Language Learning Strategies to Improve English Speaking Skills among Vietnamese Students: A Case of Three High Schools in Binh Duong Province, Vietnam

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Abstract

The role of language learning strategies (LLS) in second language acquisition has received increased attention across several disciplines in recent years. LLS has been shown to occur in many studies over the years to improve language learning efficiency. The current study endeavors to scrutinize LLS employed by the students at (1) Binh Phu, (2) Vo Minh Duc, and (3) Nguyen Thi Minh Khai high schools and suggests solutions to improve the effectiveness of LLS use. Based on the qualitative and quantitative data, the survey reveals that students' motivation enormously affected LLS. The findings simultaneously show that students use many LLS to enhance their speaking skills, but the most frequently used ones are cognitive and affective. Significant correlations among types of LLS and the influence of motivation on the choices of LLS are consistent with previous studies. The study's results are expected to be beneficial to teachers of English and students in terms of narrowing the gap between the students' LLS and their teaching methodologies preferences and sketching out the appropriate strategies to enhance students' speaking skills. The implications of these findings and the importance of viewing learners holistically are discussed, and recommendations are made for ongoing research.

Keywords: affective strategies, cognitive strategies, learning strategies, memorization strategies, speaking skills

1. Introduction

In the era of integration, the demand for communication is increasing, which leads to the formation of a universal language. English has been at the top of the list, surpassing Chinese, Spanish, French, and Esperanto. Most documents, international summits, and business contracts are in English. English is the language of business, economics, advertisements, etc. With English's rising importance and dominance, more and more people are learning it worldwide and in Viet Nam. Schools and colleges are making English a compulsory subject. In Vietnam, it is no exception. English is a required subject. The awareness of English entails more attention. As a result, controversies and renovations in classroom teaching and learning methodology. The focus that used to be on linguistic competence now moves to communicative competence. Following this, a gradual but vital shift of attention has occurred within the general education field, teaching and learning English, resulting in less emphasis on teachers and teaching and a greater emphasis on learners and learning. At the same time, a shift of attention has occurred in second language acquisition research from the products of language learning to the processes through which learning takes place (Oxford, 1990).

Language learning strategies have been proved to be not only integral components of various theoretical models of language proficiency (Ellis, 1985; Bachman & Palmer, 1996) but also a means of achieving learners' autonomy in the process of language learning (Oxford, 1990; Benson & Voller, 2014). Prior studies of second language acquisition and learning (e.g., O'Malley et al., 1990; Oxford, 1990; Larsen Freeman, 2014) reveal that language learning strategy use is one of the most crucial factors in second language acquisition. Studies in second language learning (e.g. (Oxford, 2017; Thomas & Rose, 2018; Carol, 2019) point out that successful learners use a wider variety of language learning strategies than unsuccessful learners. As shown by Green & Oxford (1995), successful students often use more active and naturalistic strategies; and more combinations of strategies than less successful students do. According to Oxford (1990), LLS is one of several individual factors that can lead learners to the goal of learning a language. Studies (e.g., Oxford, 2003; O'Malley et al., 1990; Cohen, 2011; Thomas & Rose, 2018) also reveal that selecting appropriate strategies can enhance learners' second language learning. The choice of strategies second language learners use plays a vital role in successful second language learning.

As teachers of English, not only do we have to bring into the class more exciting and relevant activities to motivate students, but also should we recommend effective learning strategies to help them self-study effectively to better their speaking skills. Most students learn English as a compulsory subject to pass tests and examinations at school. Undeniably, each student should have appropriate LLS to learn English effectively and develop communicative competence. High school students have yet to have a good mindset about LLS, even though they all want to study English well. Although studies on LLS have been conducted with altered sites, participants, and instrumentations, they have yet to be researched thoroughly.

For the above reasons, the writers aim to investigate students' language learning strategies to improve speaking skills applied by the students of the three high schools. The authors endeavor to carry out the research with the hope of exploring the frequency of using strategies among students to help provide students guidance for their self-study; and recommend some solutions to improve the effectiveness of students' LLS use.

To guide the research, the following questions are: *(1) What language learning strategies do students use to enhance their speaking skills? (2) What should be done to improve the effectiveness of language learning strategies for the students?*

Theoretically, the study contributes to the knowledge of LLS, speaking strategies, the impact of motivation on students' use of LLS, and the employment of LLS to develop speaking skills. Practically, the insights gained from the study may assist teachers of English. The study's success will help teachers understand more about students' use of language learning strategies and the impact of motivation on students' use of LLS. From that, teachers can work out efficient and effective language learning strategies to help students improve their speaking skills; and pay more attention to guide students' LLS in lessons. Teachers also help raise students' awareness of the significance of language learning strategies to language achievements. Teachers can advise students to apply many language learning strategies to study and speak English well.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Learning Strategies

Rubin (1975) defines language learning strategies as the techniques or devices a learner may use to acquire knowledge. The author defines learning strategies as those that contribute to developing the language system that the learner constructs and affect learning directly (Rubin, 1987). Oxford (1990) defines LLS as approaches or techniques that learners use to enhance their progress in developing L2 skills. The author considers LLS "*steps taken by students to enhance their learning"* (Oxford, 1990, p.8). Strategies are essential for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement in developing communicative competence. These strategies are specific actions the learner takes to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, self-directed, effective, and transferable to new situations. Oxford (2017) also defines language learning strategies. "*L2 learning strategies* are complex, dynamic thoughts and actions, selected and used by learners with some degree of consciousness in specific contexts to regulate multiple aspects of themselves (such as cognitive, emotional, and social) for (a) accomplishing language tasks; (b) improving language performance or use, and (c) enhancing long-term proficiency. Strategies are mentally guided but may also have physical and, therefore, observable manifestations. Learners often use strategies flexibly and creatively; combine them in various ways, such as strategy clusters or strategy chains; and orchestrate them to meet learning needs. Strategies are teachable. Learners in their contexts decide which strategies to use. The appropriateness of strategies depends on multiple personal and contextual factors." (Oxford, 2017, p.48). Dörnyei & Ryan (2015) states that exerting purposeful effort in the continued use of learning strategies is more important than the precise characteristics of each strategy or group of strategies Among the definitions of LLS mentioned above; the research authors chose the definition of (Oxford, 1990) as a guideline for the current research. LLS are motivating activities taken by learners consciously to develop their language skills effectively.

