



Exploring the Most Common Learning Strategy in English Language for Achieving Instructional Effectiveness at International Islamic School, Gombak

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/JSRR/2016/25050

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Complete Peer review History: <http://sciencedomain.org/review-history/15112>

Original Research Article

Received 15th February 2016
Accepted 14th June 2016
Published 22nd June 2016

ABSTRACT

This study explores the most often used language learning strategy in English class among secondary school students of International Islamic School in Gombak, Malaysia based on gender, age and grades. For the purpose of this study, three language learning strategies were adopted that consisted of cognitive, metacognitive and social. The study covered 191 participants (male and female) whose age range is between 13-18 years across grades 7-11; and purposive sampling was used to select the participants in the study. Data were collected using a questionnaire, employing a 5-point Likert's scale. Descriptive statistics were employed in describing the most frequent language learning strategy used by the students. The findings reveal that the students employ all the three learning strategies based on gender, age and grades; but social language learning strategy appears to be the most frequently used strategy among the students. Thus, it is

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recommended that teachers should organize classroom activities that promote social interaction among the students. This could help them to become successful language learners.

Keywords: Learning strategy; language learning; English language; instruction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Recent studies have shown how a number of scholars exert efforts to know how children master a certain language within a short time. Likewise, many researchers are amazed to figure out that many children from various cultural backgrounds are excellent foreign language learners. These two reasons have prompted some scholars to appraise the types of strategies used by students of ESL/EFL [1]. In addition, they conclude that learning strategies are generally important and useful regardless of the area of study [2]. Learning strategies are useful techniques employed in all subjects such as mathematics, science, social studies and so on [3]. Strategies used for learning English as a foreign language (EFL) are behaviors or steps consciously developed by learners to improve the acquisition, storage, retention, recall as well as utilization of learning [4]. Nowadays, due to the importance of employing strategies in the learning process, different researchers affirm that preparing learners to use effective learning strategies enables them to become successful learners [5]. It gives learners a sense of measuring responsibility and enhances their development to improve their skills [6].

The process of learning and its outcome depend on a number of important factors and considerations. These factors determine how an individual, at least within the formal educational structure, learns new experiences [7]. In the present study, the focus is on exploring how often students of International Islamic School Gombak, employ three learning strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, and social), expounded as the influential strategies employed by successful language learners.

The International Islamic School (IIS) was initially established at *Batu 14 JalanGombak*, Malaysia in September 1998. The vision of the school is to provide a comprehensive, qualitative, balanced and integrated education to its students, and at the same time guide them under the teachings and principles of Islam. Presently, the school is located closer to the International Islamic School (IIUM). It also comprises students from 46 various nationalities ranging from nursery to A-level [8]. Thus, the students come from diverse

cultural backgrounds, speak different languages and have different levels of social classes. Therefore, this nature of diversity provides an assumption that the learners may likely demonstrate different learning strategies.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Most of the previous studies that explored learning strategies used by language learners focused on high schools or universities that were not international institutions, and by so doing, the research comprised learners with similar upbringings, cultures, and worldviews. This research therefore, uses International Islamic school, Gombak to explore the most common learning strategy, which the students employ in learning English language.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To investigate the learning strategies used by secondary school students of International Islamic school Gombak, in English language class
2. To find out the most common learning strategy used by secondary school students of International Islamic school Gombak, in English language class.

1.3 Research Question

1. What are the learning strategies used by secondary school students of International Islamic school Gombak, in English language class?
2. What are the most common learning strategies used by secondary school students of International Islamic school Gombak, in English language class?

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Many researchers developed numerous definitions and classifications of language learning strategies. As a result, some conceptual frameworks have evolved out of those definitions and classifications, which include that of Macaro [9]. He holds the view that description of learning strategies should exhibit their important characteristics, which sustain their origin in

working memory. This encompasses mental exertion, which learners employ in dealing with new learning tasks. In addition, classification of language learning strategies includes those who describe language learning strategies as those which can be applied in all languages that can promote language competency [10]. Some scholars limited themselves to vocabulary as an aspect of language skill [11].

