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INVESTIGATING LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES (LLS) EMPLOYED BY ESL UNDERGRADUATES IN ENHANCING SPEAKING SKILLS IN TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN

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This research paper attached hereto, entitled Investigating Language Learning Strategies (LLS) Employed by ESL Undergraduates In Enhancing Speaking Skills In Tunku Abdul Rahman, prepared and submitted by Goh Kai Ling in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) English Education is hereby accepted.

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Abstract

This study investigated language learning strategies (LLS) employed by ESL undergraduates to enhance speaking skills. Around 30 participants from the four faculties of the Faculty of Business and Finance (FBF), Faculty of Arts and Social Science (FAS), Faculty of Science (FSc) and Faculty of Engineering and Green Technology (FEGT) who study at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) were involved in this study. This study adopted a quantitative design that employed the Oxford SILL questionnaire (1990). The result indicated that cognitive and compensation are the most preferred language learning strategies among the participants of the four faculties regardless of gender. There is a high significance level for the employment of affective strategies regarding the gender variable. As for good and poor proficiency learners, it has been shown that cognitive and compensation strategies have high employment frequency among both groups. However, the statistical analysis did not show that language proficiency significantly influences the employment of LLS. The results of the study have implications for modifying second-language pedagogy. It emphasises the need to enhance language learners' knowledge of the methods, so they are encouraged to employ more appropriate LLS at different stages of learning their second language. Aside from that, it raises awareness among language teachers on the importance of learning methods for language learners, as well as the impact of elements such as gender and degree of competence in the learner's choice of LLS as well as individual disparities among language learners in a learner-centered classroom.

Table of contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The issues of low language proficiency in each aspect of English, specifically in speaking skills, result from undergraduate students who graduated from high school before 2015 and did not undergo the common European framework of reference of language (CEFR). It is a framework that gives equal weight to learning all four language skills. The study is being conducted to investigate the current language learning strategies (LLS) employed by ESL undergraduate students who have yet to undergo CEFR to improve speaking skills. The trends in this field are researchers focusing on studying English as a whole instead of specifying one of the language skills. Therefore, only one variable, such as gender factors or language proficiency, will be included in the study, focusing more on primary and secondary schoolers.

The main researchers working on this topic are O'Malley et al. (1985), Rubin (1987) and Oxford (1990). O'Malley et al. (1985) described language learning strategies in more detail by classifying the strategies under three main headings: cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective. Moving on, Rubin (1987) claimed that three types of strategies contribute directly or indirectly to language learning: learning strategies, communication, and social strategies. He asserted that learning strategies consist of cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies. Noted by Rubin (1987), these three strategies provide learners with exposure to the target language but indirectly to learning it. Oxford (1990) classified language learning strategies into two main classes, namely, direct, and indirect, subdivided into six groups: direct strategies consist of memory, cognitive and compensation strategies; indirect strategies consist of metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

Most of the issues in this field are language learning strategies employed by high proficiency language level learners in learning English as a second language to differentiate the good and poor language learners, the language learning strategies employed by language

learners to improve reading, writing or English as a whole. Language learning strategies (LLS) are the central concept relevant to solving low language proficiency as researchers can determine the frequency of language learning strategies and their effectiveness concerning gender factors and language proficiency.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Although extensive research has been carried out into language learning strategies employed by primary, secondary and tertiary education (Ling & Yamat, 2020; Zakaria et al., 2018; Ping, 2017), little is known about the identification and evaluation of the current language learning strategies (LLS) employed by ESL undergraduate students in private universities which involves more variables such as gender factors, language background and language proficiency (Chanderan & Hashim, 2022).

Most of the past studies focused on using language learning strategies in learning English instead of specifying one of the four areas of English such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Mohammadipour et al., 2018; Adan & Hashim, 2021; Ping & Luan, 2017). Since primary (KBSR/KSSR) and secondary schools (KBSM/KSSM) teachers focused primarily on reading and writing abilities in their teaching approaches as the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) test specifically targets these two skills, the English language acquisition abilities of reading, writing, listening, and speaking was not given equal weight in these curricula (John et al., 2021). The Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR), which gives equal weight to learning all four language skills, was introduced into the Malaysian educational system in 2015 (Zaki & Darmi, 2021). It is evident that undergraduate students who graduated from high school before 2015 did not experience this framework, which results in low language proficiency levels. According to Adan and Hashim (2021), this batch of undergraduate students needed help speaking in English when they transferred to tertiary institutions or entered the workforce due to their limited command of the language.

Hence, this study will focus on the most preferred language learning strategies employed by ELS undergraduate students in Malaysia's private university, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, examine the difference of genders in LLS employment and the difference between good and bad language learners in employing LLS by the undergraduate students to enhance speaking skills.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the most preferred language learning strategy used by ESL undergraduates to enhance speaking skills?

2. What are the differences between male and female ESL learners in the use of overall language learning strategies?

3. What are the differences between the good and poor language proficiency ESL learners in the use of overall language learning strategies?

1.4 Research Objectives

The present study aims:

1. To investigate the preferred language learning strategy used by ESL undergraduates to enhance speaking skills.

2. To identify the differences between male and female ESL learners in the use of overall language learning strategies.

3. To identify the differences between the good and poor language proficiency ESL learners in the use of overall language learning strategies.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study's findings will provide salient evidence of the current language learning strategies (LLS) employed by undergraduates who did not undergo CEFR to enhance their speaking skills. The findings will enable all stakeholders (i.e., educational administrators, lecturers, parents, and students) to evaluate better the effectiveness of the pedagogy used in teaching English in speaking at the tertiary level regarding language proficiency and gender factors.

Language proficiency is being studied in this paper as it is a critical factor significantly influencing the effectiveness of LLS. For instance, a language learning strategy may work well for high-proficiency students instead of low-proficiency students. By studying English language proficiency and LLS, researchers will be able to identify the most effective LLS for ESL learners of different English proficiency levels.

On the other hand, gender is a vital factor to consider when examining language learning strategies. It was shown that males and females have different learning styles and preferences, which can influence the effectiveness of LLS. For example, male students prefer social strategy (Abu Radwan, 2011), while females prefer cognitive strategy (Oxford & Nyikos,1989). By examining gender differences, researchers can identify the most effective language learning strategies for male and female undergraduate students.

On that account, studying language proficiency and gender factors together will provide more reliable and valid findings regarding the effectiveness of language learning strategies as the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between these two variables and the employment of language learning strategies by ESL undergraduate students. Aside from that, studying two variables will ensure that the findings apply to a broader range of learners. Suppose the study only includes one factor, such as language learning proficiency. In that case, the results will only be generalisable to learners of different language proficiency levels.

As for the other case, studying more than two variables was not feasible with solely quantitative method and can be seen in research by Khamkhien (2010) that studied gender, motivation and experience that affect the employment of LLS of Thai and Vietnamese EFL learners. The study recognised limitations in relying solely on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire to extract language learning strategies. It suggested supplementing it with tools like think-aloud protocols, interviews, and written diaries. Hence, this study, which includes two variables, can develop more broadly applicable conclusions relevant to undergraduate students with varying levels of proficiency and different genders identified by studying two variables together while being practical research to be carried out solely with SILL questionnaires.

Furthermore, the findings also contribute to the development of improved curricula and syllabus design in ESL classes at the tertiary level. It is hoped that this study will encourage further related research to involve other variables, such as language background, that influenced the language learning strategies employed by tertiary students in enhancing speaking skills.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

1.6.1 Language Learning Strategies

Oxford (1990) classified language learning strategies into two main classes, direct and indirect, subdivided into six groups: direct strategies consist of memory, cognitive and compensation strategies; indirect strategies consist of metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

1.6.2 Direct strategies

Regarding direct strategies, memory strategies are used to store knowledge, cognitive strategies are the mental techniques that learners employ to understand knowledge and compensation strategies aid in overcoming knowledge gaps during ongoing communication (Oxford, 1990).

1.6.3 Indirect strategies

As for indirect strategies, metacognitive strategies support learners in managing their target language learning through centring learning, arrangement, planning and evaluating; affective strategies focus on the learner's emotional needs, such as confidence, whereas social strategies encourage contact with the target language through interaction (Oxford, 1990).

1.7 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The scope of the study in this research proposal is to investigate the current language learning strategies (LLS) used by ESL undergraduate students to enhance their speaking skills. The study aims to identify the highly used LLS employed by ESL undergraduates from four faculties (Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Science and Faculty of Business and Finance) to enhance speaking skills in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman.

As for the limitations, firstly, the study has limited variables as it focuses on only two variables: gender factors and language proficiency level. It is a fact that these two variables are vital to the research. However, more than two variables may be required to fully capture the complexity of LLS in enhancing speaking skills as other variables, such as learning styles, language background and motivation, may affect the language learning strategies undergraduate students choose to enhance speaking skills.

Secondly, the study will have limited generalisability as it has a relatively small sample size by only studying the undergraduate population in one private university, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. Although the undergraduate students are from five different faculties, it is a fact that the number of participants is limited and may not provide a representative sample for the entire population of ESL undergraduate students from other public or private universities in Malaysia.

Thirdly, the study may have a self-report bias as the data is gathered through the survey that depends on participants' self-reported data. It can be influenced by social desirability, memory, and response biases. Social desirability as participants may provide socially acceptable replies that affect the dependability of the result. Following that, memory bias may occur due to the inability of the participants to recall their LLS experience, leading to inaccurate and incomplete results. As for response bias may happen for unmotivated participants with limited knowledge of LLS, resulting in inconsistent or random responses.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

The research project is situated in the context of the most preferred language learning strategies (LLS) employed by ESL undergraduate students in private universities to improve speaking skills. The study will focus on studying LLS in terms of two variables, including gender factors and language proficiency, as the primary concern of this field is the strategy used in the context in which the language learning process occurs. In this chapter, the report will primarily review existing literature pertaining to speaking in an ESL or EFL context, the relationship between language proficiency and LLS, followed by the in-depth examination of LLS, the relationship between gender factors and LLS, the theory being utilised in the research as well as the identification and discussion of the research gap.

