (33.3%) | 4 (13.3%) | 2 (6.7%) | 1.800 | Low |

Table 7: Affective strategies

ESL learners, particularly those with advanced language proficiency, often exhibit distinct developmental characteristics in areas such as cognitive, emotional, and social aspects (Touron, Touron, & Silvero, 2005). These learners may demonstrate heightened emotional regulation, enabling them to manage language-related anxieties more effectively (Aliza & Hamidah, 2009). This emotional stability might influence their language learning strategies, particularly in the context of writing, where they may use affective strategies less frequently. The limited use of such strategies could be linked to their ability to regulate emotions during writing tasks, focusing more on cognitive and metacognitive strategies to enhance their writing proficiency.

## Social Strategy

Table 8 shows that four social strategies are used frequently, with mean scores ranging from M = 3.070 to M = 2.300. The highest mean score (M = 3.070) was for the strategy "If I don't understand something in English, I ask the person to say it slower or again" highlighting ESL learners' proactive efforts to clarify their understanding. This strategy supports writing by improving language comprehension. In contrast, the lowest mean score (M = 2.300) was for "I try to learn about the culture of people who speak English" suggesting that cultural learning is less emphasized in writing development.

| Social Strategies | Never True Of Me | Usually True Of Me | Always True Of Me | Mean | Level of Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| If I don't understand something in English, I ask the person to say it slower or again. | 1 (3.3%) | 15 (50%) | 9 (30%) | 3.070 | High |
| I ask people to correct me when I speak English. | 2 (6.7%) | 12 (40%) | 8 (26.7%) | 2.800 | High |
| I practice English with other learners. | 1 (3.3%) | 14 (46.7%) | 10 (33.3%) | 2.900 | High |
| I ask English speakers for help when I need it. | 3 (10%) | 16 (53.3%) | 5 (16.7%) | 2.750 | High |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I ask questions in English. | 4 (13.3%) | 9 (30%) | 4 (13.3%) | 2.350 | Low |
| I try to learn about the culture of people who speak English. | 5 (16.7%) | 9 (30%) | 5 (16.7%) | 2.300 | Low |

Table 8: Social strategies

The English curriculum in primary schools aims to develop pupils' ability to use English for real-life communication, including writing. Emphasizing social interaction, it promotes strategies like seeking help, asking for feedback, and practicing with peers (Newman, 2023). These social strategies support ESL pupils' writing by improving clarity, accuracy, and confidence.

# DISCUSSION

This study provides valuable insights into the language learning strategies (LLS) used by Year 6 ESL learners, particularly in improving their writing skills. The high overall mean score (M = 2.60) indicates that pupils actively use a variety of strategies to enhance their English proficiency. There was a clear preference for indirect strategies, especially metacognitive ones, suggesting that learners are more inclined to plan, organize, and monitor their learning rather than rely solely on memorization or linguistic manipulation. This self-regulated approach reflects a growing awareness of their own learning processes. Similarly, Rahmat et al. (2024) found that Year 6 ESL pupils frequently used strategies such as repetition of unfamiliar words, peer feedback for revision, and code-switching to compensate for vocabulary gaps. Less frequent strategies included writing in English independently, using grammar check tools, and adapting L1 words. Their findings underscore the importance of strategy-based instruction that is responsive to actual learner behavior.

Metacognitive strategies emerged as the most commonly used (M = 2.85). Pupils planned and organized their thoughts using outlines and notes, continuously checked their writing for errors, and demonstrated awareness of how others used English. These behaviors helped them structure and refine their writing, supporting theories that emphasize the role of metacognition in language learning. Teng and Zhang (2021) also emphasized the importance of metacognitive strategy instruction in empowering learners to become autonomous and reflective traits observed among the participants of this study, who frequently revised their writing, reflected on their errors, and demonstrated awareness of how others used English. These behaviors support theories emphasizing the role of metacognition in structuring and refining writing. However, despite this strategic awareness, pupils showed lower scores in planning their study time, indicating a gap between knowing what to do and consistently applying it. This suggests the need for explicit instruction in time management and goal-setting. This is supported by Peter and Hashim (2023) who found that younger learners show inconsistent use of learning strategies due to limited autonomy and discipline, highlighting the need for clear instruction in time management and goal-setting. These findings highlight the need for both metacognitive awareness and explicit instruction in time management and goal-setting.

