LEARNING STRATEGIES USED BY ESL STUDENTS IN LEARNING ENGLISH AT CAPIZ NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL, PHILIPPINES

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Abstract: Learning strategies encompass deliberate techniques and methods employed by individuals to optimize their acquisition and comprehension of information or skills. Among the categories of language learning strategies frequently utilized are memory, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies, all of which serve as valuable tools for enhancing language acquisition efficiency. Consequently, this study aims to assess the utilization level of language learning strategies, determining the extent to which students employ these strategies, and

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identifying the most and least utilized strategies in learning English. For data collection, this research adopted Oxford's Strategy Inventory Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire version 7.0. Employing quantitative descriptive methods, data were gathered from 42 Capiz National High School ESL students. The findings revealed a tendency among students to utilize strategies in their English learning endeavors, with cognitive strategies being the most frequently employed and affective strategies being the least used. These results underscore the importance for ESL teachers to tailor teaching methods, materials, and activities to align with students' preferred strategies, thereby supporting language learning effectively. Additionally, future studies are recommended to utilize larger and more diverse samples to further explore the relationships between learning strategies and other variables in greater depth.

Keywords: *English as a second language, language learning strategy, learning English, SLIL*

INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a second language is a challenging process that requires planned, organized, and intentional training along with personal experience (Gumartifa et al., 2020). Effective language acquisition involves the utilization of diverse techniques, procedures, and routines (Hashim et al., 2018). Therefore, employing varied learning approaches is essential for successful English language study (Ahmed & Abdulla, 2014). Furthermore, the use of learning strategies is crucial to assist language learners in completing their tasks (Kamiri et al., 2022), and students must employ these strategies to achieve satisfactory proficiency (Jannah & Wardah, 2022).

Various researchers (Anderson, 2005; Chamot, 2004; Oxford, 1989; Shi, 2017) provide insights into the understanding of learning strategies. Firstly, Oxford (1989) emphasizes that learners utilize

learning strategies as behaviors or actions to enhance the effectiveness, independence, and enjoyment of language acquisition. Secondly, Chamot (2004) describes learning strategies as intentional concepts and activities used by students to attain learning goals. Thirdly, Anderson (2005) suggests that learners engage in conscious actions referred to as strategies to enhance language acquisition. Lastly, Shi (2017) defines learning strategies as the conscious actions learners take to improve their learning. From these definitions, it is evident that learning strategies are consciously carried out activities aimed at assisting students in achieving their target of acquiring the second or foreign language they are studying.

Furthermore, learning strategies are purposeful approaches and methods utilized by individuals to facilitate the acquisition and comprehension of new information or skills. These strategies involve specific steps in which students engage in activities to make the learning process more convenient, efficient, and enjoyable, thereby fostering autonomy and adaptability in new conditions (Oxford, 1990). They encompass activities such as obtaining, analyzing, storing, and retrieving external knowledge, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the learning process (Wang et al., 2021). Proficient language learners must grasp the purpose of the learning approach (Cohen & Wang, 2018; Bećirović et al., 2021). Choosing the appropriate learning strategies is crucial for language acquisition (Kenol & Hashim, 2022). Additionally, language learning strategies empower students to optimize their abilities, boost confidence, and increase motivation throughout the learning process (Melvina et al., 2020).

Language acquisition studies are increasingly focusing on investigating language learning processes, particularly in the context of studying English as a second language (ESL). Several scholars indicate that Language Learning Strategies (LLS) can significantly aid students in acquiring a language more effectively and enhancing their language proficiency (Alnujaidi, 2018; Bayuong et al., 2019). Oxford (1990) categorizes language learning strategies into two types: direct

and indirect. Direct strategies involve mental engagement with the target language, while indirect strategies facilitate language learning without direct involvement with the target language.

Moreover, direct strategies consist of memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensatory strategies (Oxford,1990). Memory strategies involve the use of repetition, association, and visualization to retain new vocabulary and grammar rules. There are four types of memory strategies: creating linkage, employing pictures, reviewing, and actions. According to Oxford (1990), cognitive strategies pertain to students' active manipulation and transformation of the target language. These approaches aid students in understanding, recalling, and utilizing the target language through formal exercises such as practicing pronunciation and writing, reasoning, analyzing, quickly grasping concepts, and note-taking. Additionally, as noted by Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016), cognitive strategies involve comprehending and storing information for subsequent use in either long-term or short-term memory. Lastly, compensation strategies encourage students to use the new language when they lack understanding of language skills. This strategy involves guessing the meaning in reading and listening activities, while in writing and speaking, mime or gesture is utilized (Oxford,1990).