2.1 Speaking skills for ESL students

In contrast to reading, writing, and listening, speaking is the most challenging skill to attain proficiency in, as Rao (2019) asserts. In speaking, learners must learn the appropriate grammar and vocabulary for effective communication. It entails interactions between multiple individuals and can be viewed as a skill focused on productive communication, as Wael et al. (2018) highlights. It requires a considerable amount of time to acquire speaking skills. Ineffectiveness, particularly among those in higher learning institutions, results in inadequate oral proficiency, impacting their performance in the professional arena (Ramamuruthy et al., 2021). A heightened emphasis is on developing speaking skills among learners in higher education institutions.

According to Brown and Yule (1983), "Speaking is the skill that the students will be judged upon most in real life situations". Significantly, the teaching of speaking skills has been undervalued, with many ESL teachers focusing on memorising dialogues or repetitive drills

(Rao, 2019). On top of that, the workplace imposes importance on communication skills, leading English teachers to impart essential speaking abilities to English language Learners (ELLs) for improved performance in real-life scenarios (Certifico et al., 2023). However, speaking skills are often overlooked in the current ESL teaching landscape, even though employability emphasises communication more than technology (Rao,2019). Issues in English speaking encompass both insufficient linguistic proficiency and psychological apprehensions related to speaking in diverse situations (Certifo et al., 2023). As such, ESL learners require assistance to enhance their speaking abilities and build confidence in verbal expressions, as these factors impede their ability to communicate and express themselves effectively (Meinawati et al., 2020).

2.2 Language Proficiency and Language Learning Strategies

Extensive research studies have delved into Language Learning Strategies (LLS) and including the entirety of these studies is impractical. Thus, the study will highlight pioneering research and select studies investigating the relationship between learners' language proficiency levels and the preferred use of LLS.

Rubin (1975), the pioneer researcher who studied good language learners, claimed seven characteristics of a good language proficiency learner based on compensation, metacognitive, cognitive, and social strategies. The first three characteristics related to compensation strategies of direct strategy were a solid willingness to make guesses of unfamiliar English words or phrases during conversations, a strong drive to circumlocution, and acute attention to the context of a conversation. Following that, metacognitive strategies consist of characteristics such as readiness to embrace speech mistakes for advancements in learning the English language, constant monitoring of English learning progress, and adjusting strategies accordingly. The remaining two characteristics were related to cognitive and social strategies, respectively, whereby the users actively search for the pattern of English speech

instead of directly transferring words from their native language and seeking opportunities to communicate with native speakers while understanding their culture.

Notably, the seven characteristics mentioned by Rubin (1975) align with the study done by Ping and Luan (2017), as it demonstrated that learners with high language proficiency exhibited a broader use of strategies, including high to medium levels, such as metacognitive, cognitive, and compensation strategies. The research revealed that high achievers demonstrated a decreased preference for memory and affective strategies. The alignment between Rubin's identified characteristics and the study by Ping and Luan (2017) emphasises the significance of certain traits in the language learning of good language proficiency learners. The prevalence of metacognitive, cognitive, compensation, and strategies among high-proficiency learners indicates that the reduced reliance on memory and affective strategies among high achievers' points to a shift in preference, reflecting that they preferred analytical and strategic methods. As such, the results show that employing various strategies and being flexible in the approach, specifically focusing on understanding and reflecting on the language learning process by interacting with native speakers of their own.

Several studies have reached the conclusion that more proficient students make better use of strategies and consistently show that language proficiency has a statistical impact on the utilisation of language learning strategies (LLS) by learners (Alhaisoni, 2012; Gerami & Baighlou, 2011; Salahshour et al., 2013; Zhou & Intaraprasert, 2015). For instance, in Alhaisoni's study (2012), language proficiency significantly influences LLS. Saudi EFL undergraduates with high proficiency levels prioritised effective communication (metacognitive), seeking clarification (social) when necessary for their language understanding. In the same vein, the research done by Gerami et al. (2011) showed that successful students in English language learning use overall strategies more frequently than those who are unsuccessful. Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students least used the affective

strategy. Aside from that, the result obtained by Salahshour et al. (2013) demonstrated that highschoolers with higher proficiency levels frequently use all types of LLS compared to those with lower proficiency levels. For high schoolers with high proficiency levels, meta-cognitive and social strategies were the most favoured types of strategy, respectively. In the study of Zhou and Intaraprasert (2015), pre-service teachers with higher language proficiency levels reported employing LLS significantly more frequently than those with lower levels.

2.3 Language learning strategies

According to Ghani (2003), language learning strategies (LLS) are techniques learners employ to increase the success level of their language acquisition. It is a fact that strategy is vital to achieving specific learning purposes. The pioneers in defining the language learning strategy are O'Malley et al. (1985), Rubin (1987), and Oxford (1990).

2.3.1 Classification of Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies (LLS) was first classified into three main subcategories: metacognitive (planning for learning), cognitive (direct manipulation for learning), and socio-affective (interaction) strategies (O'Malley et al.,1985). Rubin (1987) classified LLS into three direct and indirect strategies. The direct strategies involve cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies, whereas indirect strategies involve communication and social strategies. Oxford (1990) then classified LLS into two main classes, direct and indirect, whereby direct strategies consist of memory, cognitive and compensation strategies, while indirect strategies consist of metacognitive, affective, and social strategies.

The research conducted by O'Mallay et al. (1985) categorised LLS into cognitive (notetaking), metacognitive (selective attention), and socio-affective (cooperation) domains. The study contained two phases: interviews and strategy training regarding speaking and listening skills. The findings of the study showed that the individual perception of ESL students

in language learning displayed a prevalence of cognitive strategies over metacognitive ones. In contrast, speaking skills improved through strategy training in phase two of the research.

Moving on, Rubin (1987) claimed that there are three strategies contribute directly or indirectly to language learning. He asserted that direct strategies consist of cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies. Conversely, indirect strategies consist of communication and social strategies. Cognitive strategies are defined as active analysis or synthesis of learning materials, while metacognitive strategies focus on self-regulation, including goal setting and self-management. On the other hand, social strategies play a less direct role in learning, whereby the language learners practice their language knowledge with others.

Oxford (1990) then classified LLS into two main classes, direct and indirect, subdivided into six groups: direct strategies consist of memory, cognitive and compensation strategies; indirect strategies consist of metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The book discusses two major classes of LLS, which are direct and indirect. Direct strategies involve the performer engaging with the language, including memory strategies for retention, cognitive strategies for comprehension, and compensation strategies for overcoming language gaps.

In contrast, indirect strategies are linked to the director overseeing the general management of learning. The director's role includes coordinating the learning process (metacognitive), regulating performancers' emotions (affective), and learning through interactions (social). Oxford (1990) emphasised the performer and director need to collaborate for optimal results. The application of these strategies extends to the book's four language skills. Direct strategies to improve speaking skills, memory techniques like the "BAGS" acronym (A-age words, B-beauty words, G-goodness words, and S-size words) for adjective recall, cognitive strategies that involve mimicking native speakers, and compensation strategies that rely on non-verbal-clues-for communication. On the other hand, indirect strategies include

metacognitive planning, effective encouragement to speak without fear of errors, and social strategy that involves seeking corrections from others to refine speech.

2.3.1 Direct strategies used in enhancing speaking skills

Direct strategies, as defined by Oxford (1990), involve a direct and active approach to language learning that consist of memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Memory strategies aid information retention, cognitive strategies enhance understanding and production, whereas compensation strategies allow for language use despite limitations.

Several researchers have reported that employing direct strategies contributes to the enhancement of speaking skills. Firstly, the cognitive strategies. According to the research done by Samad (2021) that examined the strategies for learning speaking skills used by adult EFL students, the findings indicated that adult EFL students predominantly employ cognitive strategies as a means to articulate their thoughts and emotions. Also, it was found that the application of cognitive strategies occurred in the process of practice and reasoning to enhance their speaking skills. In the study conducted by Mingyuan (2001), the results revealed that the China students who had studied English as a subject for at least six years in junior and senior middle schools in China demonstrated a corresponding improvement in their oral English proficiency. Mingyuan (2001) asserted that applying cognitive strategies is a significant driving force for students' advamcement in enhancing speaking skills within this educational setting. She also mentioned that, unlike indirect strategies, cognitive strategies focus on direct strategies that facilitate learning and reflect students' actual engagement in oral communication.

Secondly, compensation strategy in enhancing speaking skills. According to Zulkarnain et al. (2022), the most preferred LLS observed in Year 4 primary students for developing speaking skills was the compensation strategy, as the learners rely on seeking peer assistance and employing gestures to enhance mutual understanding during speaking activities. The result highlighted the importance of incorporating peer learning activities to enhance English

speaking skills. Not only that, but the study also conducted by Syafryadin et al. (2020) showed that proficient speakers effectively employed the three elements of compensation strategies to enhance speaking skills, such as topic selection, message adjustment and usage of mime and gestures to prevent communication gaps. As for less proficient speakers, they displayed similar tendencies but relied more on coining words to bridge the communication gaps.

Thirdly, memory strategies in enhancing speaking skills. According to the research done by Rajan (2022), the development of ESL learners' speaking skills was hindered by limited vocabulary knowledge, which serves as a barrier to enhancing English speaking skills and struggle to adapt to differences between spoken and written English. The findings indicated that memory strategies effectively enhance ESL learners' speaking skills by observing the connection between spoken and written English and recalling the vocabulary for communication. Within memory strategies, learners engage in cognitive processes by resorting to imagery, review practices and actions as outlined by Alek et al. (2020). By employing these strategies, students integrated the visual and audio within their cognitive processes, facilitating the creation of a visual representation, which enhanced English speaking skills (Alsaraireh, 2022).

2.3.2 Indirect strategies used in enhancing speaking skills

Indirect strategies, as outlined by Oxford (1990), are prominnet in supporting the English language learning process and categorised as metacognitive, affective, and social, offer learners a diverse approach. Metacognitive strategies enable self-regulation, attention, planning, and error monitoring; affective strategies address emotions, motivation, and attitudes through anxiety reduction and self-encouragement whereas social strategies involve interaction with native speakers, fostering language acquisition through questioning, collaboration, and cultural understanding (Oxford ,1990).