Cognitive strategies were also prevalent (M = 2.84), with students engaging in meaningful exposure to English through reading, media, and pronunciation practice. Pupils also translated from their first language and repeated vocabulary to aid retention. These strategies were useful for acquiring new vocabulary, though they occasionally led to errors when translations did not fit the context or grammar of English. The limited use of deeper processing strategies such as summarizing or identifying language patterns suggests surface-level engagement, which could be improved through instructional focus on critical thinking and textual analysis. However, the present study's limited evidence of deep processing, such as summarizing or analyzing language patterns, mirrors concerns raised by Gan et al. (2020), who found that younger learners tend to remain at the surface level of engagement unless explicitly trained in higher-order thinking.

Compensation strategies were moderately used (M = 2.11). Pupils employed guessing, paraphrasing, and using synonyms to overcome vocabulary gaps. These strategies helped learners maintain fluency and continue writing even when their vocabulary was limited. However, their reluctance to skip unknown words points to a preference for accuracy over fluency, which may stem from an exam-oriented educational environment that emphasizes precision. In contrast, studies such as by Rahimi et al. (2012) showed higher usage of pupils in communicative

settings where fluency was prioritized. The lower use here may reflect an exam-focused environment that discourages risk-taking and reinforces accuracy, supporting the notion that contextual and cultural factors influence strategy choice.

Memory strategies were among the least used (M = 2.48), including methods such as grouping words and visualizing scenarios to support vocabulary recall. These techniques helped make writing more descriptive and imaginative, though their infrequent use suggests a lack of multisensory or interactive learning experiences in the classroom. Similarly, affective strategies (M = 2.30) were rarely used. While some pupils practiced emotional regulation through positive self-talk to reduce writing anxiety, overall use was low. This raises concerns, as emotional support is crucial for language development. High levels of anxiety, as suggested by Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), can negatively impact writing performance. This is consistent with Dewaele and Li (2020), who argued that younger learners often lack emotional literacy training, limiting their capacity to manage writing-related stress.

Social strategies had moderate usage (M = 2.22), with pupils sometimes seeking help from peers or teachers. These interactions helped learners refine their writing and build vocabulary. However, limited classroom opportunities for collaboration and cultural norms that prioritize individual academic success may have restricted the development of these strategies. The findings highlight that learners often favor solitary and self-regulated strategies over collaborative or emotionally expressive ones. Based on the previous findings, Nakatani (2018) noted that pupils often underutilize collaborative strategies due to competitive academic cultures and limited peer interaction in classroom settings.

The study reveals an imbalance in learners' strategic behavior, with strengths in metacognitive and cognitive areas but underuse of memory, affective, and social strategies. It emphasizes the importance of holistic strategy instruction that integrates emotional support and social interaction alongside cognitive and self-regulatory techniques. Moreover, the research shows that explicit instruction in language learning strategies enhances students' awareness, making them more reflective and autonomous learners. As a result, pupils become more adaptable, confident, and effective communicators. This observation aligns with findings from a study conducted by Nazri et al. (2016) who found that while metacognitive strategies were frequently used among successful ESL learners, affective strategies were least employed, pointing to the need for more balanced instruction. Similarly, Hanafiah et al. (2021) reported that Malaysian ESL teachers commonly used metacognitive and cognitive strategies, but affective strategies remained underutilized. Tee et al. (2021) observed a similar pattern among upper primary pupils from rural areas, where memory strategies dominated and affective strategies were least favoured, highlighting the need for explicit instruction in emotional and social aspects of learning. These findings highlight the need for balanced strategy instruction that includes both cognitive and emotional aspects to foster confident and proficient language learners.

## IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, several key implications emerge for curriculum developers, school administrators and teachers seeking to enhance ESL writing instruction. Firstly, curriculum developers could consider integrating age-appropriate activities and resources that systematically foster self-regulation, planning and monitoring skills in writing from the primary school level. This is because the demonstrated preference for metacognitive strategies among young ESL learners in Sarawak highlights the potential of embedding explicit strategy instruction within the national English language curriculum. By strategically incorporating such activities and resources, curriculum developers can empower young ESL learners to become independent and proficient writers from an early stage.

Secondly, at the school level, school administrators can support the implementation of strategy-based instruction by allocating resources for the teachers' professional development, encouraging collaborative lesson planning which focuses on strategy integration and fostering a school-wide culture that values and promotes learner writing autonomy. Therefore, support and rapport from the school administrators can help learners to cultivate and enhance their writing proficiency.