Furthermore, Oxford (1990) outlined that indirect strategies encompass metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. Metacognitive strategies, which include organizing, prioritizing, goal-setting, and self-management, are utilized to monitor, control, or facilitate independent language acquisition. These strategies contribute to the learning process by involving planning, self-monitoring, and evaluation, thus supporting students in strategizing, organizing, and assessing their language acquisition efforts (Oxford,1990). Affective strategies assist students in managing emotions by recognizing and addressing potential frustrations as they arise, thereby making it easier for them to overcome challenges. Social strategies aid students in communicating with others to practice and

improve language skills through activities such as questioning, collaboration, and understanding and sharing the feelings of others.

Numerous scholars have conducted studies on learning strategies in the context of EFL. Firstly, Sartika et al., (2019) examined learning strategies commonly utilized by successful and unsuccessful students at senior high school. The results revealed that unsuccessful students tend to rely more on cognitive strategies, while successful students use a wider array of methods, especially metacognitive strategies. Secondly, Lestari & Fatimah (2020) aimed to determine how often LLS is used by student teachers at Universitas Negeri Padang's English Language Education Program, as well as which strategies they prefer the most and least. The findings indicated that international EFL teaching students commonly use metacognitive strategies and less frequently employ affective strategies in EFL contexts. Thirdly, Amir (2018) explored the predominant learning strategies employed by junior high school students across the four language skills. The results showed that reading strategies were used the most, while speaking strategies were used the least. Fourthly, Syafryadin (2020) conducted research to discover strategies usually employed in learning speaking from two high schools in Indonesia. The outcomes indicated that the most popular strategy used by learners in both schools was a metacognitive strategy.

Furthermore, similar topics have been extensively explored by various researchers at the tertiary level (Hapsari, 2019; Hong-nam & Leavell, 2006; Nguyen & Terry, 2017; Salam et al., 2020; Tanjung, 2018). According to Hong-nam & Leavell (2006) their research aimed to identify students' preferences in applying learning strategies to enhance their English language abilities. The findings revealed that learners predominantly utilized metacognitive and social strategies, while memory and affective strategies were less frequently employed.

In another study by Nguyen & Terry (2017), Vietnamese EFL students were examined to investigate the frequency and methods of language learning strategies, as well as the relationship between LLS use and self-rated English proficiency in the Vietnamese context. The

research findings suggested that the success of English language learners is associated with positive perceptions and the balanced use of learning strategies alongside engaging tasks to foster interest, strengthen determination, and provide support for students. Tanjung`s (2018) research focused on exploring the impact of students' age on their language learning strategies. The results indicated a preference for indirect strategies, supplemented by the integration of direct strategies into their learning approach.

Additionally, Hapsari (2019) conducted a study to map students' language learning strategies and determine their level of strategic proficiency. Metacognitive strategies garnered significant attention, while other strategies maintained a moderate profile, suggesting occasional usage by students. Furthermore, Salam et al (2020) investigated the primary learning styles and learning strategies employed by students. The results suggested that proficient English language learners who employ multiple learning strategies and styles can optimize their English language proficiency.

Therefore, researchers were intrigued and motivated to conduct this research, considering the limited exploration of learning strategies in the ESL context, especially at the secondary school level at Capiz National High School (CHNS) in the Philippines. Due to the constrained scope of investigating learning strategies in the ESL context, the focus remains solely on identifying the strategies most frequently and least frequently used by high-ability students at Capiz National High School. Furthermore, there are only a few studies that have delved into learning strategies at the secondary school level. Thus, this research aims to contribute to the understanding of effective teaching practices and to help optimize student learning outcomes. Additionally, the study intends to investigate: First, what is the level of language learning strategies employed by ESL students at Capiz National High School—whether it is generally high, medium, or low? Second, what are the most and least utilized strategies by ESL students in Capiz National High School, Philippines?

METHOD

Research Design

The research utilized a descriptive quantitative method aimed at addressing the research questions. This study aims to describe and summarize data rather than test specific hypotheses or theories. Instead, the focus is on gathering information to better understand the problem under study. In this case, the research investigated the learning strategies of students in English at Capiz National High School, Philippines, with a sample consisting of ESL students.

Participants

The participants in the investigation were ESL students at Capiz National High School, Philippines. A total of 42 students from the tenth-grade level were involved in this research. The researcher selected these students because they are likely to provide valuable insights into student preferences regarding the use of learning strategies.

Table 1.