Several research studies showed the effectiveness of indirect strategies that include metacognitive, affective and social strategies in improving English speaking skills. According to Zakaria et al. (2019), mastering speaking skills is a vital component of language learning, requiring students to express themselves verbally in English, and the skill is fundamental for comprehensive language proficiency, extending beyond written forms. In this case, needs and motivation are prominent components for students to excel in speaking skills (Galti, 2016), leading to affective strategies for learning English speaking skills. The review journal article by Zakaria et al. (2019) and the research conducted by Wijirahayu and Dorand (2018) identified that positive attitudes among students enhance the effectiveness of employing affective strategies in language learning. As such, the application of affective strategy has demonstrated a beneficial influence on students by serving as a motivational factor for speaking.

Besides, Zakaria et al. (2019) asserts social strategies play a significant role in enhancing speaking skills. According to Henriquez et al. (2017), social strategies in language learning play a crucial role in supporting and improving speaking abilities. For instance, the review journal article by Zakaria et al. (2019) mentioned that proficient language learners can support their peers in English communication, thus promoting collaboration and mutual assistance during speaking tasks and group activities. She claimed that using social strategies

in learning to speak contributes to a supportive environment that mainly benefits students who may feel hesitant about making speech errors. In a simpler manner, participating in a group setting and receiving assistance from peers of similar age reduces anxiety and fosters a sense of safety in the language learning process.

In terms of faculties, effective English-speaking skills are imperative for success in engineering students' future careers (Kehing et al., 2021). According to Rao (2019), proficiency in English communication is crucial for engineers as English is a widely spoken global language and serves as the international language in engineering. The ability to understand and express information related to engineering underscored the significance of strong English-speaking skills (Kehing et al., 2021). While preparing for their professional journeys, engineering students need to prioritise the development of these language skills to facilitate effective communication in their future careers. Based on the findings of the research done by (Kehing et al., 2021), metacognitive strategies that require the students to regulate their own learning through planning and self-evaluation were the most preferred strategies employed by engineering students, whereas social strategies are the least. The results indicated that the participants were conscious of their thought processes while speaking the target language. A comparable discovery was made in the study conducted by Rubaai et al. (2019), where learners acknowledged their speech errors while using English. The respondents mentioned that they preplanned their speech and contemplated how their message would be expressed in their native language to ensure they could articulate it similarly.

2.4 Gender and Language Learning Strategies

Gender remains a consistently contentious factor in research, with researchers lacking consensus on the impact of gender on the usage of language learning strategies (LLS). Over an extended course, a prevalent concept suggests the existence of biological, fundamental cognitive disparities in the information processing between males and females, and the belief was notably pertinent in language learning (Tran, 2021). LLS involve intentional cognitive processes that ESL learners use to facilitate language acquisition and reach their desired language proficiency (Kashefian-Naeeini et al., 2011). Adopting appropriate LLS benefits language learning and increases learners' confidence in mastering the target language (Ahamad & Abdullah, 2019; Balini & Jeyabalan, 2018). In this case, gender differences may stem from both physiological differences, such as brain development, and differences in higher-level cortical functions. Males and females exhibit distinct patterns of lateralization, with males showing more left-hemisphere dominance (Rahman & Anchassi, 2012). Regarding brain activation, Legato (2005) found that women not only engage both hemispheres but also activate a greater number of areas than men. Regardless of whether gender differences are culturally or biologically determined, numerous studies highlight their substantial influence on students' academic interests, needs, and accomplishments (Wang & Degol, 2017).

Regarding gender differences from biologically determined, Sumarni's (2019) investigation focused on analysing LLS, particularly distinguishing between male and female university students in Indonesia. The study highlighted that female students were more inclined towards utilising social strategies. Cognitive strategies, including dividing English words and making summaries, were less prevalent among female university students. The male students demonstrated the lowest frequency of affective strategies, indicating potential discomfort in expressing emotions related to their English learning experiences. Aside from that, Fortes (2023) contends that the findings displayed a higher prevalence of metacognitive and affective

strategy use among public college female students compared to male students in English language learning. Also, the results showed that female students employ all six LLS under direct and indirect strategies more frequently, signifying a diverse range of strategies in L2 learning. A parallel study by Arbon et al. (2018) supported the results of Fortes (2023) study, revealing that female students utilise all six LLS, with metacognitive strategies being the most dominant, indicating that they preferred having clear goals and reflecting on progress in ESL learning. On top of that, in Mohamed's (2023) study encompassing several public and private universities in Malaysia, the analysis highlights distinct preferences concerning memory strategies among male and female ESL learners in Malaysia's higher education. The most notable difference observed was the utilisation of rhymes to memorise English words, which is highly favoured by male students. With that, it was suggested that songs be employed in ESL classes for male students.

As for the sociocultural aspect of gender differences, the societal values, habits, or educational principles adopted may influence how both women and men employ language learning strategies in manipulating knowledge. The study done by Nyongesa and Mukhwana (2017) explored how gender serves as a sociocultural determinant in influencing LLS among Tanzanian East African English learners. While no significant differences were found between genders in memory, cognitive, compensation, and affective strategies, disparity was found in metacognitive and social strategies. Male learners reported higher employment of metacognitive and social strategies, influenced by the sociocultural patriarchal nature of Tanzanian culture inherited from Arabic culture in which females are prohibited from social interaction beyond their immediate circles.

Likewise, Dawadi (2017) found that male students exhibited a higher frequency of utilising social strategies than female students. The elevated use of social strategies among males was attributed to biological, cultural, and socialisation factors. Additionally, the study revealed that male students demonstrated greater use of affective strategies, suggesting that they were more adept at managing their emotions and displaying increased confidence and willingness to address fear and anxiety related to English speaking compared to female students. Nepalese culture's conservative nature inhibited females from socialising beyond their immediate circles, leading to potential hesitance in employing social strategies such as "practising English with other people" and "asking for help."

Aside from that, Sukraini (2021) conducted a study with students from Lab University Malaysia Primary School, participants in the International Class Program (ICP), where English served as the primary language of classroom instruction. The students had been learning English for approximately five years. In the study, the prevailing belief in Western cultures that females tend to outperform males in LLS was observed, with Sukraini (2021) suggesting that the discrepancy could be a social construct. The findings of female students utilising higher compensation strategies may be attributed to their heightened determination and diligence in comprehending their conversation partners and ensuring effective communication.

Madhumathi et al. (2014) observed a noteworthy distinction in the utilisation of metacognitive strategies among females, signifying that female exhibited more frequent monitoring of their language learning progress than males. In the context of India, where the enrollment of females in higher education is lower than that of males, cultural factors such as early marriage often hinder females from continuing their education. Consequently, female students pursuing higher education bear a heightened responsibility to successfully complete their courses. With that in mind, increased responsibility appears to contribute to the heightened

awareness and conscientious monitoring of language learning progress among female students in India.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

2.5.1 Information Processing Theory

The first theoretical framework that will be used in the study will be information processing theory. According to Lyttle (2011), the theory posits that the human mind functions analogously to a computer, employing strategies and logical rules to encode, store, and retrieve information. He claimed that it encompasses four key aspects: the encoding of new information in the brain, the generalisation of acquired knowledge, self-modification to assimilate learned information, and task analysis for rapid problem understanding and effective solution identification. In applying the theory, information follows a specific pathway within the brain by perceiving the information and processes, temporarily stored in short-term memory before eventually being transferred to long-term memory for future retrieval (Lyttle, 2011).

Specifically, the theory examines how individuals perceive, comprehend, and retain the information acquired from their surroundings (Olson & Ramírez, 2020). Simply, it outlines several stages of learning, such as input (initial exposure to new material), central processing (establishing connections between new information and existing knowledge), and output (demonstrating acquired knowledge) (Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004). In the context of the information-processing theory, perception and attention are crucial during the input stage. At the same time, memory assumes a central role in both the central processing and output stages (Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004). Similarly, Albanese (2000) noted that the information-processing theory, as advocated by Schmidt (1983), emphasises its significance in accessing students' prior knowledge. Schmidt also stressed the impact of past learning on the current learning experience, highlighting how students utilise their knowledge from the past to generate new ideas during the thinking period.

Singh et al. (2018) state that students enhance their learning by activating existing schemata connecting prior knowledge of the subject to comprehend new information. Essentially, students' schemata play a vital role in information processing related to the subject matter, thereby exercising their thinking skills (Singh et al., 2018). According to Hardacre and Güvendir (2018), L2 speech production involves a progression through five stages, accompanied by a shift in cognitive processes. They mentioned that proficient learners demonstrated the ability to redirect attention from minor grammatical details to more complex language features. The shift is explained by the information processing theory, suggesting that, initially, learners focus on understanding or producing basic vocabulary and syntax. Only after automating these structures through meaningful practice can ESL learners focus on more complex, higher-order language features.

2.5.2 Social learning theory

The study will incorporate the social learning theory (SLT) as its second theoretical framework. Advocates of the theory asserted that learning is inherently social in nature (Nimehchisalem, 2013). According to this perspective, language acquisition occurs through active engagement in authentic social interactions, wherein learners observe and emulate their behaviours (Bandura, 1977; Miller & Dollard, 1941). As per Lyttle (2011), social learning theory claims that learning can occur through observation, independent behavioural changes, and imitation, which are primary mechanisms for learning, influencing both behaviour and cognition. SLT has become perhaps the most influential theory of learning and development as it is rooted in many basic concepts of traditional learning theory Nabavi (2012). The theory is often called a bridge between behaviourist and cognitive learning theories because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation (Muro & Jeffrey 2008).

According to Nabavi (2012), the principles of SLT will be consistent across the lifespan, allowing for observational learning at any age. Exposure to new influential theory facilitates

ongoing learning through modelling (Newman and Newman, 2022). SLT asserts that individuals acquire knowledge from one another through processes such as observation, imitation, and modelling. Under these principles, learning is conceptualised as possible without requiring an immediate change in behaviour. In contrast to behaviourist perspectives, which emphasise a permanent alteration in behaviour as the hallmark of learning, social learning theory, exemplified by Bandura and Walters (1965), contends that individuals can acquire knowledge solely through observation, with the manifestation of learning not necessarily evident in their immediate performance.