Educators have classified LLS into several sets. According to Rubin (1981), there are three major LLS "learning strategies, communication strategies, and social strategies." O'Malley et al. (1985) classify three LLS as "metacognitive, cognitive, and social or affective strategies." Oxford (1990) inherits and develops the theories of the previous authors; in this author's view, LLS are categorized into two types: "Direct and indirect strategies." Direct strategies include memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, while indirect ones consist of metacognitive, affective, and social ones. It is concluded that, similarly, 16 LLS are divided into three types: (1) cognitive strategies, (2) metacognitive strategies, and (3) social strategies.

2.2 The Impact of Motivation on the Choice of Language Learning Strategies

Motivated learners tend to employ more strategies and use them more often than less motivated ones. Specific reasons or goals for learning a language affect selecting plans. Learners who want to learn a new language mainly for interpersonal communication may use different strategies from learners who wish to learn a new language solely to perform well on a test. Gardner (1985) states, "Motivation in the present context refers to the combination of effort plus a desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language." Gardner (1985) points out that 'motivation' refers to a kind of central mental 'engine' or 'energy center' that subsumes effort, want/will (cognition), and task enjoyment (affect). Brown (1990) considers motivation as an inner drive, impulse, emotion, or desire that moves one to a particular action. According to Dornyei (2001), learners with intrinsic motivation may not hold distinct positive or negative attitudes toward the target-language group. This kind of motivation involves the arousal and maintenance of curiosity and can fluctuate because of such factors as learners' particular interests. On the contrary, extrinsic motivation consists in performing a behavior to receive extrinsic rewards or avoid punishment. The current study focuses on two kinds of motivation: (1) intrinsic and (2) extrinsic. Dornyei (2021) states that intrinsically motivated behaviors are the ones that the individual performs for some internal rewards (e.g., the joy of doing a particular activity or satisfying one's curiosity). Pittman & Boggiano (1992) define learning extrinsic motivation as "the learners' desire for achievement for an external reward such as to pass examinations or to get a job. Unlikely extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation is internal and comes from within. Intrinsic motivation is more within students' control, whereas extrinsic motivation is out of their control.

The current study applies the theories of language learning strategies and motivation (Rubin, 1981; O'Malley et al., 1985; Oxford, 1990; and Dornyei, 2021). Based on these theories, the authors examine the use of LLS and the impact of motivation on language learning strategy choices.

2.3 Previous Studies

Investigating LLS is a continuing concern within education. Researchers and educators worldwide have conducted various studies of LLS in general and English-learning strategies in particular. Those findings are about 1) good language learners and limited language learners. 2) types of English learning strategy use, 3) factors affecting English learning strategy choice, and so on. The study listed five typical foreign and local studies. Studies by Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975) about LLS reported: "less able learners used strategies in a random, unconnected, and uncontrolled manner" (cited in Fauzy, 2019, p. 218).

2.3.1 Foreign Studies

One study by Tanjung (2018) examined students' LLS related to their ages. The research utilized a descriptive survey research design. The participants were 122 English Department students from one of the public universities in Borneo Island, Indonesia. The instrument was the SILL questionnaire. The findings showed that students mostly used metacognitive (M=3.857), cognitive (M=3.707), and compensation strategies (M=3.563). Students' varying ages led to their selection and implementation of different strategies. The author concluded that although indirect strategies get higher means of preference from the participants, they did not only focus on using indirect strategies. These were combined with direct strategies.

In a study by Lestari (2020), the author attempted to explore the language learning strategies used by students who take English Literature study programs in an English as a foreign language (EFL) setting. In the survey, 76 participants were asked to fulfill a questionnaire called Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) developed by Oxford (1990). The result of the research showed that metacognitive strategies have been the most frequently used ones, followed by social and compensation strategies. In contrast, affective strategies become the least used ones by the students.

In an investigation into factors affecting LLS used by a Greek female learner of English, Du (2020) found a clear relationship between the learner's strategy use and three factors: motivation, gender, and personality. Her strategy use varied according to the evolution of her learning motivation over time, and her preference for using social strategies seemed to be closely tied to integrative motivation. Gender was crucial as the female learner used more social strategies than a male student and only used those strategies to suit her gender role. The learner was also found to choose strategies corresponding to her extroverted personality.

Many other studies on language learning strategies were conducted, and the authors stated the importance of LLS in language learning. Language educators need to expose their students to a variety of methods, and in order to do so, they must get familiar with the strategies and understand how to teach them to their students (Pattanon, 2016; Almet et al., 2016; Jaikrishnan & Ismail, 2021; Pragasam et al., 2022; Soupi et al., 2022). The research findings revealed the relationship between language strategy use and learning attitude. The findings also indicated that language-learning strategies in relation to gender, language proficiency, and fields of study were different.

2.3.2 Local Studies

Huong (2017) investigated the relationship between motivations and LLS in the context of learning English as a second language of first-year students at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering Technology, Hanoi University of Industry. One hundred non-English major freshmen participated in responding to survey questionnaires. The data were also collected from interviews with ten students. Regarding learning strategy, participants used social and cognitive strategies most frequently; on the other hand, compensation strategies gained the least attention. Moreover, there were significant correlations between types of motivation and learning strategies that were consistent with previous studies.