Specifically, Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is an effective and persuasive instrument of finding out more about language learner proficiency. It also provides the most comprehensive order of learning strategies [12]. Likewise, many researchers have come up with different studies on learners' learning strategies by using SILL. By making comparison with the essential studies which emerged based on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning of Oxford, as well as its reliability and validity, the present study applied this learning strategy category to explore the most often used learning strategy among the students. This is divided into two strategies; direct and indirect. Direct strategies include memory, cognitive and compensation. Indirect, on the other hand, include strategies such as metacognitive, affectation and social strategies. Out of these six strategies, cognitive, metacognition and social strategies are used for the purpose of this study. To reiterate, some researchers affirm that successful language learners, usually, employ these three techniques in learning a language [13]. Thus, this study used Oxford's model and derived its conceptual framework based on three independent variables: cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies related to language learning strategies emerged over the past three decades. During the period, Rubin and Stern [14] brought the idea of successful language learners [15]. Mid-seventies are described as a period when many scholars and teachers of language began to appreciate the significance of employing various effective techniques in learning a language [16]. At first instance, Rubin describes learning strategies as methods utilized by learners in order to acquire new learning skills. Subsequently, he highlights two different types of learning strategies. The first relates to those that directly contribute to learning such as verification/clarification, memorization, monitoring, inductive inference/guessing, practice and deductive reasoning. The second

includes those strategies that indirectly contribute to learning such as developing chances that allow for practice and enhance learners' skills [17].

Moreover, substantial numbers of researches emerge on language learning skills; albeit, not much focused on EFL students with different backgrounds. Strategies in English as Foreign Language (EFL) help non-native speakers to gain language mastery. Those strategies facilitate learning and provide the students with the caliber to master functions and forms needed for the acceptance or reception and utilization of second language; and which may affect their achievement [18].

3.1 Importance of Language Learning Strategies in Learning

The word "strategy" is originally a Greek term with military connotation. It refers to co-ordination and utilization of resources for achieving military objectives in war. Modern usage of the word is as diverse as its conception. Scholars use the term strategy in disciplines like economics, business administration, political science, security studies and education. In education, scholars use the word to refer to techniques and methods for acquiring specific skills and experiences for specific purposes [19]. In the context of this research, strategy is used to denote totality of techniques and methods, which non-native speakers of English language employ in learning and mastering English language.

Learners of a second language use different techniques and methods to communicate efficiently. Essentially, the different techniques used in learning language can improve the ability of learners to become competent learners [20]. Some scholars such as Chamot and O'Malley [21] consider Rubin as the pioneer researcher on language learning strategy. He defines Language-Learning Strategy (LLS) as methods or devices that students could use to obtain information [22].

Most importantly, a number of studies reveal that successful language learners who study English as a foreign language make use of different strategies to enhance their learning [21]. Similarly, some scholars affirm that suitable learning strategies utilized by students enable them to attain greater proficiency in the focused language [23]. Other scholars expounded that good learning strategies also enables them to

become independent and self-supporting learners who gain self-direction, autonomy, self-sufficiency and these are mandatory qualities needed for learners as lifelong strategies to reach their potential [24]. Interestingly, in the last few decades, both language teachers and researchers confirmed that some students tended to display success in foreign language learning, which had no relation with teaching methods and techniques used by teachers. Hence, a substantial number of scholars have moved their efforts of research from teaching techniques or methods to investigate type of strategies employed by language learners [25].

In order to understand the nature of students in language learning, scholars make several efforts to investigate how learning techniques influence learning [26]. As a result, various research projects in language learning exist. These include scholars' efforts to investigate relationships between language strategy and distinct factors that include nationality, age and level of proficiency [27]. Consequently, researchers observed that effective strategies for learning language are essential in promoting proficiency [28]. Therefore, if teachers become familiar with the sound and efficient techniques of language learning, they can easily teach less proficient students to improve their language skills [29].

In order to appraise methods employed by successful language learners and to train students with lower proficiency, schools encourage teachers to evaluate the soundness of techniques used by language students. In addition, this provides the reason why the majority of present studies on language learning try to examine types of methods or strategies employed by language learners [30].

3.2 Learning Strategies: Terms and Classification

Stern defines 'strategies' as 'broadly conceived intentional directions'. Furthermore, various scholars assert that learning strategies are "operations or steps used by a learner that will facilitate the acquisition, storage, retrieval or use of information". Rigney initially proposed this definition [31]. In addition, the mentioned scholars point out twenty-six strategies that can be classified into three classes. These include, metacognitive, cognitive and social. However, Oxford divided strategies for language learning into six major classes. These are cognitive,

metacognitive, memory, compensation, social and affective strategies. Stern however, proposes a comprehensive list of ten language-learning strategies that he describes as features of effective language learners [32].