Improvised Social learning theory introduced by Bandura and Walters (1977) holds significant potential in shaping the learning journey of novice language learners in adulthood. The theory delves into the interplay of cognitive, behavioural, and environmental factors within the learning process, suggesting that these influences can facilitate learning through observational processes, thereby shaping cognitive states. According to Bandura and Walters (1977), much of human behaviour is acquired through observational learning and modelling, where individuals develop an understanding of new behaviours by observing others. This action-encoded information serves as a guide for future actions. In second language learning, ESL beginner learners can discover motivation in learning from various sources, such as peers, classmates, and mentors. Through the observation-modelling process, beginners can establish a system that motivates them to engage with written material and replicate English spoken sounds (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2014).

2.6 Research gap

Despite the comprehensive literature review, several research gaps were found. Firstly, while the problem statement emphasizes the need to investigate language learning strategies (LLS) concerning gender factors, the literature review provides an extensive overview of the impact of language proficiency on strategy use but lacks a direct comparison with gender-related variables in Malaysia. The literature briefly touches on gender differences in strategy utilisation but fails to systematically explore the depth of these differences (Sumarni, 2019; Fortes, 2023; Arbon et al., 2018). Secondly, the problem statement emphasizes the need for specificity in exploring language learning strategies in the context of ESL undergraduate students in private universities. However, the literature review does not explicitly focus on private university contexts (Sukraini, 2021; Zulkarnain et al.,2022; Rajan, 2022), potentially overlooking specific factors that could influence strategy use in this setting. Lastly, the literature review does not sufficiently address the recent changes in the Malaysian educational system and their potential impact on language proficiency levels and strategy use among ESL undergraduate students.

In summary, the literature review thoroughly examines language learning strategies, speaking skills, and language proficiency. However, there is a research gap in the in-depth exploration of gender differences in strategy utilisation, a specific focus on private university contexts, and the impact of recent educational changes on ESL undergraduate students. Addressing these gaps could contribute to a complete understanding of language learning strategies in the specified context and offer valuable insights for educational practitioners and policymakers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology employed for data collection, offering thorough explanations regarding the research design, participants, methods, and procedures.

3.2 Sampling method

A range of 50-120 undergraduate students from four faculties (Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Science and Faculty of Business and Finance) will be chosen to participate in the study. There will be around 13 participants from each faculty for a range of 50 participants. In comparison, there will be 25 participants from each faculty for a range of 100 participants. The sample of this study was selected using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) random sampling approach for the convenience of researchers to collect data by considering the students' availability from various classes and varying degrees of English ability. The study examines how undergraduate students employ language learning strategies to improve their speaking abilities. As a result, it is critical to identify students' most employed speaking strategy. The frequency will be determined using the primary data from the disseminated surveys and the questionnaire items will be examined using descriptive analyses and independent t-tests in the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS 29.0).

3.3 Research design

The quantitative research method is appropriate for the study as the research objectives are to determine highly used language learning strategies (LLS), differences between males and females as well as good and poor proficiency learners in employing LLS to enhance speaking skills in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman. The quantitative study approach allows for the explanation of factors and trends in chosen samples and the representation of broad populations, such as the frequency of LLS used by undergraduate students and their genders. The data was gathered using Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

questionnaires. In addition, the MUET test, which consists of six bands and reflects undergraduates' English language competency before admission to Malaysian tertiary institutions, was utilised in this study to determine the language proficiency of undergraduates.

3.4 Research instrument

SILL questionnaire will be used to collect the necessary and relevant data for this research to identify students' most employed speaking strategies, the correlation between gender variables and the selection of LLS to improve their speaking abilities, the correlation between language competency and the selection of LLS to enhance their speaking skills.

3.4.1 SILL questionnaire

The SILL questionnaire will be administered online, and participants will be given a set period to complete it. Aside from that, the participants' demographic information, such as gender, faculty, and MUET results, will be reviewed. The data will be used to identify the differences between male and female ESL learners using overall language learning strategies. The MUET results will be used to determine the differences between good and poor language proficiency learners using overall language learning strategies. In addition, SILL responses of 4 (usually true of me) and 5 (always or nearly true of me) on a 5-point Likert scale will be classified as "high strategy use" for accurate analysis of the six language learning strategies under the direct and indirect strategy, respectively.

3.5 Theoretical Framework
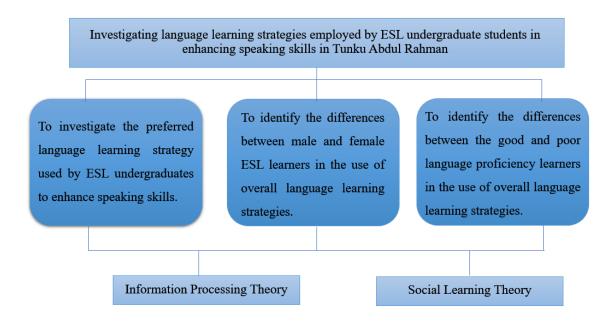
Figure 1: Information Processing Theory and Social Learning Theory

3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

The data will be collected to evaluate the students' preferred strategies, the correlation between gender variables and language competency, and the selection of language learning strategies (LLS) to improve their speaking abilities. The questionnaire will be distributed for quantitative data at the convenience of the respondents, and completed questionnaires will be returned to the researchers on the same day. The ethical forms will be enclosed with the pre-distributed surveys.

As for the research instrument, the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire will be used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire is most suited when the sample is large and distributed widely. In reference to past studies (John et al., 2021; Edward et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2018), all information will be gathered using the SILL questionnaire administered by the researcher. The SILL questionnaire will be carefully conducted to elicit responses from respondents.

SILL responses of 4 (usually true of me) and 5 (always or nearly true of me) on a 5-point Likert scale will be classified as "high strategy use" for accurate analysis. The classification was carried out to fulfil the minimum number of respondents necessary in each cell of cross-tabulation, which was especially important for smaller sample sizes of respondents with high levels of language competence.

Using the SPSS 29.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software package, data from the questionnaire were collected, quantified, and presented as computed frequencies, means, and standard deviations. By collecting descriptive data such as mean score and standard deviation for each LLS, additional statistical methods will be used to calculate appropriate inferential statistics. For instance, to assess the existence of a statistical difference in the mean scores of each LLS depending on the participants' language proficiency level, One-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) will be employed. Following that, an independent T-test will be performed using the SPSS 29.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software package to see whether there is a difference in the tactics employed by male and female undergraduate students to improve their speaking abilities.

3.7 Conclusion

In this methodology, I have outlined the research design and methods I will employ to conduct the study. Firstly, the research would start with preparing questions for the Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire. The SILL questionnaire created via Google Form would then be given to undergraduate students from four faculties (Faculty of Arts and Social Science, Faculty of Science and Faculty of Business and Finance) in UTAR Kampar through the link created if the link is inaccessible, printed forms would be given instead. The collected data will be analysed and classified into statistical data using SPSS 29.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software. One-Way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) will be employed to assess the existence of a statistical difference in the

mean scores of each LLS depending on the participants' language proficiency level. On top of that, an independent t-test will be performed using the SPSS 29.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software package to observe whether there is a statistica difference in the mean score of LLS employed by male and female undergraduate students to improve their speaking abilities.

Chapter 4-Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses ESL undergraduates' preferred language learning strategies (LLS) to enhance speaking skills by comparing the highest mean scores from the six language learning strategies (LLS). Following that, the mean scores of male and female ESL learners in the use of the six strategies will be analyzed, and an independent t-test will be performed using the SPSS 29.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software package to observe whether there is a statistical difference in the mean score of LLS employed by both genders to improve their speaking abilities. Finally, the language proficiency level of ESL learners will undergo the same analyzing procedures as the gender variable. It will be followed by One-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) to assess the existence of a statistical difference in the mean scores of each LLS depending on the participants' language proficiency level.

4.2 The Preferred Language Learning Strategy Used by ESL Undergraduates To

Enhance Speaking Skills

Table 4.1

ANOVA Results of Faculties Affect ESL Undergraduates' Preferred Language Learning Strategies

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Memory Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (MRS)	Between Groups	3.044	3	1.015	2.596	.055
	Within Groups	50.039	128	.391		
Cognitive Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (CGS)	Between Groups	1.107	3	.369	.723	.540
	Within Groups	65.282	128	.510		
Compensation Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (CPS)	Between Groups	2.557	3	.852	2.125	.100
	Within Groups	51.342	128	.401		
Metacognitive Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (MCS)	Between Groups	3.783	3	1.261	2.437	.068
	Within Groups	66.227	128	.517		
Affective Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (ATS)	Between Groups	7.979	3	2.660	4.223	**.007**
	Within Groups	80.604	128	.630		
Social Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (SCS)	Between Groups	11.708	3	3.903	7.517	**.000**
	Within Groups	66.456	128	.519		

Note. Significant Level at 0.05.

Table 4.2

Descriptive Statistics of Faculties Affect ESL Undergraduates' Preferred Language Learning Strategies

	Faculty of Business and Finance (FBF)			Faculty of Arts and Social Science (FAS)			Faculty of Science (FSC)			Faculty of Engineering and Green Technology (FEGT)		
	$\bar{x}$	SD	Degree	$\bar{x}$	SD	Degree	$\bar{x}$	SD	Degree	$\bar{x}$	SD	Degree
MRS	3.5	0.6	Mid	3.4	0.6	Mid	3.4	0.6	Mid	3.1	0.7	Low
CGS	3.8	0.8	High	3.8	0.7	High	3.8	0.6	High	3.6	0.7	High
CPS	3.8	0.6	High	3.7	0.6	High	3.5	0.7	Mid	3.4	0.7	Mid
MCS	3.6	0.7	High	3.5	0.8	Mid	3.6	0.6	Mid	3.2	0.7	Mid
ATS	3.5	0.9	Mid	3.1	0.7	Low	3.5	0.7	Mid	2.9	0.9	Low
SCS	3.8	0.6	High	3.3	0.7	Mid	3.5	0.7	Mid	3.0	0.9	Low

Note. Low=Mean 2.6-3.1, Mid=Mean 3.2-3.5, High=Mean 3.6-4.1, Very High=Mean 4.2-4.5, Powerful=Mean 4.6-5

Figure 4.1

Bar Chart of Faculties Affect ESL Undergraduates Preferred Language Learning Strategies
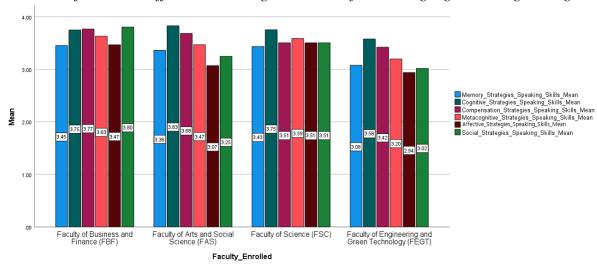
Table 4.1 shows the ANOVA results of faculties that affect ESL undergraduates' preferred language learning strategies. It indicates that the Faculty of ESL undergraduate students does not affect the choices of learning strategies when it comes to the memory strategies (MRS) $(F_{(3,128)}=2.596, p=0.055)$, cognitive strategies (CGS) $(F_{(3,128)}=0.723, p=0.540)$, compensation strategies (CPS) $(F_{(3,128)}=2.125, p=0.100)$, and metacognitive strategies (MCS) $(F_{(3,128)}=2.437, p=0.068)$.