Lem (2019) also examined LLS use among high school students, a relatively neglected population in previous LLS studies. Eighty-three Vietnamese tenth-graders were given the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) proposed by Oxford (1990), including six subscales: memory-related, cognitive, compensatory, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The results suggested that high school learners utilized a wide range of language learning strategies at a medium frequency level, indicating a necessity for more explicit LLS instruction. While metacognitive strategies were the most frequent, affective strategies were the least. Cognitive strategies, strongly linked to other LLS groups, dominated language learners' LLS employment. Gender was confirmed to be a significant factor that influenced the students' LLS usage only in the case of social strategies.

The above studies indicated the significance of language-learning strategy use in second language acquisition. The studies found that language learners used a wide range of LLS; motivation, proficiency, gender, and personality had a substantial effect on choosing LLS. The studies also showed that students should know LLS and select appropriate ones to improve their English skills. However, the studies gained the expected results and contributed theoretically and practically to English learning and teaching; small sample sizes and the need for more reliable instruments were severely limited for these earlier studies. The current study applied a mixed method with quantitative and qualitative approaches to eliminate these limitations regarding small sample sizes and the need for more reliable instruments. Questionnaires, interviews, and class observations were used to collect data. Three hundred seventy student subjects and 15 teacher subjects from the three high schools participated in the survey. Even though many studies have been conducted on LLS, each study was administered at different research sites, scopes, and populations. Significantly, LLS have not been to be scrutinized at high schools yet. For these reasons, LLS at Binh Phu, Vo Minh Duc, and Nguyen Thi Minh Khai high schools in Binh Duong province are worth investigating.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Methods

The current study applied a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design to investigate students' language learning strategies. In the quantitative phase, the researchers implemented a written questionnaire to determine students' use of LLS, the differences in LLS use among students from three grades, and the impact of students' motivation on their use of learning strategies to improve their speaking skills. In the qualitative phase, the researcher conducted class observations and semi-structured interviews with 15 random teachers and 18 random students from 9 classes to get more insights and strengthen the interpretation of data collected from questionnaires. The authors observed six practical classes from three grades; and conducted a pretest to ensure that the control and experimental groups were at the same English level. Then the authors implemented a post-test to evaluate the effectiveness of LLS use. All teachers were experienced and devoted to English teaching. Both teachers and students were interested in the survey on language learning strategies.

Dornyei & Ushioda (2021) claim that mixed methods research's main attraction is that by using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, a researcher can bring out the best of both paradigms while compensating for their weaknesses. Mixed methods research is not simply collecting multiple types of data (quantitative and qualitative) but integrating and interpreting various forms of data to understand the problem under investigation (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Combining quantitative and qualitative methods enhances the quality of the study because each approach has different strengths and weaknesses (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). By collecting multiple data types, mixed methods research provides a deeper understanding of the issue (Creswell, 2014). Integrating numerous data sets using multiple research methods produces multiple and complementary strengths because each approach provides distinct types of information (Johnson & Christensen, 2014), and the results are more convincing and powerful (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

3.2 Research Participants

3.2.1 Students

Student subjects were (1) assumed to face similar problems and need to improve their English speaking, (2) keen on participating in the study to self-evaluate their LLS use, (3) serious about answering their questionnaires, and (4) supposed to be willing to evaluate the use of LLS to improve their English speaking ability.

In the school year 2022-2023, there was a total of 4953 students, including 2149 males (43.4%) and 2804 females (56.6%), enrolling in the three schools. Because the population was rather significant, the researcher could only survey some members of the population. The formula developed by Yamane (1967, p. 886) was used to calculate the reliable sample size needed for the study. The confidence level is 95%, and the level of precision is 0.05; the reliable sample size calculated by the formula is about 370 students (Figure 1).

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} = \frac{4,953}{1+4,953(0.05)^2} = 370 \text{ students}$$

Figure 1. The formula for calculating the reliable sample size

Where **n** is the sample size, **N** is the population size, and *e* is the level of precision.

After the sample size for the study had been calculated, nine classes were chosen randomly from three grades of three schools. The randomly chosen classes with total students were 370 students (178 males and 192 females). This number of students was the reliable sample size calculated by Equation 1. Hence, the researcher decided to choose these classes to investigate.

3.2.2 Teachers

Fifteen teachers of English from the three schools were invited to participate in interviews with the researchers. The teachers have experienced more than five years of teaching English at high schools; some are group leaders or vice group leaders. All of them enthusiastically accepted the invitation because of their enthusiastic help and interest in learning more about LLS to improve the English-speaking ability of the students. This fact motivated the teachers to cooperate with the researcher and gave valuable suggestions. Among these fifteen teachers, three taught experimental and three taught control classes.