Correspondingly, researchers make a holistic categorized structure on learning strategies. Among those studies, some rely on observation to explain language-learning strategies; whereas, scholars like O'Malley and Chamot, depend on the classification made by the classic researchers in the first language contexts. Others, such as Oxford develops a comprehensive classification of methods used in language learning, which was obtained from various sources [33]. For example, in recent times, think-aloud protocol analysis (interview) serves as a means for strategy recognition and classification [34]. Different scholars have developed illustrative taxonomies systems that classify individuals' strategies into greater classification. Initially, there was an emphasis on creating a division among strategies, which directly deal with memorization like vocabulary mastery. Others that have indirect influence include planning and self-management and these are related to any kind of activity [35].

Based on the Oxford's classification of methods used in learning language, the objective of cognitive strategy is to allow learners to understand a language. On the other hand, metacognitive strategy enables students to coordinate the whole learning process; and memory strategies equip learners with the ability to remember and retrieve new information. While learners rely on compensation strategies to acquire fluency in using a particular language regardless of their incompetence to speak the language, social strategies enable students to relate and practice the language with others, and affective strategies provide learners with the ability to regulate their emotions [36].

3.3 Empirical Studies on Language Learning Strategies

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) has been broadly used in various researches related to EFL/ESL. Some of those studies used the SILL to investigate the strategies employed by students in language learning. Secondly, SILL has been used to measure the relationship of variables such as motivation, gender, with language proficiency. Meanwhile, the present study mainly focuses on investigating the most

often used learning techniques employed in English class by the students of International Islamic School Gombak.

A research study has been carried out to explore the connection between the learning strategies used by university students in learning English as foreign language and motivational orientations, which include both extrinsic and intrinsic orientations. The participants were 131 in number (79 female students, and 52 male students). Cluster sampling was used to draw the sample size. Additionally, SILL was adopted to assess the techniques used in English class, whereas language learning orientation scale (LLOs) developed by Noels, Pelletier and Vallerand [37] was used to appraise students' motivational orientation. Motivational motives stand as controlled constructs, while techniques used in language emerged as independent constructs [38].

The results show that there is no relationship between students' LLOs and motivation. In addition, the findings showed no significant correlation between extrinsic motives and techniques used in language learning. These however, tally with the result of Noels et al. [39]. In which the extrinsic orientation was weak and there was no significant correlation between extrinsic and promising English language learning activities. On the other hand, the relationship between scores obtained from LLOs and intrinsic orientation were found to be significantly positive. This result however, also reflects the view of Ellis [40] that language students who have intrinsic orientation tend to use different language learning strategies. Finally, it has been observed from the result of Ellis that intrinsic motivation affects LLOs.

Despite the importance and relevance these findings generated, some shortcomings could not be overlooked. First, it was stated in the study of Ellis [41] that "gender and age variables were excluded in the analysis". Nevertheless, justification for the exclusion was not given [42]. This is important, because some researchers have asserted that various factors such as gender, age, motivation and cultural setting could affect both the choice and utilization of strategies in learning language [43]. Specifically, the name and state of the university from which the participants were drawn were clearly missing. In addition, the number of subscales exhibited by each instrument used in the study was described. However, there was no specific clarification on whether all the subscales were

used or only some parts of the instruments were considered.

More so, many research works were conducted to explore the techniques employed by high school learners where English was used as a foreign language via SILL. Among those research works, some affirmed that students most often liked to utilize compensation strategies [44]. Moreover, research conducted on An-Najah English majors revealed that the students utilized learning strategies with high to medium frequency, and metacognitive strategies were the highest rank with 79.6%; whereas, compensation strategies were lowest with 63%. These researchers concluded that the students should be trained to employ cognitive, memory and compensation strategies [45].

Furthermore, two comparative studies have been conducted to find out the language learning strategies used by two different groups of college students (Romanian and Turkish). The findings revealed that Romanian learners used higher strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, social and compensation), than Turkish students. In addition, Romanian students frequently employed social and metacognitive strategies, and the result categorized them as successful language learners [46]. Ultimately, the previous studies discussed above are used to provide robust fortification to this study in the area of methodology, research instruments and other relevant aspect that could guide the study.