However, the variable of Faculty of ESL undergraduates will affect affective strategies (ATS) $(F_{(3,128)} = 4.223, p=0.007)$ and social strategies (SCS) $(F_{(3,128)}= 7.517, p=0.000)$ as learning strategies. Both significant levels are lower than 0.01.

At the same time, we can see from Table 4.2 and Figure 4.1 that most faculty ESL undergraduates are more inclined to use cognitive strategies to enhance their speaking skills. The mean of the Faculty of Business and Finance (FBF) is 3.75, the Faculty of Arts and Social Science (FAS) is 3.83, the Faculty of Science (FSC) is 3.75, the Faculty of Engineering and Green Technology (FEGT) is 3.58. The findings are consistent with Samad (2021), who investigated the techniques for acquiring speaking skills adult EFL students use. The findings revealed that adult EFL students primarily utilise cognitive strategies to explain their thoughts and feelings.

The most significant differences are affective strategies (ATS) and social strategies (SCS). The highest preferred value in affective strategies (ATS) is Faculty of Science (FSC) (mean=3.51, High), and the lowest preferred value is Faculty of Engineering and Green Technology (FEGT) (mean=2.94, Low). In social strategies to enhance speaking skills (SCS), the highest preferred value is Faculty of Business and Finance (FBF) (mean=3.80, High). In contrast, the lowest preferred value is Faculty of Engineering and Green Technology (FEGT) (mean=3.02, Low).

4.3 The Differences Between Male and Female ESL Learners in The Use of Overall

Language Learning Strategies

Table 4.3

Group Statistics of the Differences Between Male and Female ESL Learners in The Use of Overall Language Learning Strategies

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Frequency of Use
Memory Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (MRS)	Male	59	3.268	.6872	Medium
	Female	73	3.384	.5923	Medium
Cognitive Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (CGS)	Male	59	3.655	.7804	High
	Female	73	3.781	.6514	High
Compensation Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (CPS)	Male	59	3.588	.6881	High
	Female	73	3.601	.6059	High
Metacognitive Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (MCS)	Male	59	3.427	.7397	Medium
	Female	73	3.509	.727	Medium
Affective Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (ATS)	Male	59	3.090	.8816	Low
	Female	73	3.381	.7523	Medium
Social Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (SCS)	Male	59	3.353	.7812	Medium
	Female	73	3.441	.7685	Medium
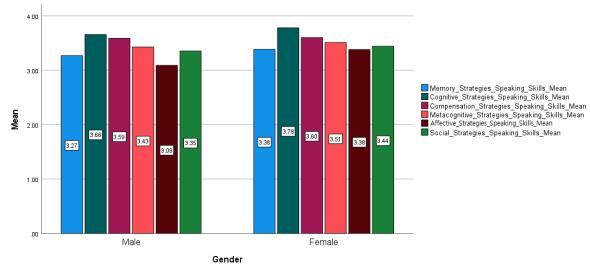
Note. Low=Mean 2.6-3.1, Mid=Mean 3.2-3.5, High=Mean 3.6-4.1, Very High=Mean 4.2-4.5, **Powerful=Mean 4.6-5**

Table 4.4

t-test for Equality of Means on the Differences Between Male and Female ESL Learners in The Use of Overall Language Learning Strategies

		t	df	p (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Memory Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (MRS)	Equal variances assumed	-1.03	130	.303	-.1152
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.02	115.1	.311	-.1152
Cognitive Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (CGS)	Equal variances assumed	-1.01	130	.316	-.12545
	Equal variances not assumed	-.99	112.9	.325	-.12545
Compensation Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (CPS)	Equal variances assumed	-.11	130	.909	-.01289
	Equal variances not assumed	-.11	116.6	.910	-.01289
Metacognitive Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (MCS)	Equal variances assumed	-.64	130	.521	-.08258
	Equal variances not assumed	-.64	123.4	.522	-.08258
Affective Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (ATS)	Equal variances assumed	-2.05	130	**.043**	-.29088
	Equal variances not assumed	-2.01	114.4	**.047**	-.29088
Social Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (SCS)	Equal variances assumed	-.646	130	.520	-.08753
	Equal variances not assumed	-.645	123.4	.520	-.08753

Note. **Significant Level at 0.05.**

Figure 4.2
Bar Chart of the Differences Between Male and Female ESL Learners in The Use of Overall Language Learning Strategies

According to Table 4.4, gender differences of ESL learners do not affect the use of memory strategies speaking skills (MRS) ($t(130)=-1.03$, $p=0.303$), cognitive strategies speaking skills (CGS) ($t(130)=-1.01$, $p=0.316$), compensation strategies speaking skills (CPS) ($t(130)=-0.11$, $p=0.909$), metacognitive strategies speaking skills (MCS) ($t(130)=-0.64$, $p=0.521$), and social strategies speaking skills (SCS) ($t(130)=-0.646$, $p=0.520$).

Table 4.3 and Figure 4.2 shows that for both men and women, the top three most frequent use of language learning strategies are cognitive strategies (CGS), compensation strategies (CPS), and metacognitive strategies (MCS). Female students employed all these three strategies more than male students. Male students employed cognitive strategies (CGS) frequently with a mean of 3.66, and that of female students is 3.78; the mean of male students using compensation strategies (CPS) is 3.59, and that of female students is 3.60; the mean of male students using metacognitive strategies (MCS) is 3.43, and that of female students is 3.51.

However, Table 4.4 also shows that gender differences of ESL learners significantly impact the use of affective strategies (ATS), the t value (130) is -2.05, and the significant level is 0.043. The significant level is less than 0.05. From Table 4.3 and Figure 4.2, there is a big gap in the use of affective strategies (ATS) between male and female students. Female students (mean=3.38, Medium) employ affective strategies (ATS) more than male students (mean= 3.09, Low). The result is aligned with the research done by Fortes (2023), as the data showed that

female public college students employed more affective strategies in English language acquisition than male students.

4.4 The Differences Between the Good and Poor Language Proficiency ESL Learners in the Use of Overall Language Learning Strategies

Table 4.5

Descriptive Statistics of the Differences Between the Good and Poor Language Proficiency ESL Learners in the Use of Overall Language Learning Strategies

	Poor User			Basic User			Independent User			Proficiency User		
	$\bar{x}$	SD	Level	$\bar{x}$	SD	Level	$\bar{x}$	SD	Level	$\bar{x}$	SD	Level
Memory Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (MRS)	3.2	0.24	Mid	3.5	0.55	Mid	3.3	0.65	Mid	3.2	0.76	Mid
Cognitive Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (CGS)	3.4	0.59	Mid	3.6	0.71	High	3.8	0.69	High	3.8	0.90	High
Compensation Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (CPS)	3.4	0.59	Mid	3.5	0.65	High	3.6	0.62	High	3.7	0.79	High
Metacognitive Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (MCS)	3.1	0.12	Low	3.4	0.77	Mid	3.5	0.70	Mid	3.3	0.85	Mid
Affective Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (ATS)	2.7	0.47	Low	3.3	0.86	Mid	3.3	0.77	Mid	3.1	1.06	Low
Social Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (SCS)	3.3	0.35	Mid	3.6	0.72	High	3.3	0.80	Mid	3.3	0.77	Mid

Note. Low=2.6-3.1, Mid=3.2-3.5, High=3.6-4.1, Very High=4.2-4.5, Powerful=4.6-5

Table 4.6

ANOVA of the Differences Between the Good and Poor Language Proficiency ESL Learners in the Use of Overall Language Learning Strategies

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Memory Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (MRS)	Between Groups	1.126	3	0.375	0.925	0.431
	Within Groups	51.957	128	0.406		
Cognitive Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (CGS)	Between Groups	0.536	3	0.179	0.347	0.791
	Within Groups	65.852	128	0.514		
Compensation Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (CPS)	Between Groups	0.361	3	0.12	0.288	0.834
	Within Groups	53.539	128	0.418		
Metacognitive Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (MCS)	Between Groups	1.374	3	0.458	0.854	0.467
	Within Groups	68.636	128	0.536		
Affective Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (ATS)	Between Groups	1.435	3	0.478	0.703	0.552
	Within Groups	87.148	128	0.681		
Social Strategies Speaking Skills Mean (SCS)	Between Groups	1.44	3	0.48	0.801	0.496
	Within Groups	76.724	128	0.599		

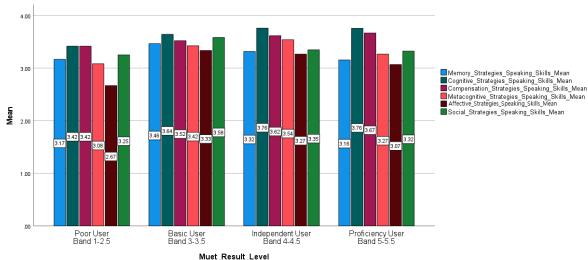*Note*. **Significant Level at 0.05.**

Table 4.7

Descriptive and ANOVA Results of the Differences Between the Good and Poor Language Proficiency ESL Learners in the Use of Overall Language Learning Strategies