Next, to cultivate independent and effective writers, teachers should first focus on developing metacognitive

strategies. The strategies include explicitly teaching learners on how to set writing goals, plan their written drafts, check their work and reflect on their learning, which builds on their existing strengths. This practice can produce more independent and better writers who have a deeper understanding of the best way to learn writing.

Other than that, to foster more complex and organized writing, teachers must address the underutilization of deeper cognitive strategies. While pupils use some cognitive strategies like watching English shows and reading, they don't often use deeper thinking strategies like finding patterns in English or summarizing skills. Hence, the ESL learners need guidance in analyzing language critically and understanding idea connections to write better.

In addition, to address potential anxiety and improve overall writing performance, teachers should prioritize trying to make learning more encouraging and less stressful. For instance, they can teach writing by using games or songs. This is because a relaxed learning environment can help to alleviate learners' anxiety in writing which allows them to write better (Sari et al., 2024). Based on the pedagogical implications, it shows that teachers play a crucial role in improving their writing skills.

In conclusion, the study delivers significant information regarding strategic behaviours used by Year 6 ESL learners during their writing development process. The study reveals that the learners have improved their learning autonomy since they use metacognitive and cognitive strategies regularly yet they could benefit from developing their memory and social and affective strategies. The uneven distribution of strategies demonstrates students are reflective and capable of work planning and monitoring yet needs additional holistic learning support that includes emotional support and collaboration. Hence, this research demonstrates that learners can develop autonomous writing skills along with enhanced proficiency through strategic language learning strategy instruction.

# REFERENCES

1. Baltabayeva, A. K. (2023). Theoretical foundations for the formation of students' language learning strategies in the English language classroom. Қарағанды Университетінің Хабаршысы [Bulletin of Karaganda University], 3(111). 213-218. https://doi.org/10.31489/2023ped3/213-218
2. Bhowmik, S. K., & Kim, M. (2022). ESL Writing Instruction in K-12 Settings: Pedagogical Approaches and Classroom Techniques. Language and Literacy: A Canadian Educational e-Journal, 24(2), 174–197. https://doi.org/10.20360/langandlit29612
3. Chen, H. P., & Shu, D. (2024). Exploring English self-concept and investment of successful EFL learners from a Chinese secondary school. Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching. Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 1-22. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.31971
4. Dewaele, J.-M., & Li, C. (2020). Emotions in second language acquisition: A Critical Reviewand Research Agenda. Foreign Language Annals, 53(2), 343–359. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12460Ellis, R. (2020). Instructed Second Language Acquisition: A Literature Review. Ministry of Education, New Zealand.
5. Ghosh, A., & Sen, S. (2023). Relationship between Different Components of English Writing Skill. International Journal of Research and Review, 10(10), 463–471. https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20231058
6. Griffiths, C. (2020). The strategy factor in successful language learning (2nd ed.). MultilingualMatters.
7. Hanafiah, M. H., Embi, M. A., & Mahmud, R. (2021). Identifying language learning strategies For Reading Among Malaysian TESL Postgraduates in a Public University. International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 11(8), 1864–1878. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v11-i8/13966
8. Hardiyanto, A., Nastika MN, O., Eslabon, M. N. A., & Suprapto, I. (2024). Learning Strategies Used by ESL Students in Learning English at Capiz National High School, Philippines. JEELLS (Journal of English Education and Linguistics Studies), 11(1), 453–474. https://doi.org/10.30762/jeels.v11i1.2723
9. Hashim, H. (2023). Unlocking the Secret of Language Learning Strategies: Improving Year 4 ESL Pupils' Writing Skills. International Journal of Academic Research in Business & Social Sciences, 13(6). https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v13-i6/17610
10. Hyland, K. (2013). Second Language Writing. Cambridge University Press John Peter, A. A., & Hashim, H. (2023). Language Learning Strategies Used by ESL/EFL Learners: A Systematic Review (2019 – 2023). International Journal of Academic Research in Business & Social Sciences, 13(12). 2970-2990. https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v13-i12/20148
11. Kakamad, K., Mawlod, K., & Mohammed, M. (2024). Personality Traits and Language Learning

Strategies among EFL Students. Passer Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences, 6(1), 185-191. https://doi.org/10.24271/psr.2024.425624.1422

12. Khalil, S. M. (2024). Toward Strategic EFL Learners: A Correlational Study Between Proficiency Level and Grammar Learning Strategies. Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 15(6), 1951–1958. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1506.20

13. Li, Y. (2023). Student Use of Language Learning Strategies in Second/Foreign Language (L2) Learning— Chinese English Majors as an Example. Lecture Notes on Language and Literature, 6(5). https://doi.org/10.23977/langl.2023.060503

14. Nakatani, Y. (2018). Developing an Oral Communication Strategy Inventory. The Modern Language Journal, 90(2), 151–168.