3.3 Instrumentations

3.3.1 Questionnaires

The questionnaire included two parts. In Part 1, the researchers composed five close-ended questions to investigate students' English learning (motivation, attitudes to learning English) and their need to participate in an LLS training course (see Table 4). In Part 2, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), EFL/ESL 7.0 version; (Oxford, 1990) was used to investigate the frequency of the participants' use of language learning strategies. Twelve close-ended SILL questions with Likert Scale (1= Never; 2=Rarely; 3=Sometimes; 4=Usually; 5=Always) were used to examine the use of language strategies among students. Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) is "perhaps the most comprehensive classification of learning strategies to date" (Ellis, 1994, p. 539). According to Oxford's (1990) classification, learners with a mean of 3.5 or more were considered high-strategy users, learners with a mean of below 2.4 were low-strategy users, and the standard for medium-strategy users was between 2.4 and 3.5. (see Table 5)

3.3.2 Interviews

The study applied semi-structured interviews to get data from 18 random students in 9 classes and 15 teachers. According to Loewen & Plonsky (2017), an interview is a type of data collection in which researchers use questions to obtain answers from one or more research participants. Interviews are an essential part of qualitative research, where researchers try to understand another person's point of view. Interviews are beneficial for gaining insights into unobservable phenomena and cognitive processes such as attitudes, beliefs, and awareness. A semi-structured interview includes a set of pre-set questions. Researchers are free to pursue specific topics and ask additional questions. Semi-structured interviews are organized and supported, with broad questions covered according to how the students respond. In the interviews with teachers, the authors asked teachers five main questions to get information about LLS instruction and their effectiveness: *(1) How long have you been teaching English? (2) Which LLS do you often guide students to apply in order to develop their English speaking skills? (3) Why do you choose these LLS to introduce to your students? (4) When are these LLS introduced to your students? (5) Do you think LLS are beneficial to improving students' speaking skills?* In the interviews with students, the researchers used five main questions to investigate students' attitudes to learning when they applied LLS: *(1) Are you instructed to use LLS in your English classes? (2) Which LLS do you often apply in your English language learning? (3) Why do you choose these LLS? (4) Are you confident in your speaking skills? (5) Do you have your own LLS to improve your speaking skills?*

3.3.3 Class Observations

The current study applied class observation to get qualitative data. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative observation means the researcher took field notes on the behaviors and activities of individuals at the research sites and recorded observations. The research authors met some teachers in charge of teaching the classes chosen as the current study's sample; then asked their permission to let the author attend the classes. While observing these classes, the authors observed students' use of LLS in some English-speaking classes and took notes on the necessary data. The authors used an observation checklist to take notes. The observation checklist included thirty-four items: *(A) Organization* (1. Presented overview of the lesson; 2. Presented topics in a logical sequence; 3. Related today's lesson to previous/future lessons; 4. Summarized significant points of the lesson; 5. Paced the lesson appropriately). *(B) Presentation* (6. Used varied visual materials; 7. Explained significant/minor points with clarity; 8. Used good examples to clarify points; 9. Used intonation to emphasize essential points; 10. Spoke clearly and with appropriate volume, speed, and pronunciation; 11. Maintained eye contact with students; 12. Noticed and listened to students' questions and comments; 13. Integrated materials (examples, cases, simulations) from the real world;14. Active, collaborative, cooperative learning). *(C) Content* (15. Exact and scientific; 16. Suited lesson objectives and requirements; 17. Systematic, accurate, adequate; 18. Focused on the main points. *D. Instructor-student interactions* (19. Responded appropriately to any student disruptions; 20. Responded appropriately to any verbal cues of confusion, boredom, curiosity, or distraction; 21. Maintained students' attention; 22. Used students' names; 23. Showed respect & sensitivity to diverse learners; 24. Talked with students informally before and after class. *E. Lesson implementation* (25. Encouraged student questions; 26. Elicited students' ideas about the lesson topic; 27. Asked questions to monitor students' understanding or performance; 28. Promoted critical thinking; 29. Asked probing questions when students' answers were incomplete; 30. Asked students to generate their explanations. *F. Students' responses* (31. Were eager to ask questions; 32. Participated willingly in in-class activities; 33. Engaged in the lesson; 34. Appeared to understand the lesson). The observers used Likert Scales to evaluate these classes' levels: 1 = at a very low level; 2 = at a low level; 3 = neutral; 4 = at a high level; 5 = at a very high level

3.3.4 Experimental Teaching

The authors conducted a ninety-minute instruction to students from three experimental classes (one grade-10 class, one grade-11 class, and one grade-12) at the beginning of the first term. Experimental teaching was conducted within four months. The teacher responsible for the experimental classes were experienced, devoted, enthusiastic teachers. The students from both experimental and control classes had to take three tests: a pre-test at the beginning, a midterm test in the second month, and a post-test in the fourth month of the experimental teaching. The research group compared the test results and concluded the effectiveness of applying LLS.

Table 1. Speaking assessment criteria

Accuracy	Level	Fluency	Level
Little or no language produced	1	Little or no communication	1
Poor vocabulary, mistakes in basic grammar, may have a powerful accent	2	Very hesitant and brief utterances, sometimes difficult to understand	2
Adequate but not rich vocabulary, mistaking obvious grammar mistakes, slight foreign accent	3	Get ideas across, but hesitantly and briefly	3
Good range of vocabulary, occasional grammar slips, slight foreign accent	4	Effective communication in short turns	4
Vast vocabulary appropriately used, virtually no grammar mistakes, native-like or slight foreign accent	5	Easy and effective communication, using long turns	5
Total score: 10			

In the study, the speaking assessment criteria in Table 1 were used to evaluate students' speaking ability in speaking tests.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

The techniques used to validate questionnaires are related to validity and reliability. These are the two most critical psychometric properties of measurement as they improve the quality of the size. (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The validity of countermeasures can be proved by a

combination of content validity, spurious validity, criterion-related validity, and construct validity (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

Content validity: After developing the questionnaire elements, the authors were consulted by three experts from TDMU's Department of Foreign Languages to review the questionnaire. They assessed how well each item relates to the research questions and theoretical framework. In the process, academically inappropriate expressions were identified. To make the elements of the questionnaire easier to understand, some complex concepts were suggested for simplification. There were also comments about the order of the articles. Experts suggested omitting some items and adding some to other aspects of the questionnaire.