	Never or almost never true of me		Usually not true of me		Somewhat true of me		Usually true of me		Always or almost always true of me		F	Sig.
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Memory Strategies Speaking Skills (MRS)												
MRS_1	3	2.3%	8	6.1%	45	34.1%	62	47.0%	14	10.6%	0.51	0.68
MRS_2	6	4.5%	17	12.9%	40	30.3%	49	37.1%	20	15.2%	0.32	0.81
MRS_3	5	3.8%	17	12.9%	37	28.0%	58	43.9%	15	11.4%	3.51	**0.02**
MRS_4	2	1.5%	22	16.7%	43	32.6%	50	37.9%	15	11.4%	0.01	1.00
MRS_5	19	14.4%	37	28.0%	32	24.2%	35	26.5%	9	6.8%	3.17	**0.03**
MRS_6	8	6.1%	29	22.0%	32	24.2%	47	35.6%	16	12.1%	0.37	0.78
Cognitive Strategies Speaking Skills (CGS)												
CGS_1	3	2.3%	10	7.6%	23	17.4%	54	40.9%	42	31.8%	0.42	0.74
CGS_2	5	3.8%	10	7.6%	30	22.7%	54	40.9%	33	25.0%	0.10	0.96
CGS_3	4	3.0%	10	7.6%	29	22.0%	46	34.8%	43	32.6%	1.86	0.14
CGS_4	4	3.0%	10	7.6%	38	28.8%	49	37.1%	31	23.5%	0.80	0.50
CGS_5	4	3.0%	23	17.4%	28	21.2%	52	39.4%	25	18.9%	0.56	0.64
CGS_6	5	3.8%	14	10.6%	35	26.5%	58	43.9%	20	15.2%	0.75	0.52
Compensation Strategies Speaking Skills (CPS)												
CPS_1	0	0.0%	8	6.1%	34	25.8%	62	47.0%	28	21.2%	0.19	0.91
CPS_2	2	1.5%	10	7.6%	35	26.5%	65	49.2%	20	15.2%	1.81	0.15
CPS_3	3	2.3%	7	5.3%	29	22.0%	59	44.7%	34	25.8%	2.81	**0.04**
CPS_4	3	2.3%	13	9.8%	42	31.8%	51	38.6%	23	17.4%	0.25	0.86
CPS_5	2	1.5%	9	6.8%	33	25.0%	54	40.9%	34	25.8%	0.46	0.71
CPS_6	28	21.2%	28	21.2%	35	26.5%	29	22.0%	12	9.1%	1.15	0.33
Metacognitive Strategies Speaking Skills (MCS)												
MCS_1	2	1.5%	19	14.4%	41	31.1%	52	39.4%	18	13.6%	0.28	0.84
MCS_2	2	1.5%	11	8.3%	26	19.7%	68	51.5%	25	18.9%	2.14	0.10
MCS_3	6	4.5%	29	22.0%	47	35.6%	40	30.3%	10	7.6%	3.08	**0.03**
MCS_4	5	3.8%	19	14.4%	39	29.5%	49	37.1%	20	15.2%	0.89	0.45
MCS_5	5	3.8%	22	16.7%	42	31.8%	47	35.6%	16	12.1%	2.71	**0.05**
MCS_6	4	3.0%	12	9.1%	39	29.5%	54	40.9%	23	17.4%	3.52	**0.02**
Affective Strategies Speaking Skills (ATS)												
ATS_1	9	6.8%	20	15.2%	39	29.5%	48	36.4%	16	12.1%	1.71	0.17
ATS_2	5	3.8%	10	7.6%	29	22.0%	66	50.0%	22	16.7%	0.13	0.94
ATS_3	13	9.8%	28	21.2%	28	21.2%	43	32.6%	20	15.2%	0.41	0.75
ATS_4	5	3.8%	19	14.4%	37	28.0%	53	40.2%	18	13.6%	1.39	0.25
ATS_5	39	29.5%	24	18.2%	24	18.2%	36	27.3%	9	6.8%	2.08	0.11
ATS_6	17	12.9%	22	16.7%	28	21.2%	48	36.4%	17	12.9%	0.44	0.72
Social Strategies Speaking Skills (SCS)												
SCS_1	6	4.5%	17	12.9%	40	30.3%	50	37.9%	19	14.4%	0.49	0.69
SCS_2	5	3.8%	20	15.2%	35	26.5%	56	42.4%	16	12.1%	1.05	0.37
SCS_3	21	15.9%	39	29.5%	24	18.2%	39	29.5%	9	6.8%	4.50	**0.01**
SCS_4	10	7.6%	16	12.1%	36	27.3%	46	34.8%	24	18.2%	2.49	0.06

SCS_5	7	5.3%	16	12.1%	25	18.9%	60	45.5%	24	18.2%	0.29	0.84
SCS_6	2	1.5%	14	10.6%	36	27.3%	53	40.2%	27	20.5%	0.48	0.70

Note. **Significant Level at 0.05.**

Figure 4.3
Bar Chart *of the Differences Between the Good and Poor Language Proficiency ESL Learners in the Use of Overall Language Learning Strategies*

According to the ANOVA results in Table 4.6, there is no significant impact of the differences between the good and poor language proficiency of ESL learners in terms of using overall language learning strategies. The ANOVA results of memory strategies (MRS) is $F_{(3,128)}= 0.925$ and $p=0.431$; cognitive strategies (CGS) is $F_{(3,128)}=0.347$, and $p=0.791$; compensation strategies (CPS) is $F_{(3,129)}=0.288$ and $p=0.834$; metacognitive strategies (MCS) is $F_{(3,128)}=0.854$ and $p=0.467$; Affective strategies (ATS) is $F_{(3,128)}=0.703$ and $p=0.552$ and social strategies (SCS) is $F_{(3,128)}=0.801$ and $p= 0.496$.

Table 4.5 and Figure 4.3 also indicate that most ESL learners use higher cognitive strategies (CGS) and compensation strategies (CPS) to enhance speaking skills. The mean of poor users who use cognitive strategies is 3.4 (Medium), basic user is 3.6 (High), independent users is 3.8 (High), and proficiency users is 3.8 (High). The average rate is 3.4 (Medium) for the poor user that employed compensation strategies (CPS)., the basic user is 3.5 (High), the independent user is 3.6 (High), and the proficiency user is 3.7 (High). The findings are consistent with Ping and Luan's (2017) research, which found a predominance of cognitive compensation among high-proficiency learners, indicating that they preferred analytical and strategic methods then it comes to enhancing their language skills.

Although Table 4.6 shows that there are no significant differences between the good and poor language proficiency ESL learners in the use of overall language learning strategies, Table 4.7 finds that some questionnaire items have significant differences between the good and poor language proficiency ESL learners in the use of overall language learning strategies.

First, items 3 ($F=3.51$, $p=0.02$) and 5 ($F=3.17$, $p=0.03$) of memory strategies speaking skills (MRS) have significant differences between the good and poor language proficiency ESL learners in the use of overall language learning strategies. Metacognitive strategies (MCS) items 3 ($F=3.08$, $p=0.03$), 5 ($F=2.71$, $p=0.05$), and 6 ($F=3.52$, $p=0.02$) possess significant impact. Additionally, item 3 of compensation strategies (CPS) ($F=2.81$, $p=0.04$) and item 3 of social strategies (SCS) ($F=4.50$, $p=0.01$). The complete titles of these items can be referred to in *Appendix A.*

Chapter 5- Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter presents the research discussion, conclusion, and recommendations for future research in employing ESL undergraduates' language learning strategies (LLS). This study is based upon the three research questions, which intends to identify the preferred language learning strategy used by ESL undergraduates to enhance speaking skills, differences between male and female ESL learners in the use of overall language learning strategies as well as the differences between the good and poor language proficiency ESL learners in the use of overall language learning strategies. As mentioned in Chapter 4 on analysis and interpretation of the data collected for this study, the findings are as follows: Cognitive strategies are the most frequently used language learning strategies, Affective strategies have the highest significance level as well as there is no significance level when it comes to learner proficiency level. This chapter will discuss the possible reasons for the findings.

5.1 The Preferred Language Learning Strategy Used by ESL Undergraduates To

Enhance Speaking Skills

5.1.1 Cognitive strategies being the most frequent use of language learning strategies

From the results of the analysis of the language learning strategies (LLS) of undergraduate students, cognitive strategies are most frequently used to enhance speaking skills in the Faculty of Engineering and Green Technology (FEGT), Faculty of Science (FSc), Faculty of Business and Finance (FBF) and Faculty of Arts and Social Science (FAS). The result can be explained by the fact that the undergraduate students are viewing English as their field of concentration by putting more focus on cognitive skills as through reasoning, analyzing, summarizing, synthesizing, taking notes, outlining, rearranging knowledge, practising in a natural situation, and examining sounds and visuals, they can develop language materials with the cognitive method.

5.1.2 High significance level of Affective strategies according to the ANOVA result

The significant difference in the ANOVA result according to the faculty variable of the employment of LLS can be seen from affective strategies (ATS) and social strategies (SCS). The Faculty of Science (FSc) has the highest employment of affective strategies (3.51), and the Faculty of Engineering and Green Technology (FEGT) has the lowest employment of affective strategies (2.94). The reasons for the FSc to have the highest employment of effective strategies can be branched out to English proficiency as a crucial skill in science communication Regarding this aspect, science students will need to include proficiency in English as they are essential for disseminating research findings and presenting them in front of their lectures. Hence, they may prioritise affective strategies to address speaking anxiety, nervousness, and self-praise to support their English language acquisition in terms of speaking. Following that, the language learning content of science is often integrated with numerous discipline contexts that require students to apply their English language speaking skills. They may encounter situations where they need to communicate complex scientific ideas in English to their colleagues whose first language may not be English. To address this challenge, they must implement effective strategies to cultivate a positive self-image when using English as a communication medium.

On the other hand, engineering has the lowest employment of affective strategies (ATS) in two aspects: technical focus and practical skill development and limited emphasis on communication skills. The student from this faculty typically emphasizes technical skills and practical applications of knowledge in engineering and technology fields. In contrast to disciplines prioritising interdisciplinary collaboration, such as FSc, they may perceive less importance in addressing emotional needs related to learning English. Consequently, this faculty may allocate fewer resources towards effective strategies focusing on English language learning, such as addressing speaking anxiety or self-praise, as these may be perceived as less

critical to achieving technical proficiency. Next, there will be little emphasis on communication skills, as in engineering practice, the emphasis may lean more towards technical writing, data interpretation, and presentation skills rather than language proficiency or interpersonal communication in English. As a result, they may allocate fewer resources towards affective strategies focused on building confidence or managing speaking anxiety in English, as these skills may be perceived as secondary to technical competencies.