Number of the participants

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	20	48%
Female	22	52%
Total	**42**	**100%**

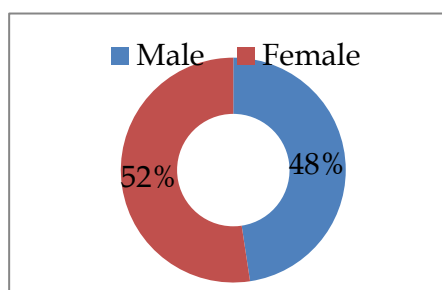The following is the result of the donut chart's number of participants:

Figure 1. Donut chart Number of participants

Instrument

The instrument utilized in this research was the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire version 7.0, developed by Oxford (1990). The SILL questionnaire consists of 50 statements categorized into six main categories: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Specifically, items 1-9 pertain to memory strategy; 10-23 pertain to cognitive strategy; 24-29 pertain to compensation strategy; 30-38 pertain to metacognitive strategies; 39-44 pertain to affective strategies; and 45-50 pertain to social strategy.

Data Collection Technique

In this research, a modified questionnaire served as the data collection technique. The questionnaire utilized a Likert scale with five answer choices: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree. The questionnaire was distributed via Google Form and shared through the messenger group on Facebook.

Data Analysis

This research employed descriptive quantitative analysis to examine the data concerning learning strategies utilized by ESL learners at Capiz National High School (CNHS). The researcher used Microsoft Excel to tabulate and summarize questionnaire responses. Then, calculated statistical measures such as the mean (M), median (Me), mode (Mo), and standard deviation (Std). Additionally, the researchers identified and interpreted the ranking of language learning strategies using the framework developed by Oxford (1990).

Table 2.

Language Learning Strategies Level (Oxford, 1990)

Level	Interpretation	Score
High	Always or almost always	4.5 – 5.0
	Usually used	3.5 – 4.4
Medium	Sometimes used	2.5 – 3.4
Low	Seldom used	1.5 – 2.4
	Never used	1.0 – 1.4

FINDINGS

According to the two previously formulated parts of the questions, the research findings on student learning strategies are presented.

The level of language learning strategies by ESL students

To determine the level of use of learning strategies, researchers analyzed the data by calculating the mean for each strategy. The table results are as follows:

Table 3.

The level of memory strategy usage

No	Items	Mean	Level
1	I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English	4,24	High
2	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	4,24	High
3	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.	3,81	High
4	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	3,88	High
5	I use rhymes to remember new English words.	2,55	Medium
6	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	2,36	Low
7	I physically act out new English words.	2,83	Medium
8	review English lessons often.	3,19	Medium
9	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	3,60	High
	Overall	**3,41**	**Medium**

Table 3 illustrates the frequency of students' utilization of memory strategies. Items 1 and 2 are the strategies most frequently selected by learners, with a mean score of 4.24. This indicates that students often rely on previous knowledge to understand new concepts and prefer to write down new words to facilitate memorization. On the other hand, item number 5 is the least utilized, with a mean score of 2.55. This suggests that using rhymes as a method for learning English vocabulary is less effective according to the respondents.

Table 4.
Level of cognitive strategy usage

No.	Items	Mean	Level
10	I say or write new English words several times.	3,71	High
11	I try to talk like native English speakers.	4,29	High
12	I practice the sounds of English.	4,07	High
13	I use the English words I know in different ways.	4,36	High
14	I use the English words I know in different ways.	3,76	High
15	I watch English language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English.	4,69	High
16	I read for pleasure in English.	4,29	High
17	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	4,52	High
18	I first skim an English passage (read it quickly) then go back and read carefully.	4,31	High
19	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new new words in English.	3,69	High
20	I try to find patterns in English.	3,76	High
21	I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	3,90	High
22	I try not to translate word-for-word.	3,81	High
23	I make summaries of information that I hear . or read in English.	3,81	High
	Overall	**4,07**	**High**

Table 4 presents the frequency of students' utilization of cognitive strategies. Item number 15 emerges as the most frequently used strategy, with a mean score of 4.69. This indicates that students often engage in audio-visual activities such as watching English language TV shows or movies, employing mental processes to enhance their language learning experience. Conversely, the least utilized strategy is represented by item number 19, with a mean score

of 3.69. This suggests that students are accustomed to or find it easier to comprehend the meaning of new English words without resorting to seeking similar words in their native language. As a result, this strategy is deemed less effective for them.