Reliability: In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the language learning strategy's reliability (see Table 2). The overall alpha for the 12-item scale is .783, well within the range expected for a reliable tool. (Nunnally, 1967)

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha for each category of the questionnaire

Categories	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
1. Students' English learning	.770	5
2. Students' LLS	.783	12
3. Classroom observation checklist	.668	34

The study population was 370 students from all three grades, which is a reliable sample size, according to Yamane (1967, p. 886). All of these students participated in the survey. Cronbach's Alpha and Statistical Package determined the validity and reliability of the Social Sciences 20 (SPSS 20).

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Results from the Questionnaire

The main research question aims to investigate the strategies most frequently used by students to develop their speaking skills, the differences in language learning strategy choices among students, and the effects of motivation on using language learning strategies. The first set of questions aims to investigate students' English learning and students' needs to take part in a learning strategy-training course.

Table 3. Students' English learning [1]

Questions	Options									
	1		2		3		4		5	
	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P
Q1: Years of learning English	18	4.9	118	31.9	162	43.8	36	9.7	36	9.7
Q2: Degrees of liking English	94	25.4	107	28.9	40	10.8	78	21.1	51	13.8
Q3: Students' motivation for learning English	93	25.1	184	49.7	31	8.4	36	9.7	26	7.0
Q4: Frequency of being instructed LLS	113	30.5	96	25.9	107	28.9	33	8.9	21	5.7
Q5: Students' need for an LLS training course	129	34.9	119	32.2	56	15.1	35	9.5	31	8.4

As shown in Table 3, 162 (43.8 %) students have been learning English for 10 to 11 years. The table also shows that 118 students (31.9%) have studied English for 8 to 9 years. Only 18 (4.9) students reveal that they have spent 5 to 7 years learning English, while 72 students confirm they have taken 11 to 12 or more 12 years to learn English. Secondly, 107 students liked learning English a bit, 78 liked it, 51 adored it, but 94 learners divulged they disliked learning English. Forty students disclosed that they neither liked nor disliked. Thirdly, most students have extrinsic motivation, with 184 students attempting to learn English because they want to get good marks on the tests and examinations at school and get rewards. Ninety-three students reveal that they attempt to learn English to get an excellent job in the future. Only 26 students confess that they learn English to enjoy English songs, movies, articles, etc. 31 intend to live and study abroad, so they must improve their English knowledge. Thirty-six students make an effort to learn English to broaden their English ability. Fourthly, 113 students reveal they are never instructed in LLS, and 96 students express that their teachers rarely lead in LLS. One hundred seven students are sometimes taught LLS, while only 54 students are usually or always trained in LLS. Finally, the table also presents that 248 students find it essential or slightly necessary to join a training course LLS to help them study English better, especially in improving their speaking skills. Fifty-six students chose the option neutral, while the remaining 66 thought taking part in an LLS training course was slightly unnecessary.

Another data analysis reveals the frequency of LLS use and the differences in LLS choices among students from the three grades.

Table 4. Students' preference for LLS

LLS	Mean
Cognitive strategies	3.19
Affective strategies	3.16
Social strategies	2.96
Compensation strategies	2.69
Memorization strategies	2.68
Metacognitive strategies	2.51
Average	**2.87**

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[1] F = Frequency, P= Percent

Table 4 displays an overview of students' priority of LLS use. Students are low-strategy users (average M = 2.87). They prioritize cognitive and affective strategies with M=3.19 and 3.16, respectively. The second priority is social, compensation, and memorization strategies, with M=2.96, 2.69, and 2.68. Metacognitive strategy is the least frequently used one by students accounting for M=2.46. According to Oxford (1990), students are medium strategy users because the means are between 2.4 and 3.5.

A simple statistical analysis was used to determine the difference in the use of LLS among students from the three grades.
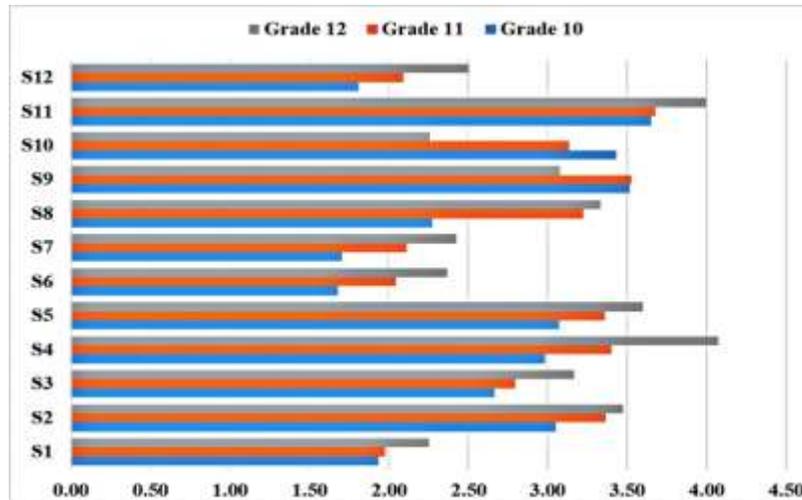

Figure 2. LLS use of three grades

Figure 2 shows that the 12th graders are the higher-strategy users than the 10th and 11th graders. The 10th graders are the lowest-strategy users. The figure also presents that the 10th graders are high-strategy users of strategies 11 and 9 (M=3.65, 3.51, "> 3.5"), medium-strategy users of strategies 10, 5, 2, 4, 3 (M= 3.43, 3.07, 3.05, 2.98, 2.66, "2.4 – 3.5"), and low-strategy users of strategies 8, 1, 12, 7, 6 (M=2.27, 1.94, 1.81, 1.70, 1.68, "<2.4"). The 11th graders are high-strategy users of strategies 11 and 9 (M=3.68, 3.53, "> 3.5"), medium-strategy users of strategies 4, 2, 5, 8, 10, 3 (M= 3.40, 3.36, 3.36, 3.22, 3.14, 2.80, "2.4 – 3.5"), and low-strategy users of strategies 7, 12, 6, 1 (M=2.11, 2.09, 2.04, 1.97, "<2.4"). The 12th graders are high-strategy users of strategies 4, 11, 5 (M=4.07, 3.99, 3.60 "> 3.5"), medium-strategy users of strategies 12, 2, 8, 3, 9 (M= 2.50, 3.47, 3.33, 3.17, 3.08, "2.4 – 3.5"), and low-strategy users of strategies 7, 6, 10, 1 (M=2.43, 2.37, 2.26, 2.25, "<2.4").