5.1.3 **High significance level of social strategies according to the ANOVA result**

Regarding social strategies (SCS), the Faculty of Business and Finance (FBF) has the highest employment of social strategies. In contrast, the Faculty of Engineering and Green Technology (FEGT) has the lowest employment of social strategies.

There are two aspects of the highest employment of social strategies for business and finance students: emphasis on professional communication skills and networking for professional development opportunities. In Business and Finance, effective professional communication skills are paramount for success. When negotiating deals, presenting proposals, or networking with clients or professionals in this field, they rely heavily on their interpersonal skills. They may prioritise social strategies such as conversing with English speakers, seeking corrections, and participating in English-speaking practice sessions by actively engaging in social interactions with native or proficient English speakers. As a result, it may refine their communication skills, help them adapt to different communication styles, and build confidence in professional settings. Following that, this faculty often provides students with access to networking events, internships, and professional development opportunities that require proficient English communication skills. Students in this faculty may actively seek social strategies to improve their English proficiency and expand their professional networks, such as repeating and seeking assistance when encountering English-speaking colleagues and industry

professionals. Hence, the students need to be equipped with the communication skills and networking abilities necessary for success in the dynamic world of business and finance.

On the other hand, the Faculty of Engineering and Green Technology (FEGT) has the lowest employment of social strategies, and it may be from two aspects: technical focus, prioritization of problem-solving skills, and perception of English as a secondary skill. This faculty typically emphasises technical knowledge and problem-solving abilities. FEGT students often devote significant time and effort to mastering complex mathematical concepts, scientific principles, and practical applications. Consequently, their primary focus may be acquiring technical proficiency rather than prioritizing social strategies for learning English. In the context of their coursework and research projects, students may perceive limited opportunities or incentives to engage in social interactions with English speakers, such as seeking corrections or participating in English-speaking practice sessions. Aside from that, English language proficiency is often viewed as a secondary skill rather than a primary competency. While effective communication is important for conveying technical ideas and collaborating with colleagues, students may prioritise technical excellence over social fluency in English. In this context, students may perceive social strategies such as seeking corrections or understanding cultural norms as less critical than problem-solving and technical innovation. Therefore, there may be a lower emphasis on social strategies for English language learning within FEGT, as students prioritise mastering technical content over social interactions in English-speaking environments.

5.2 The Differences Between Male and Female ESL Learners in The Use of Overall

   Language Learning Strategies

5.2.1 The top three most frequent uses of LLS are CGS, MCS and CPS

The employment of cognitive (CGS), metacognitive (MCS) and compensation strategies(CPS) are the highest in terms of enhancing speaking skills.

5.2.1.1 High employment of Cognitive Strategies by Male and female students

One possible reason for the high employement of cognitive strategies (CGS) in these four faculties is effective language practice. Cognitive strategies such as practising pronunciation, imitating speech patterns, and summarising spoken information help FAS students improve their English language skills, enabling them to participate actively in class discussions, deliver presentations, and write coherent essays. As for FEGT, students often need to communicate technical concepts and project proposals effectively. Hence, cognitive strategies such as practising pronunciation, immersing oneself in English-language media, and summarizing spoken information aid students in developing clear and concise communication skills, which are crucial for collaborating with peers, presenting research findings, and engaging with industry professionals. Following that, science disciplines from FSc require students to communicate research findings, participate in group discussions, and collaborate with colleagues from diverse backgrounds. Cognitive strategies such as practising pronunciation, immersing oneself in English-language TV shows, and summarizing spoken information help students enhance their English language skills, enabling them to articulate scientific concepts clearly, communicate effectively, and contribute to scientific discourse. When it comes to FBF, effective communication is vital in business and finance fields, where professionals interact with clients, colleagues, and stakeholders from around the world. Cognitive strategies such as practising pronunciation, imitating speech patterns, and reading

English texts help students develop strong communication skills, enabling them to convey ideas persuasively, negotiate effectively, and collaborate on projects seamlessly.

5.2.1.2 High Employment of Compensation Strategies by Male and Female Students

One possible reason for the high employment frequency of compensation strategies in these four faculties is adaptability in communication and flexibility in expression.

FAS students are required to engage in critical discussions, interpret texts, and present arguments persuasively. Compensation strategies such as using synonyms, deducing meaning from context, and inventing new words allow students to express themselves creatively, adapt their language use to suit specific rhetorical situations to articulate complex ideas and contribute meaningfully to scholarly discourse. As for FEGT, it emphasizes problem-solving and innovation, requiring students to communicate technical concepts effectively. Compensation strategies such as using knowledge of similar words, inventing new words, and asking for clarification enable students to convey ideas accurately, adapt their language use to suit different engineering contexts and innovate solutions to engineering challenges. Regarding FSc, flexibility in expression is crucial for communicating scientific findings, engaging in research discussions, and collaborating with peers. By employing compensation strategies, both male and female students in this faculty can enhance their ability to convey complex scientific ideas, participate in research collaborations, and contribute to scientific discovery. Lastly, FBF students focus on flexibility in expression for communicating business strategies, negotiating deals, and building relationships with clients and stakeholders. By incorporating compensation strategies into communication, Faculty of Business and Finance male and female students can enhance their ability to convey ideas persuasively, negotiate effectively, and succeed in diverse business environments.

5.2.1.3 High Employment of Metacognitive Strategies by Male and Female Students

One possible reason for metacognitive strategies (MCS) to the third most frequently language learning strategies employed by male and female students in Utar is enhanced learning reflection and strategic goal setting. For the enhanced learning reflection when it comes to FAS students, they reflect on learning advancements in speaking skills to assess their progress, identify areas for improvement, and set realistic goals for future development. Metacognitive strategies such as reflecting on speaking achievements enable students to recognize their strengths and weaknesses in communication, facilitating continuous improvement and growth and engaging more effectively in academic discourse. Aside from that, FEGT students benefit from reflecting on their advancements in speaking skills, as effective communication is essential for collaborating on projects, presenting research findings, and engaging with industry professionals. By utilizing metacognitive strategies, both male and female students in the faculty can enhance their speaking proficiency, convey technical information clearly, and succeed in their academic and professional endeavours.

Following that, FSc students focus on reflection on learning advancements in speaking skills. It is essential for presenting research findings, participating in group discussions, and collaborating with peers by reflecting on speaking achievements to enable students to evaluate their communication strengths and weaknesses, set clear objectives for improvement, and monitor their progress over time to communicate scientific concepts effectively. Regarding FBF, they reflect on learning advancements in speaking skills for negotiating deals, delivering presentations, and building professional relationships. To enhance their speaking abilities, convey ideas persuasively, and succeed in their business endeavours.

5.2.2 **High significance level of affective strategies according to the T-test result**

The usage of affective strategies (ATS) differs significantly between male and female students in UTAR ESL learners from the FBF, FEGT, FSc and FAS. Compared to male students (mean=3.09, Low), female students (mean=3.38, Medium) use affecive strategies (ATS) to enhance speaking skills more frequently.

Socialization and cultural norms of these four faculties will contribute to female students employing affective strategies more frequently than male students. For FAS students, there may be cultural expectations and social norms regarding gender roles and expressions of emotions. Female students in the faculty might feel more comfortable and encouraged to express their emotions, seek support from others, and engage in self-reflection. As for FEGT, it often has a higher proportion of male students, and the academic environment may emphasize technical proficiency and problem-solving skills over emotional expression and self-reflection. Male students in the faculty may feel less inclined or comfortable discussing their emotions and seeking support from others regarding language learning challenges. As a result, they may be less likely to employ affective speaking strategies compared to female students. Moving on to FSc students, they are similar to the FEGT in terms of the academic culture in science disciplines. They may prioritize objective reasoning and analytical thinking over emotional expression and self-reflection. Male students in the FSc may be socialized to focus on academic performance and technical skills rather than acknowledging and managing their emotions in language learning contexts.

Consequently, they may exhibit lower utilization of affective speaking strategies than their female counterparts. As for FBF students, the field often requires strong communication skills and interpersonal abilities, which may require a higher emotional intelligence and self-awareness. Female students in the faculty might recognize the importance of managing

46

emotions and building confidence in speaking English for professional success. They may use effective speaking strategies to overcome language anxiety and enhance communication skills. In contrast, male students may be less inclined to prioritize emotional aspects of language learning, resulting in lower utilization of affective speaking strategies.

5.3 The Differences Between the Good and Poor Language Proficiency ESL Learners in the Use of Overall Language Learning Strategies

5.3.1 High employment of cognitive and compensation Strategies between Good and poor language proficiency ES learners

Based on the findings of the present investigation, high-proficiency English-level students reported more frequent overall strategy use than their low-proficiency counterparts. In contrast, no significant differences were found between high and poor English language proficiency. Most UTAR ESL students employ compensation and cognitive strategies for speaking skills (CPS and CGS) more frequently. Those with low English proficiency levels employed cognitive strategies to enhance speaking skills at a mean of 3.4 (Medium), whereas those with high English proficiency levels at a mean of 3.8 (High). In addition, students with low English proficiency levels attain a mean of 3.4 (Medium) and employ compensation strategies, whereas students with high English proficiency levels attain a mean of 3.7 (High).

5.3.1.1 High employement of Cognitive strategies between Good and Poor Language proficiency ES learners

One of the possible reasons for higher employment of cognitive strategies will be greater language confidence and autonomy. Students with high English proficiency levels have likely invested more time and effort into language learning, leading to increased confidence in their language abilities. As a result, they feel more comfortable experimenting with different strategies and taking risks in their language practice. This confidence allows them to actively engage in cognitive strategies such as practising pronunciation, immersing themselves in English media, and refraining from translation, as well as compensation strategies such as using synonyms and deducing meaning from context.