4. METHODS

This study adopted a survey method, because it stands as the most common form of quantitative research. Additionally, it allows the researcher to collect quantitative data that can be analyzed quantitatively using descriptive and inferential statistics. Furthermore, the data collected through this method could be used to advocate any possible reason for specific relationships between constructs; and to propose a model for a relationship. In addition, the survey approach gives an opportunity for the researcher to gain control over the research process [47].

4.1 Participants of the Study

The Table 1 describes the secondary school students' population of International Islamic School Gombak in Malaysia, ranging from grades 7 to 11 with three classes of 25 students each. The school comprises students from different cultural backgrounds and countries. The

total population of the students is 375 comprising both male and female students from diverse backgrounds and nationalities. Each grade comprises three classes with a total number of 25 students in each class. Thus, at each grade there is total of 75 students (*Al-Ghazali, Al-Farabi and Ibn-Sina*).

4.2 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample comprises respondents among the students' population that serves as representatives of the population under study. However, obtaining the sample and overcoming non-response bias is essential in survey research to ensure representation of a population. In order to draw the sample for the present study, the researcher referred to Krejcie and Morgan [48] sampling size determination. Thus, out of total population of 375 students, 191 samples were selected for the study with 5% margin error, which indicated 95% confidence level. Besides that, purposive sampling technique was employed in drawing the required sample size. Purposive sampling is also known as judgmental sampling, and it is chosen because the participants (students) stand as informants who can provide the information needed. Hence, the researcher deliberately chose 191 representing 50% of the total student population of 375.

4.3 Instrumentation

Using survey methodology, allowed the researcher to easily obtain numerical facts, percentages, and frequency and be able to explain the demographic characteristics of the respondents. In this research, the researcher adopted the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), in order to access students' language learning strategies. The original questionnaire has 50 items and each of five

items are classified into one of the relevant constructs that were comprised of memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. In relation to this research, only three strategies were considered. These comprised cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies with twenty-seven items. To reiterate, number of researchers have indicated that successful language learners frequently employ these strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, and social); hence, the researcher chose the three to investigate the extent to which the students use them. Also, all the items for cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies were adopted without making any changes. Cognitive strategy involved thirteen (13) items; metacognitive strategy consisted of nine (9) items and social strategy comprised five (5) items. Tables 2, 3 and 4 indicate these three groups of 27 items.

4.4 Validity of the Instrument

Validity of a research instrument aims to find out the extent to which it measures what it intends to measure. Validation of an instrument is classified as face, construct, and content validity. For the purpose of this research, experts in the area validated the instrument through a content approach. The three experts included three PhD students from English language and one lecturer specialized in research methodology. In addition, consideration was given to the experts' views, especially regarding some items that express general opinions such as 'I practice the sounds of English and I ask questions in English'. These items measuring cognitive and social strategies respectively are not specific. Therefore, based on the experts' views, the items were limited to 'I always practice the sounds of English' and 'I ask my friends questions in English'.

Table 1. Registered students' enrolment

Description of secondary level students' population at International Islamic School Gombak (IIS), 2015			
	Class 1 (Al-Ghazali)	Class 2 (Al-Farabi)	Class 3 (Ibn-Sina)
Grade 7	25	25	25
Grade 8	25	25	25
Grade 9	25	25	25
Grade 10	25	25	25
Grade 11	25	25	25
Total	125	125	125

Source: School enrolment register, 2014

Table 2. List of cognitive strategy items

Category	Items statement
Cognitive strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I say or write new English words several times. 2. I try to talk like native English speakers. 3. I practice the sounds of English. 4. I use the English words I know in different ways. 5. I start conversations in English. 6. I watch English language channels or go to English movies. 7. I read for pleasure in English. 8. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English. 9. I first skim an English passage then go back and read carefully. 10. I use English dictionary to look up words that I know in my language in order to see the similarities and difference in meanings in English language. 11. I try to find the correct way of pronouncing English words. 12. I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand. 13. I try not to translate word-for-word.

Table 3. List of metacognitive items

Category	Items statement
Metacognitive strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English. 2. I notice the mistakes I make in English and use that information to help me do better. 3. I pay attention when someone is speaking English. 4. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English. 5. I plan my schedules so I will have enough time to study English. 6. I look for people I can talk to in English. 7. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English. 8. I have clear goals for improving my English skills. 9. I reflect about my progress in learning English.