Further data analysis shows the students' motivation effects on strategy choices.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of students' motivation in learning English

	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Mean	2.15	2.30	2.27
Median	2.00	2.00	2.00
Mode	2	2	2

It is seen in Table 5 that the majority of students from three grades learn English because they want to get good marks on tests and examinations and rewards. (Mode = 2 and Median = 2.00). Fewer students want to find a good job in the future. They are two primary purposes for high school students to study English.

Table 6. Students' motivation in learning English

Options	Grade 10		Grade 11		Grade 12	
	F	P	F	P	F	P
To find an excellent job in the future.	31	24.8	30	25.4	32	25.2
To get good marks on tests and examinations and rewards.	62	49.6	58	49.2	64	50.4
To live and study abroad	20	16	5	4.2	4	4.7
To broaden my English knowledge.	6	4.8	15	12.7	15	11.8
To enjoy English songs, movies, articles, etc.	6	4.8	10	8.5	10	7.9
Total	125	100	118	100	127	100

Table 6 shows the reason why students attempt to learn English. Most students (80 10th, 60 11th graders, and graders) learn English to get good marks on tests, examinations, and rewards. 31 grade-10, 30 grade-11, and 32 grade-12 students learn English to find a good job. Only four 11th and nine 12th graders study English because they intend to live and study abroad. To conclude, most students have extrinsic motivation. From the results in Table 6, Table 7, and Figure 2, it is clear that students' motivation leads to students' preference for cognitive strategies. 10th graders are in favour of items 2,3,5,9, 10 and 11; 11th graders prefer items 2,4,5,8,9,10,11, and 12th graders often use items 2,3,4,5,8,9,10, and 11. The 12th graders highlight items 4 and 11 because they are in the final grade and must deal with examination papers.

4.1.2 Results fom the Interviews with the Teachers

In the semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers, the following five questions are asked: *(1) How long have you been teaching English? (2) Which LLS do you often guide students to apply in order to develop their English speaking skills? (3) Why do you choose these LLS to introduce to your students? (4) When are these LLS introduced to your students? (5) Do you think LLS are beneficial to improving students' speaking skills?*

Question 1: All teachers have been experienced in teaching English for at least five years. The two wealthiest teachers in experience have been teaching English for 29 years. Seven teachers have fifteen or more years of teaching English.

Questions 2 and 3: Most of the teachers answered that they often introduced some learning strategies (memorization, cognitive, affective, and social strategies) during the lessons, but they only talked about these strategies generally. Every teacher and student had to apply flexibly for each class or skill. None of them introduced LLS to students at the beginning of the school year but during practice time. "I often introduce memorization and cognitive strategies to my students. I think these LLS are crucial to improving my students' English. They can memorize vocabulary, grammar, and structures. They also know to make their study plans." (Teacher 2 and Teacher 6)

Question 4: According to Teacher 9, "I always introduce some LLS in review lessons like memorization and affective strategies." "I always apply affective and social strategies for normal lessons, and memorization and cognitive strategies for review or consolidation lessons." (Teacher 12). These teachers confided in the review lessons, especially highlighting memorization; and cognitive strategies. They revealed that students had to memorize enormous knowledge to prepare for the examination, so they should review systematically and practice as much as possible. None of them mentioned metacognitive strategies like planning and managing.

Question 5: "After applying LLS, I see my students' speaking skills develop effectively. They feel more confident because they have more vocabulary and structures to speak." (Teacher 1). "After being introduced to LLS, my students know how to improve their pronunciation and speaking skills." (Teacher 9). These teachers agreed that LLS effectively improve students' speaking and other skills. They suggested that students should be trained in LLS at the beginning of each school year or semester. Teachers and students should remind and use LLS more frequently.

4.1.3 Results from the Interviews with the Students

In the interviews with the students, the authors applied five main questions to strengthen knowledge about students' LLS in their learning of English: *(1) Are you instructed to use LLS in your English classes? (2) Which LLS do you often apply in your English language learning? (3) Why do you choose these LLS? (4) Are you confident in your speaking skills? (5) Do you have your own LLS to improve your speaking skills?*

In response to Question 1, most students stated that they were instructed LLS during lessons. "Yes, I am." (Except for Student 3) "We are instructed LLS in some lessons, but not at the beginning of the school year." (Student 4)

In response to Questions 2 & 3, 14 out of 18 students confessed that they applied these strategies (cooperating, confiding with friends and teachers, practicing, reviewing, etc.) as a habit. They needed to learn these strategies and when to apply them. In the second-question answer, they disclosed that they used these strategies because they had to review and memorize a considerable amount of vocabulary and knowledge in each lesson for flying colors in the exams. They also needed more time to listen to music, play games, or watch TV because they were too busy with extracurricular activities and extra classes. "I usually ask my friends, teachers, or native speakers who are good at English (social strategies)" (Student 1)

In response to Question 4, some students admitted not being confident speaking English, while others said they felt satisfied because they could communicate fluently with foreigners. "Yes, I am. Because I can communicate with foreigners fluently." (Student 2, 5, 8). "No, I am not. When communicating with my friends and teachers, I do not have many ideas. I have not ever talked with native speakers." (Students 9, 12, 15)

In response to Question 5, Student 7 said he tried his best to talk with native speakers when traveling. "I go to extra classes." (Students 3, 4). "I am taking English-speaking courses with native teachers." (Students 6, 10)

Interviews also revealed that good learners were high-strategy users interested in learning English; however, fair learners were medium-strategy users, and poor students were low-strategy users and felt bored with their studies. The interview findings indicated that many students, especially the tenth graders (4 out of 6), were not confident speaking English. Most students did not have their own LLS to improve their English speaking skills.