5.3.1.2 High Employment of Compensation Strategies between Good and Poor Language proficiency ESL learners

As for the employment of compensation strategies, students with high English proficiency levels are more likely to refrain from relying on translation and instead focus on understanding English directly, a hallmark of effective language learning. By immersing themselves in the language without constantly translating to their native language, they develop a deeper understanding of English vocabulary, grammar, and idiomatic expressions. Furthermore, these students demonstrate greater autonomy in their language-learning journey. They take ownership of their progress by regularly summarizing spoken English information, reflecting on their language development, and setting specific goals for improvement. This proactive approach allows them to identify areas for growth and tailor their language practice to their individual needs and preferences.

In contrast, students with low English proficiency may feel less confident in their language abilities and may be more hesitant to experiment with different strategies. They may rely more heavily on translation and struggle to comprehend spoken English without context

or assistance. Additionally, they may be less proactive in seeking opportunities for language practice and may require more guidance and support from instructors.

5.3.2 No significant difference between the overall use of LLS between the good and poor language proficiency ESL learners

Although there are no significant differences between good and poor language proficiency ESL learners in using overall language learning strategies, some questionnaire items have significant differences between good and poor language proficiency ESL learners in using overall language learning strategies. First, items 3 and 5 of memory strategies in enhancing speaking skills (MRS) significantly differ between the good and poor language proficiency ESL learners using overall language learning strategies. Metacognitive strategies speaking skills (MCS) items 3, 5 and 6 (F=3.52, p=0.02) possess significant impact. Additionally, item 3 of compensation strategies to enhance speaking skills (CPS) and item 3 of social strategies to enhance speaking skills (SCS).

5.3.2.1 Items 3 and 5 of memory strategies have significant differences between the good And poor language proficiency ESL learners

There are reasons for items 3 and 5 of memory strategies in enhancing speaking skills (MRS), which have significant differences between the good and poor language proficiency of ESL learners in using overall language learning strategies, which **will be differences in cognitive processing and learning preferences**. Good language proficiency is one possible reason for item 3, which is related to linking words to locations. ESL learners may excel in spatial memory and associative learning, enabling them to effectively use location-based mnemonic techniques to remember new words or phrases. They create vivid mental images that facilitate recall during speaking activities by mentally associating words with specific locations on a page, board, or street sign. This spatial association strategy leverages their visual

memory and strengthens the connections between new vocabulary and contextual cues, making it easier for them to retrieve words during conversations.

Conversely, poor language proficiency ESL learners may struggle with spatial memory or find it challenging to create meaningful associations between words and locations. They may have difficulty visualizing the spatial relationships between words and external stimuli, leading to ineffective use of location-based memory strategies. As a result, they may rely more on rote memorization or context-free repetition, which may be less efficient for retaining new vocabulary in the long term.

As for Item 5, which is for them to utilise flashcards to enhance speaking skills and good language proficiency, ESL learners may find flashcards to be an effective tool for vocabulary acquisition and retention due to their active engagement and repetition-based learning. Flashcards provide a structured and interactive way to review new words, allowing learners to reinforce their memory through repeated exposure and self-testing. The act of flipping through flashcards and recalling word meanings strengthens neural connections and enhances word retrieval during speaking tasks. In contrast, poor language proficiency ESL learners may struggle to engage with flashcards effectively or may not find them conducive to their learning preferences. They may perceive flashcards as repetitive or monotonous, leading to disengagement or lack of motivation to use this memory strategy. Additionally, they may encounter difficulties in organizing and managing flashcards, which can hinder their ability to utilize this technique consistently for vocabulary memorization.

5.3.2.2 Items 3, 5 and 6 of metacognitive strategies have significant differences between the good and poor language proficiency ESL learners

There is one possible reason for items 3, 5 and 6 of metacognitive strategies to have significant differences in enhancing speaking skills. Firstly, item 3 is about linking words to locations.

Good language proficiency ESL learners may excel in spatial memory and associative learning, enabling them to effectively use location-based mnemonic techniques to remember new words or phrases. They create vivid mental images that facilitate recall during speaking activities by mentally associating words with specific locations on a page, board, or street sign. This spatial association strategy leverages their visual memory and strengthens the connections between new vocabulary and contextual cues, making it easier for them to retrieve words during conversations.

In contrast, poor language proficiency ESL learners may struggle with spatial memory or find it challenging to create meaningful associations between words and locations. They may have difficulty visualizing the spatial relationships between words and external stimuli, leading to ineffective use of location-based memory strategies. As a result, they may rely more on rote memorization or context-free repetition, which may be less efficient for retaining new vocabulary in the long term.

Item 5 is about utilizing flashcards to enhance speaking skills. Good language proficiency ESL learners may find flashcards an effective vocabulary acquisition and retention tool due to their active engagement and repetition-based learning. Undoubtedly, flashcards provide a structured and interactive way to review new words, allowing learners to reinforce their memory through repeated exposure and self-testing. The act of flipping through flashcards and recalling word meanings strengthens neural connections and enhances word retrieval during speaking tasks. Conversely, poor language proficiency ESL learners may struggle to engage with flashcards effectively or may not find them conducive to their learning preferences. They may perceive flashcards as repetitive or monotonous, leading to disengagement or lack of motivation to use this memory strategy. Additionally, they may encounter difficulties in organizing and managing flashcards, which can hinder their ability to utilize this technique consistently for vocabulary memorization.

When it comes to item 6 requires students to act out words to enhance speaking skills physically, and good language proficiency. ESL learners may benefit from kinesthetic learning techniques, such as physically acting out new words, to enhance memory retention and recall. Engaging in physical movements associated with word meanings creates embodied experiences that strengthen the connection between words and actions, leading to more robust memory representations. This kinesthetic approach to vocabulary learning appeals to their preference for hands-on, experiential learning and facilitates a more profound understanding and retention of word meanings. On the other hand, poor language proficiency ESL learners may struggle to utilize kinesthetic learning techniques effectively or may find them impractical in language learning contexts. They may encounter difficulties coordinating physical movements with word meanings or feel self-conscious about acting out words in front of others. As a result, they may be less inclined to employ this memory strategy and rely more on auditory or visual learning methods for vocabulary acquisition.

5.3.2.2 Item 3 of compensation strategies has a significant difference between the good and poor language proficiency ESL learners

One possible reason item 3 of compensation strategies in enhancing speaking skills exhibit significant differences between good and poor language proficiency ESL learners in using overall language learning strategies is differences in contextual understanding and language processing skills. Good language proficiency ESL learners typically demonstrate a higher level of proficiency in contextual understanding and language processing. They have developed a robust linguistic repertoire and are adept at recognizing patterns, interpreting nuances, and making educated guesses based on contextual cues. When encountering unfamiliar spoken English words or phrases, they can leverage their contextual comprehension skills to infer meaning from surrounding information, such as the topic of conversation, tone of speech, and nonverbal cues. In contrast, poor language proficiency ESL learners may struggle to interpret

contextual cues accurately or may lack the linguistic resources necessary for effective deduction of word meanings. They may rely more heavily on explicit vocabulary knowledge and struggle to understand spoken English when contextual cues are ambiguous or unfamiliar. As a result, they may experience comprehension difficulties and communication breakdowns, particularly when encountering unfamiliar words or phrases in spoken discourse.

5.3.2.3 Item 3 of social strategies has a significant difference between the good and poor language proficiency ESL learners

Finally, one possible reason for item 3 of social strategies in enhancing speaking skills is that there are significant differences between good and poor language proficiency in ESL learners in the use of overall language learning strategies, which is the differences in social networks and confidence levels. Good language proficiency ESL learners typically benefit from having a social network of friends who are proficient or fluent in English. They may have peers with whom they can regularly schedule and engage in English-speaking practice sessions, whether through informal conversations, group activities, or structured language exchange programs. These regular interactions provide valuable opportunities for practising speaking skills, receiving feedback, and building confidence in using English in real-life situations. In contrast, poor language proficiency ESL learners may face challenges in accessing similar social networks or may lack the confidence to initiate or participate in English-speaking practice sessions with peers. They may feel self-conscious about making mistakes or speaking English in front of others, leading to avoidance behaviours or reluctance to engage in spoken English interactions. As a result, they may miss out on valuable language practice opportunities and struggle to make significant progress in improving their speaking skills.

Conclusion

This study has implications for the modification of second-language pedagogy. It indicates the necessity of raising awareness among language learners of the strategies to encourage them to use more appropriate strategies at various stages of learning their second language. Aside from that, it creates awareness among language teachers to recognize the salient role of learning strategies for language learners and to be aware of the significance of factors such as gender and level of proficiency in the learner choice of strategy use—individual differences among language learners implementing a learner-centred class.

The study's limitations include a restricted emphasis on only two variables, gender and language proficiency level while ignoring other important aspects, such as learning styles, language background, and motivation. Its generalizability is limited by the small sample size from a particular university, which may fail to reflect the larger community of ESL undergraduate students. Furthermore, relying on self-reported survey data increases the danger of biases such as social desirability and memory lapses. These limits limit the study's breadth and the dependability of its conclusions, focusing on theoretical rather than practical insights.

In future research, the study can expand its scope beyond gender and language proficiency, considering factors like learning styles and motivation. Also, it can increase the sample size and diversity by recruiting from various universities using stratified sampling and collaboration that enhance generalizability. To address self-report bias, ensure anonymity, use triangulation, provide clear prompts, offer incentives, and validate data with objective measures. Implementing these strategies can improve the study's reliability and applicability to ESL undergraduate students in Malaysia.

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Appendix A- Questionnnaire items that have significant difference

The usage of memory strategies in enhancing speaking skills. *

I remember new English words or phrases by linking them to their location on a page, a board, or a street sign.	○	○	○	○	○

I utilise flashcards as a technique to memorise newly acquired English words.	○	○	○	○	○

Item 3 and 5 of Memory strategies

The usage of metacognitive strategies in enhancing speaking skills. *

I establish specific and achievable learning goals and objectives before practicing or studying spoken English.	○	○	○	○	○
I consistently monitor my progress in spoken English learning and adjust strategies accordingly.	○	○	○	○	○
I actively self-evaluated by learning from my English speech errors to improve.	○	○	○	○	○

Item 3, 5 and 6 of Memory strategies

iii. Compensation strategies

I deduce the meaning of unfamiliar spoken English words or phrases based on the surrounding context.

○　○　○　○　○

Item 3 of compensation strategies

vii. Social strategies

I schedule and engage in regular English-speaking practice sessions with my friends.

○　○　○　○　○

Item 3 of social strategies