Table 4. List of adopted five items of social strategy

No	Item statement
1.	When I don't understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or paraphrase.
2.	I ask English speakers to correct me whenever I make mistake.
3.	I practice English with other students.
4.	I ask English speakers to help me with my language problems.
5.	I ask my friends questions in English.

4.5 Reliability of the Instrument

The researcher conducted a pilot study to ensure consistency of all the items in the instrument. Thus, 20 questionnaires were administered to 20 randomly selected students from all grades. The analyzed result showed that all the variables have satisfactory mean values and internal consistency reliability of Coefficient Alpha=0.861.

4.6 Data Collection Procedure

First, the researcher secured an approval letter to carry out the research from the Institute of

Education of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The letter was submitted to the head of school (IIS), where the research was conducted. In order to administer the questionnaire, the researcher sought help from IIS teachers with the principal's consent. The questionnaire was self-administered which was done in classes with the class teachers' support and 191 students participated. The researcher initially read the instructions to the participants in order to provide accurate understanding and to avoid confusion of the content of the instruments. The participants were encouraged to seek more clarifications on anything that was not clear to

them for successful gathering of information. Generally, it took the students between 30 to 40 minutes to fill the questionnaires.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

In this research, descriptive statistics was used to explore the most often used learning strategy among the secondary level students of International Islamic School Gombak. But, the researcher collapsed the scale of the instruments, a 5 Likert scale to a point scale (disagree, neutral and agree). Strongly disagree and disagree were collapsed to disagree, neutral stands alone and agree represents strongly agree and agree. To reiterate, a number of studies have indicated that successful language learners frequently employ these strategies (cognitive, metacognitive, and social); hence, the researcher chose the three to investigate the extent to which the students use them. Also, all the items for cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies were adopted without making any changes. Cognitive strategy involved thirteen (13) items; metacognitive strategy consisted of nine (9) items and social strategy comprised five (5) items. Tables 2, 3 and 4 indicate these three groups of 27 items.

The Table 5 depicts some descriptive statistics about the demographic variables captured in the study consisting of gender, age, nationality and grades. The results show that female participants are higher in number than male counterparts, which accounts for 60% (N=78), while males were 40% of the participants (N=52). This indicates that more females have participated in the study than males. The score for respondents' age reveals that the minimum and maximum ages were 12 and 18 respectively, with a mean age of 14 and a half years (SD =1.43). The result indicated that students with age below the mean age were 58 or 44.7%, whereas respondents with age above the mean age were 42 or 55.3%, illustrating that a majority of participating students were above the mean age. In terms of nationality, 33% (N=42) were Malaysians while 67.7% (N=88) were international students, portraying that a majority of the participants were international students. Beside nationality, the results for grades showed that participants in grade 9 were the highest amounting to 30.8% (N=37), then grade 11 with 28.5% (N=37) followed by participants in grade 8 which included 25.4% of participants (N=33) and the least was participants in grades 10 who

constituted 15.4% of participants (N=20). Tables 6, 7 and 8 provide demographic information of the respondents in the form of cross tabulation.

Table 5. Demographic information of the respondents

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	52	40.0
Female	78	60.0
Age		
12.00	13	10.0
13.00	24	18.5
14.00	21	16.2
15.00	32	24.6
16.00	30	23.1
17.00	9	6.9
18.00	1	.8
Nationality		
Malaysian	42	32.3
Non-Malaysian	88	67.7
Grade		
8.00	33	25.4
9.00	40	30.8
10.00	20	15.4
11.00	37	28.5

Table 6 presents the breakdown of information relating to gender and age of the respondents. The results show that males include 52 of the total respondents with students aged 16 having the highest frequency of 15 (28.8%). Coming next were those aged 15 with frequency of 14 (26.9%), while the lowest were students aged 12 and 17 with frequency of 3 (5.8%) each. On the other hand, female respondents have frequency of 78 of the total respondents with students aged 15 having the highest frequency of 18 (23.1%), followed by students aged 13 and 16 with frequency of 15 (19.2%) each, while the least was a student aged 18 that was 1 (1.3%).

Table 7 depicts the breakdown information relating to gender and grades of the respondents. The results show that male students in grade 11 were the majority in the study with frequency of 16 (30.8%), followed by students in grade 10 with frequency of 10 (9.2%). Then grade 8 has the least number of participants in the study with frequency of 8 (15.4%). On the other hand, female respondents from grade 8 are the highest with frequency of 25 (32.1%), followed by respondents from grade 9 with frequency of 22 (28.2%), while the least were respondents from grade 10 with frequency of 10 (12.8%).