4.1.4 Results from Class Observations

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of the activities

Classes	Number	Mean
Class 1	34	3.44
Class 2	34	3.15
Class 3	34	3.09
Class 4	34	2.59
Class 5	34	2.94

Class 6	34	3.65
Class 7	34	3.88
Class 8	34	3.50
Class 9	34	2.97

Through four months of observing practical classes, the authors noticed students' behaviors and activities (see Table 7). All classes often applied pair-work and group work (social strategies), practicing (cognitive strategies), and reviewing (memorization strategies). Students also used dictionaries to check the meanings of unfamiliar words but not for pronunciation or collocations. They constantly attempted to remember single words; did not put them out in phrases or sentences. Some of these classes utilized music; and games (affective strategies). However, no classes focused on students' pronunciation, and even after students' presentations, teachers did not correct their pronunciation errors.

In classes 7, 6, and 8, teachers used PowerPoint presentations and interactive boards, applied games, and exciting activities, which engaged students in the lessons and contributed their positive roles to the lesson's success. (M=3.88, 3.65, 3.50 respectively). On the contrary, classes seemed more boring when teachers did not apply PowerPoint presentations and the interactive board. These classes did not maintain students' attention until the end of the lessons, so the levels were lower. The authors also found that motivation strongly affects language learning strategy use; and the lessons' success. This means that when students are motivated, they learn more effectively and are more eager to use LLS.

4.1.5 Results from the Tests

Before experimental teaching, students from the control and experimental class took a pretest to ensure they were at the same level of English. In the second month of experimental education, students took a midterm test. In the fourth month, students were given a post-test. The researchers compared the results of the midterm test and post-test between the control group and the experimental one to evaluate the effectiveness of using LLS.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics of pretest results

Classes	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
C10	38	2	8	5.34	1.632
E10	38	2	7	5.05	1.138
C11	38	2	8	4.97	1.385
E11	38	2	8	4.95	1.293
C12	38	3	7	5.03	1.127
E12	38	3	8	5.03	1.423

Pretest results presented in Table 8 showed that English levels among experimental and control classes were equal. (Control class 10: M=5.34 & Experimental class 10: M=5.05, Control class 11: M=4.97 & Experimental class 11: M=4.95, Control class 12: M=5.03 & Experimental class 12: M=5.03). The statistics of the pretest results indicated that the sample classes were reasonable for conducting experimental teaching. Having led experimental teaching, the researchers compared the results of midterm tests and posttest of experimental and control classes.

Table 9. Paired sample midterm test

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	C10- E10	-.868	1.256	.204	-1.281	-.456	-4.263	37	.000
Pair 2	C11-E11	-1.184	.766	.124	-1.436	-.932	-9.530	37	.000
Pair 3	C12-E12	-.895	1.181	.192	-1.283	-.507	-4.671	37	.000

The midterm test results explored after two months of experimental teaching revealed students' improvement in their speaking skills (see Table 9). The test results of the experimental classes were higher than those of the control classes (Mean of the control class 10 & experimental class 10 = -.868; Mean of the control class 11 & experimental class 11 = -1.184; Mean of the control class 12 & experimental class 12 = -.895). The speaking skills of the students were improved. The impact of LLS brought effectiveness to students' speaking improvement. (Sig. =.000 < .005)[1]

Table 10. Paired sample posttest[2]

	Paired Differences							
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			

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[1] C10 = Control class 10, E10 = Experimental class 10, C11 = Control class 11, E11 = Experimental class 11, C12 = Control class 12, E12 = Experimental class 12

Pair 1	C10 - E10	-.526	.762	.124	-.777	-.276	-4.259	37	.000
Pair 2	C11 - E11	-.605	.855	.139	-.886	-.324	-4.361	37	.000
Pair 3	C12 - E12	-.474	.862	.140	-.757	-.190	-3.389	37	.002

This data analysis on the paired sample test presented in Table 10 reveals statistically significant differences in students' speaking skills improvement before and after employing LLS. The T-test data computation in this study shows the P-value (Sig) = .000, .000, .002 < .005, proving that applying LLS positively impacts students' speaking improvement.
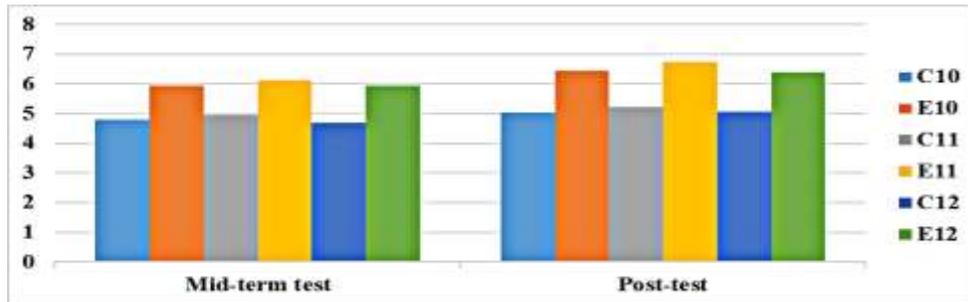
Figure 3. Comparison of midterm test and post-test results

Comparing the midterm and post-test results between the control and experimental classes (see Figure 3), the authors conclude that students progress much in their speaking skills. Students' speaking skills developed considerably and got better and better. Students' speaking skills significantly improve in all grades, grade-10, grade-11, and grade-12, as the orange, yellow, and green bars are much higher than the blue, grey, and blue ones. Students always make efforts to get better post-test results.