Table 5.
Level of compensation strategy usage

No.	Items	Mean	Level
24	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	3,76	High
25	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	3,83	High
26	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	2,64	Medium
27	I read English without looking up every new word.	3,60	High
28	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English	3,40	Medium
29	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	4,48	High
	Overall	**3,62**	**High**

Table 5 shows the frequency of students' utilization of compensation strategies. Item number 25 emerges as the strategy most frequently chosen by students, with a mean score of 3.83. This suggests that students often resort to using gestures or body language when they encounter difficulties expressing their thoughts in English. Conversely, the least utilized strategy is represented by item number 26, with a mean score of 2.64. This indicates that students do not feel the need to coin new English words because they possess a broad vocabulary and a strong comprehension of the language.

Table 6 presents the frequency of students' utilization of metacognitive strategies. Item number 31 emerges as the strategy most frequently chosen by students, with a mean score of 4.40. This indicates that students tend to organize and evaluate their learning process to enhance their language skills. On the other hand, item number 34 is the least used, with a mean score of 2.95. This suggests that students prioritize flexibility in study time over making rigid schedule plans.

Table 6.

Level of metacognitive strategy usage

No.	Items	Mean	Level
30	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	4,17	High
31	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	4,40	High
32	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	4,24	High
33	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	4,12	High
34	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	2,95	Medium
35	I look for people I can talk to in English.	3,19	Medium
36	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	3,98	High
37	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	3,79	High
38	I think about my progress in learning English.	3,79	High
	Overall	**3,85**	**High**

Table 7.

Level of affective strategy usage

No.	Items	Mean	Level
39	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	3,43	Medium
40	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	4,07	High
41	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	2,52	Medium
42	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	2,76	Medium
43	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary	3,05	Medium
44	I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	2,76	Medium
	Overall	**3,10**	**Medium**

Table 7 displays the frequency of students' utilization of affective strategies. Item number 40 emerges as the strategy most frequently chosen by students, with a mean score of 4.04. This suggests that students often regulate their emotions and feelings to enhance their language learning abilities. On the other hand, item number 41 is the least utilized strategy, with a mean score of 2.52. This indicates that students occasionally reward themselves for their language learning efforts.

Table 8.
Level of social strategy usage

No.	Items	Mean	Level
45	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or to say it again.	3,98	High
46	I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	3,86	High
47	I practice English with other students.	3,62	High
48	I ask for help from English speakers.	3,38	High
49	I ask questions in English.	4,19	High
50	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	3,67	High
	Overall	**3,78**	**High**

Table 8 illustrates the frequency of students' utilization of social strategies. Item number 49 emerges as the strategy most frequently chosen by students, with a mean score of 4.19. This indicates that students frequently engage in social interactions and asking questions in English. Conversely, item number 48 is the least utilized strategy, with a mean score of 3.38. This suggests that students rarely seek assistance from English speakers.

The most and the least strategies used by ESL students

After investigating the level of strategies used by students in ESL learning, researchers will identify the strategy that receives the most and least scores. The results findings are as follows:

Table 9.
Most and Least strategy use

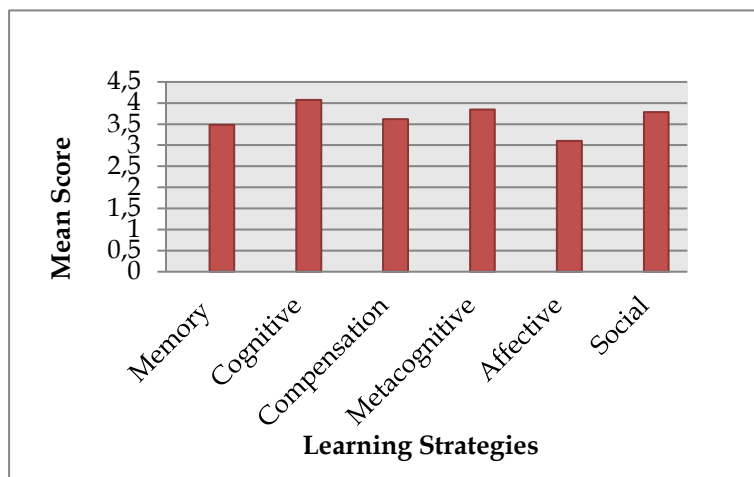| Strategy Category	Mean Score	SD	Rank
Memory	3.41	1.19	5
Cognitive	4.07	1.00	1
Compensation	3.62	1.25	4
Metacognitive	3.85	1.04	2
Affective	3.10	1.25	6
Social	3.78	1.23	3