Table 8 indicates breakdown of information relating to gender and nationality of the respondents and the results show that male international students were the highest and accounted for the frequency 31 (59.6%). Similarly, female international students were the majority in the study accounting for 57 (73.1%).

5.1 Descriptive Analysis of the Responses

In this section, descriptive statistics involving frequency, percentage, means and standard deviation were used. Frequency and percentage were used in describing the extent of the agreement or otherwise on item statements in every item in all the variables. Likewise, mean and SD of each item as well as for its constructs are presented, indicating that mean and SD for cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies are

provided. The mean and SD of each of these variables were used in drawing conclusions regarding the respective constructs.

What is the most frequent learning strategies use by secondary level students of International Islamic School, Gombak in English class?

In answering this question, three learning strategies were taken into consideration. These included cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies. Table 9 consists of thirteen items measuring the cognitive strategy. The table indicates the descriptive results of the cognitive strategy among students.

Table 11 reports social strategy of the respondents with five (5) items. It describes mean, standard deviation and frequency of the

Table 6. Breakdown information based on gender and age

Age category			Age							Total
			12.00	13.00	14.00	15.00	16.00	17.00	18.00	
Gender	Male	Count	3	9	8	14	15	3	0	52
		% within gender	5.8%	17.3%	15.4%	26.9%	28.8%	5.8%	0.0%	100.0%
	Female	Count	10	15	13	18	15	6	1	78
		% within gender	12.8%	19.2%	16.7%	23.1%	19.2%	7.7%	1.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	13	24	21	32	30	9	1	130
		% within gender	10.0%	18.5%	16.2%	24.6%	23.1%	6.9%	0.8%	100.0%

Table 7. Breakdown information based on gender and grade

			Grade				Total
			8.0	9.0	10.0	11.0	
Gender	Male	Count	8	18	10	16	52
		% within gender	15.4%	34.6%	19.2%	30.8%	100.0%
	Female	Count	25	22	10	21	78
		% within gender	32.1%	28.2%	12.8%	26.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	33	40	20	37	130
		% within gender	25.4%	30.8%	15.4%	28.5%	100.0%

Table 8. Breakdown of information based on gender and nationality

			Nationality		Total
			Malaysian	Non-Malaysian	
Gender	Male	Count	21	31	52
		% within gender	40.4%	59.6%	100.0%
	Female	Count	21	57	78
		% within gender	26.9%	73.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	42	88	130
		% within gender	32.3%	67.7%	100.0%

Table 9. Cognitive strategy

SN	Item	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1	I write new English words.	33 (25.4%)	19 (14.6%)	78 (60%)
2	I talk like native English speakers.	34 (26.2%)	12 (9.2%)	84 (64.6%)
3	I practice the pronunciation of English.	28 (21.5%)	14 (10.8%)	88 (67.7%)
4	I use the English words in different ways.	20 (15.4%)	19 (14.6%)	55 (70.0%)
5	I start conversations in English.	23 (17.7%)	10 (7.7%)	97 (29.2%)
6	I watch English language TV shows every day.	10 (7.7%)	9 (6.9%)	110 (84.6%)
7	I read for pleasure in English.	26 (20.0%)	22 (16.9%)	82 (63.1%)
8	I write notes in English.	9 (8.7%)	11 (8.5%)	110 (83.7%)
9	I first skim an English passage then go back and read carefully.	26 (20.0%)	24 (18.5%)	80 (61.5%)
10	I use English dictionary to look up words that I know in my language in order to see the similarities and difference in meanings in English language.	44 (33.8%)	26 (20.0%)	60 (46.2%)
11	I try to find the correct way of speaking English language.	16 (10.0%)	14 (10.8%)	100 (77.0%)
12	I divide the English words into parts.	51 (39.3%)	22 (16.9%)	57 (43.9%)
13	I try not to translate word for word	46 (35.3%)	25 (19.2%)	59 (45.4%)