4.2 Discussions of the Results

The current study aims to explore students' LLS use and suggests solutions to enhance the effectiveness of applying LLS. The study seeks to answer two research questions: *(1) What language learning strategies do students use to enhance their speaking skills? (2) What should be done to improve the effectiveness of language learning strategies for the students?* To answer these questions, the research was conducted with a mixed-method approach. While small sample sizes and a lack of reliable instruments have severely limited previous studies, the current study employed a mixed method (SILL 12-item questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and class observations). For class observations, the authors used 34-item classroom observation checklists to take notes and compare classes. A reliable sample size of 370 participants (according to Yamane, 1967) took part in the survey. Combining a reliable sample size, a mixed methods study, and modern data analysis tools presented more detailed findings than previous studies.

The findings satisfied the research questions. For the first research question, the current study concluded that students most frequently used cognitive and affective strategies and the least frequently used metacognitive strategies. Both the 10th graders and 11th graders most frequently used affective strategies, but they least frequently used metacognitive ones. The 12th graders most frequently used cognitive and least frequently used affective strategies. Students used a wide range of LLS, and they were medium-strategy users. Because the 10th graders were inexperienced and not under the pressure of graduation examinations, they were the lowest-strategy users. While Tanjung (2018), Lem (2019), and Lestarin (2020) concluded that university students most frequently used metacognitive strategies, Huong (2017) found out that students most frequently used cognitive and social strategies.

The current study also highlighted that motivation remarkably influenced LLS choices. Most students had extrinsic motivation (They learned English because they wanted to get good marks on tests and examinations and rewards; and an excellent job in the future). It was the purpose of learning English that students chose their LLS. The study also discovered through class observations and interviews that when students were motivated to learn, they were excited about participating in the lessons and utilizing LLS. Du (2020) surveyed a Greek female learner and found a clear relationship between the learner's LLS use and her motivation. The learner's integrative motivation relates to the preference for social strategy. The current study found that most students had extrinsic motivation and preferred using cognitive strategies. The 10th graders do not have clear study goals, so they are more passive in-class activities.

Pattanon (2016); Almet, et al. (2016); Jaikrishnan & Ismail (2021); Pragasam et al. (2022); and Soupi et. al. (2022) conducted studies on different student subjects such as undergraduate, postgraduate, or even primary students. They all concluded that LLS positively affected students' English learning. Personality, gender, attitudes, the field of study, and language proficiency impact LLS use among students. Unlikely, the current study focused on investigating LLS use and the effect of students' motivation on LLS selection. Similarly, through class observations, the authors discovered that students motivated to study English tend to use LLS more frequently, and their language skills, like speaking skills, were better.

The current study presented more findings by combining interviews and class observations. Both teachers and students highlighted memorization and cognitive strategies because students had to comprehend and memorize vocabulary, grammar rules, pronunciation rules, etc. They did not prefer using metacognitive like planning and managing, but these strategies were necessary for students to self-study.

Teachers agreed that students' speaking strategies improved significantly after applying LLS in learning and teaching. The teachers also revealed that they did not introduce LLS to students at the beginning of the school year, but LLS was introduced during practice time. Experienced teachers agreed that LLS was beneficial to students' learning. Students confided they did not determine what LLS they were using and what LLS to use, so they needed an LLS training course. The findings of the current study were different from these of previous studies. The current study's findings are reliable and valuable because the current study applies various instruments to collect data, and it was conducted with a more significant population. The current study proves that LLS are effective in improving students' speaking skills through the midterm test and post-test results, while the midterm tests were not included in the previous studies.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The current study aims to assess LLS used by students and recommends solutions to enhance the effectiveness of LLS use. The study has answered all the research questions in detail. Students used some strategies frequently but did not understand them thoroughly and used them as usual. The questionnaires' results reveal that students most frequently used cognitive and affective strategies and the least frequently used metacognitive ones. There is a difference among the learners from grades 10, 11, and 12. The current study did conclude that students most frequently used cognitive and affective strategies and the least frequently used metacognitive strategies. Both the 10th graders and 11th graders most frequently used affective strategies, but they least frequently used metacognitive ones. The 12th graders most frequently used cognitive and least frequently used affective strategies. The study also highlights that motivation had a remarkable influence on LLS choices.

The authors suggest that students need to be introduced to some strategies: (1) planning and setting goals, (2) placing that word in a meaningful phrase or a sentence, (3) practicing English pronunciation, (4) using a dictionary to check the meanings, parts of speech, pronunciation, collocations, and how the vocabulary is used in sentences and repeat reading them many times, (5) using gestures when I do not know what to say during a conversation, (6) reviewing what I have learned and work out what should be developed their natural speaking skills and feelings while talking to them. The reason is that these essential strategies help students develop their natural speaking skills and communicate successfully. An LLS training course should be organized at the beginning of each school year and applied usually. Students should be taught to make their study plans for each school year.

Regardless of the study's contributions, several limitations need to be acknowledged: (1) the study was implemented during one semester of an academic year. (2) The study was carried out at three high schools. Although the study's results are valid, they cannot be generalized to other scopes. Connected with the above limitations, further studies should be conducted during an academic year and employed at more schools. The current research focuses on LLS to develop speaking skills; other studies can be done on writing, listening, and reading skills.

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