15. Nazri, N. M., Yunus, M. M., & Nazri, N. D. M. (2016). The use of language learning strategies among Malaysian ESL learners in a private university. Advances in Language and Literary Studies, 7(2), 124–133. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.7n.2p.124

16. Newman, R. S. (2023). Adaptive help seeking: A strategy of self-regulated learning. In Self-regulation of learning and performance (pp. 283-301). Routledge.

17. Nguyen, C. D., & Boers, F. (2019). The effectiveness of games for vocabulary retention in EFL contexts: A meta-analysis. Language Teaching Research, 23(6), 667–685.

18. Nguyen, L. T. C., & Gu, Y. (2020). Strategy-based instruction: A learner-focused approach to developing learner autonomy. Language Teaching Research, 24(5), 664–686. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168818787540

19. Oxford, R. L. (1990). Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know. Newbury House.

20. Radwan, A. A. (2022). Foreign Language Learners' Beliefs and Use of Language Learning Strategies. Journal of Arts and Social Sciences (JASS), 13(3). 3-1 https://doi.org/10.53542/jass.v13i3.5415

21. Rahmanova, G., Yangın Ekşi, G., Shahabitdinova, S., Nasirova, G., Sotvoldiyev, B., & Miralimova, S. (2025). Enhancing Writing Skills with Social Media-Based Corrective Feedback. World Journal of English Language, 15(1). 252-264. https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v15n1p252

22. Rahmat, N. A., Mohd Yazid, N. A., Yong, W. K., Zhuri, H. A. H., Yazid, M., & Hashim, H. (2024). Assessing Language Learning Strategies in Enhancing Writing Skills among ESL Year 6 Primary School Pupils. International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development, 13(3). https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarped/v13-i3/21820

23. Rahimi, M., Riazi, A., & Saif, S. (2012). An investigation into the factors affecting the use of language learning strategies by Persian EFL learners. Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 15(2), 19–43.

24. Rakhimovna, D., & Urozova, M. (2020). Effective strategies for improving writing skills of elementary english language learners. Science Education, 1(7), 241–243. https://openscience.uz/index.php/sciedu/article/view/510

25. Rana, N. (2023). Strategies for Learning the English Language as Reported by Advanced Language Learners. Research Review International Journal of Multidisciplinary, 8(6), 126–136. https://doi.org/10.31305/rrijm.2023.v08.n06.017

26. Rubin, J. (1981). Study of cognitive processes in second language learning. Applied Linguistics, 11, 117-131.

27. Rose, H., Briggs, J. G., & McWhorter, W. (2022). Exploring learner strategies in L2 writing: A mixed-methods approach. System, 105, 102746. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2022.102746

28. Tahmina, T. (2024). High-proficiency and low-proficiency learners' compensation strategies use in english language learning. Language Literacy, 8(2), 658–666. https://doi.org/10.30743/ll.v8i2.8766

29. Tee, W. T., Mahanita, M., & Narasuman, S. (2021). Language learning strategies in acquiring English language skills among Year 5 pupils in rural areas in Southern Malaysia. International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences, 11(8), 1473–1487. https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v11-i8/10353

30. Teng, F. (2022). The impact of social and collaborative writing strategies on young EFL learners' writing development. Language and Education, 36(1), 59–76. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2021.1941915

31. Teng, F., & Huang, J. (2023). Strategy-based instruction and its impact on writing performance and learner autonomy in EFL contexts. Journal of Second Language Writing, 60, 101006. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2023.101006

32. Teng, F., & Zhang, L. J. (2021). Empowering learners in the second language classroom: A study of

metacognitive strategy instruction. TESOL Quarterly, 55(1), 210–233. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.589

33. Wood, J. (2020). A Closer Look at Language Learning Strategies. Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT), 2019(1), 100-105. https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTPCP2019-13

34. Zakaria, N., & Sulaiman, N. A. (2024). The Needs Analysis of ESL Learners' Expository Writing Challenges: Perspectives of ESL Teachers. International Journal of Academic Research in Business & Social Sciences. 14(5), 322–335. https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v14-i5/21387

35. Zhang, L. J., & Li, W. (2021). Language learning strategies and language proficiency: A meta-analysis. Applied Linguistics Review, 12(1), 1-26.