Detailed information see Appendix 1

Table 10. Reports metacognitive strategy of the respondents with nine items

SN	Item	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1	I find many ways to use my English.	25 (19.3%)	16 (12.3%)	89 (68.5%)
2	I notice the mistakes I make in English.	16 (12.3%)	13 (10.0%)	101 (48.5%)
3	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	19 (14.6%)	15 (11.5%)	96 (73.9%)
4	I try to find out how to be better learner of English.	13 (8.5%)	16 (12.3%)	101 (77.7%)
5	I plan my schedule to study English.	53 (40.8%)	22 (16.9%)	55 (42.3%)
6	I look for people I can talk to in English.	25 (19.2%)	23 (17.7%)	82 (63.1%)
7	I look for opportunities to read in English.	27 (16.2%)	24 (18.5%)	79 (60.8%)
8	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	23 (17.7%)	27 (20.8%)	80 (61.6%)
9	I think about my progress in learning English.	15 (11.5%)	16 (12.3%)	99 (76.1%)

students' responses on the items. Thus, the table reveals that the students employ social strategies most often compared with the other two strategies (cognitive and metacognitive).

However, the students display a significant utilization of both cognitive and metacognitive strategies with ($m=3.67$ and 3.72 ; $SD=.56$ and $.709$) respectively.

Table 11. Social strategy

SN	Item	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
1	If I don't understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or paraphrase.	19 (13.1%)	6 (4.6%)	105 (80.8%)
2	I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	28 (21.6%)	15 (11.5%)	87 (67%)
3	I practice English with other students.	20 (15.4%)	15 (11.5%)	95 (73.1%)
4	I ask for help from English speakers.	26 (10.8%)	10 (7.7%)	94 (72.3%)
5	I ask questions in English.	3 (2.3%)	4 (3.1%)	123 (94.6%)

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As stated earlier, there are various learning strategies used by students while learning a language, but this research focused only on three namely: cognitive, metacognitive, and social learning strategies. Previous studies on language learning strategies reveal that successful language learners used all three strategies: cognitive, metacognitive and social [49]. The findings of this study revealed that most students used all the three strategies (cognitive, metacognitive and social). However, social strategy emerged as the most commonly used learning strategy among the students of International Islamic school in Gombak, followed by metacognitive and then cognitive ($m_{\text{social}} = 3.93$, $m_{\text{metacognitive}} = 3.72$ and $m_{\text{cognitive}} = 3.67$; $SD = .868$, $.709$ and $.566$ respectively). This research is not the first empirical study to reveal that students of English language frequently employed social learning strategy. The study corresponds with the findings of Ahmad et al. (2012) who investigated the learning strategies used by English language female high school students in Saudi Arabia. Ahmad et al.'s results revealed that the most commonly used was social strategy. Similarly, the findings of this research are in line with those of Maryam [50] and Al-Buainain [51] despite the fact that both differ from the current work in terms of participants and the locality. Maryam used Romanian and Turkish students at high school, whereas Al-Buainain used 150 Iranian college students in Iran to investigate their learning strategies. Both found that social learning strategy was the most common strategy used by successful language learners. This finding is not universal and it is slightly inconsistent with the findings of Yaping, Abdolmehdi, Abu Shaims, Hong-Nam and Leavell, [52] and Ali Akbar et al. [53]. Abu Shaims used college students of An-Najah English major (male and female)

population in Qatar. While Yaping used senior high school students both male and female in China and likewise Hong-Nam, in China, used college students of Intensive English Program (IEPI) comprising male and female students. Abdolmehdi used 120 female Arabic-speaking students majoring in English at a university in Qatar. These scholars affirmed that students of English language frequently employed metacognitive strategy followed by social strategy. The findings of Eid [54] differ with the result of the present study. In his study, students were found with frequent used of cognitive and metacognitive strategies and depicted use of social strategies least frequently. This study on the other hand, revealed different results, which vary from those of Maryam [55]. In her study, she found that students of English who employed cognitive strategies had a strongest impact on their language proficiency.

Collectively, the finding reveals that social learning strategy is the most commonly used learning strategy among the students followed by metacognitive and finally cognitive learning strategy. Comparatively, this indicates that students of International Islamic school, Gombak are good English language learners. They used all the three learning strategies that classified learners as successful language learners. As stated earlier, the main aim of this research was to affirm the theory, which categorizes successful language learners as those who commonly employ social strategy and display elements of metacognitive and cognitive strategies in learning. Thus, the students of International Islamic School at secondary level can be categorized as good language learners. Consistent use of the strategies by students would help them learn English as a subject; and that will assist teachers to deliver what is expected of them without much stress and difficulty. Therefore, teachers in the school

should exert efforts to employ all the possible means that could encourage the students to become good English learners. These could include organizing teaching and learning activities that promote social interaction among the students including, debates, quizzes, project work in the form of group assignments and any type of activity that encourages cooperation among students.