Figure 2. Most and least strategy use

The table and bar chart illustrate the mean value associated with each learning strategy, indicating the frequency of their usage. Cognitive strategy was the most frequently used strategy by all participants, ranking 1 with a mean value of 4.07, followed by metacognitive strategy (mean = 3.85), social strategy (mean = 3.78), compensation strategy (mean = 3.62), memory strategy (mean = 3.41), and affective strategy (mean = 3.10). Cognitive, metacognitive, social, and compensation strategies are identified as high-level strategies, while memory and affective strategies are identified as medium-level, as shown above

DISCUSSION

The current research concludes that ESL students at Capiz National High School utilize all six types of strategies in learning English, namely memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social. It was found that the application of Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) indicates a high frequency of learning English. These results are consistent with previous findings (Chuin & Kaur, 2015; Razak et al., 2012). The

high utilization of these strategies by students may be attributed to the environment that demands fluency in spoken English, supported by the status of English as a second language spoken in the Philippines.

The results indicate that cognitive strategy ranks first, signifying it as the most widely used strategy, with a mean value of 4.07. Following cognitive strategy, metacognitive strategies rank second, followed by social, compensation, memory, and affective strategies. Affective strategy is the least frequently used by students in learning English, with a mean value of 3.10.

Cognitive strategies are predominantly adopted by learners at Capiz National High School (CNHS) because they employ cognitive processes to comprehend information. According to the findings from the SILL questionnaire, students primarily learn by watching English films and movies, taking notes, exchanging messages, utilizing English in various contexts, and attempting to emulate native speakers. These activities offer engaging visualizations for students, facilitating intentional language understanding and aiding in decision-making and problem-solving. Furthermore, as noted by (Hashim et al., 2018), cognitive strategies are commonly employed in the process of comprehending and synthesizing received information. Additionally, Oxford (1990) suggests that cognitive strategies are typically the most utilized among language learners.

The strategy least used by respondents is affective. The moderate frequency of affective strategy usage aligns with prior investigations (Ang et al., 2017; Chanderan & Hashim, 2022; Ho & Ng, 2016; Yunus et al., 2013). This finding suggests that most students struggle with regulating their emotions, behaviors, and feelings when using language. Additionally, students occasionally reward themselves when they perform well in English and attempt to calm themselves down when feeling scared or anxious. This underscores the influence of affective strategy on students' behavior in learning English, particularly in managing feelings of nervousness. Therefore, addressing motivational and emotional

factors is crucial for proficiently utilizing English. In line with this, Oxford (1990) stated that self-encouragement strategies are an effective means to enhance attitude and motivation.

This finding presents both similarities and differences with previous research. Interestingly, compared to other strategies, cognitive strategies are rarely employed in an ESL context, as shown by other studies (Irwandi et al., 2022; Kashefian-Naeeini & Maarof, 2010), while others indicate that metacognitive strategies are the most utilized (Adan & Hashim, 2021; Lian et al., 2021). However, in this research, metacognitive strategies are the second most frequently utilized, following cognitive strategies. Additionally, comparing the results of this research in the EFL context reveals that compensation is the most used strategy (Charoento, 2017; Chen, 2014; Zou & Lertlit, 2022), while metacognitive strategies are highlighted in other studies (Alrashidi, 2022; Alqarni, 2023; Kunasaraphan, 2015). These differences in learning strategies may result from variations in context, purpose, and students' characteristics. Therefore, recognizing and understanding these differences can assist educators in developing targeted language learning strategies that address the specific needs of students in diverse language learning environments.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the investigation, students at Capiz National High School (CNHS) utilize all six categories of strategies - memory, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social with high frequency. This demonstrates that ESL students recognize learning strategies as a crucial component in the learning process. An intriguing aspect of these findings is that students seem to rely more on cognitive strategies, indicating their focus on better understanding the language, which is significant. Conversely, students do not utilize emotional strategies as frequently, suggesting they may require assistance in managing their feelings while learning a language.

The findings of this investigation can offer valuable insights for educators, enabling them to employ appropriate teaching methods and create engaging learning experiences. Moreover, these results can be theoretically applied to address students' challenges with learning strategies in English and aid teachers in supporting students who struggle with their language abilities.

Furthermore, the practical implications extend to evaluating ESL students' language learning in educational settings. However, this study is limited by its sample size. Therefore, future studies are recommended to utilize larger and more diverse samples to delve deeper into the relationships between learning strategies and other variables.

Ultimately, the implications of this research can contribute to enhancing the quality of educational practices and learner outcomes by identifying students' preferred strategies and fostering their creativity, enthusiasm, and motivation. Armed with this knowledge, educators can design more effective learning experiences and support students in improving their English language skills, while educational institutions can allocate resources to facilitate students in achieving their learning goals.

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