7. RECOMMENDATION

1. This study can be replicated in other educational settings that combine students from the same background; or compare and contrast the language learning strategies used by students of public and private schools and relate to their performance.
2. Moreover, this research was conducted at a single International school; future research could use two or three international schools at different places to fathom how differently students employ their learning because of environmental influence.
3. Furthermore, future research can explore the relationship between learning strategies with other constructs such as cognitive engagement and academic performance.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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APPENDIX 1



QUESTIONNAIRE

Assalamu alaikum warrahmatullahi wabarakaatuh

Dear Brother / Sister,

My name is Abubakar Sani, currently undertaking my Master research in *students learning strategies and cognitive engagement: A case study at the International Islamic school Gombak (IIS)*, under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Che Noraini Hashim.

The main objective of my study is to investigate the relationship between students learning strategies and cognitive engagement among secondary level students of International Islamic school Gombak. I would be very grateful if you could help me by answering all the questions in this questionnaire.

Certainly, the information provided will be treated with confidentiality. Your participation is very important as well as valuable.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Students' Learning Strategies and Cognitive Engagement Questionnaire

Section A: Demographic Information (Tick where appropriate)

<p>Gender: Male <input type="radio"/></p> <p>Female <input type="radio"/></p>	<p>AGE: _____</p>	<p>NATIONALITY</p> <p>Malaysian <input checked="" type="radio"/></p> <p>Non-Malaysian</p> <p>Specify: _____</p>
<p>Grade: _____</p>	<p>Class: _____</p>	

Section B: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL):

Please tick the best options that represent your opinion in each of the question below.

1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= neither agree nor disagree 4= agree 5= strong agree

Cognitive strategies:

S/N	Item (s)	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I say or write new English words several times.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I try to talk like native English speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I practice the sounds of English.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I use the English words I know in different ways.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I start conversations in English.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I watch English language TV or go to English movies	1	2	3	4	5
7	I read for pleasure in English.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I first skim an English passage then go back and read carefully.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I look for vocabulary in my own language that are similar to new meaning in English.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I try to find the correct way of speaking English words every day.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I try not to translate word-for-word.	1	2	3	4	5

Metacognitive strategies

S/N	Item (s)	SD	D	N	A	SA
14	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	1	2	3	4	5
19	I look for people I can talk to in English.	1	2	3	4	5
20	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	1	2	3	4	5
21	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	1	2	3	4	5
22	I reflect about my progress in learning English.	1	2	3	4	5

Social strategies

S/N	Item (s)	SD	D	N	A	SA
23	If I don't understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or repeat.	1	2	3	4	5
24	I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	1	2	3	4	5
25	I practice English with other students.	1	2	3	4	5
26	I ask for help from English speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
27	I ask my friends questions in English.	1	2	3	4	5

Section C: Level of Cognitive Engagement

Please circle the best option that represents your opinion in each of the question below.

		1=Never	2=Rarely	3=Sometimes	4=Often	5=Always
SN	Item (s)	NV	R	ST	O	AL
28	I find that at times studying in English class gives me a feeling of deep personal satisfaction	1	2	3	4	5
29	I feel that almost any topic in English class can be highly interesting once I get into it	1	2	3	4	5
30	I find new topics in English class interesting	1	2	3	4	5
31	I often spend extra time trying to obtain more information about many topics related to English class	1	2	3	4	5
32	I find that reading my English books at home can at times be as exciting as a good novel or movie	1	2	3	4	5
33	I test myself on important topics in English class until I understand them completely	1	2	3	4	5
34	I work hard at my studies because I find the material use in English class interesting	1	2	3	4	5
35	I spend a lot of my free time finding out more about interesting topics which have been discussed in the English class	1	2	3	4	5
36	I come to English class with questions in mind that I want answer	1	2	3	4	5
37	My aim is to pass English subject while doing as little work as possible	1	2	3	4	5
38	I do not find English subject very interesting, so I keep my work to the minimum	1	2	3	4	5
39	I generally restrict my study to what is specifically set, as I think it is unnecessary to do anything extra	1	2	3	4	5
40	I make a point of looking at most of the suggested readings that go with the teachers	1	2	3	4	5

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Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
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