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Exploring Language Learning Strategies of TESL Practicum Students Through a Phenomenological Lens for Enhancing Language Competency

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Abstract. Proficiency in English as a second language (TESL) and effective cross-cultural communication skills are paramount for future educators. This study investigates the language proficiency learning strategies and motivations of TESL students in engaging with English communications beyond the classroom. This aspect is frequently underestimated in Malaysian educational contexts. Employing a phenomenological approach, qualitative interviews were conducted with 13 TESL practicum students at a Malaysian public university, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in backgrounds and experiences. The study spanned from August 2021 to August 2023, totalling 2 years. The duration of each interview ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts using NVivo software unveiled significant themes such as using audio-visual materials, leisure reading, note-taking, self-speaking practice, music listening, teaching and learning, gamification, and football commentary. The implications of these findings extend to TESL students, academic researchers, English teachers, and higher education institutions, suggesting avenues for further research to enrich language proficiency and communication skills among TESL students. Integrating these strategies into language education curricula is essential for fostering effective communication skills among

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future educators, thereby contributing to the advancement of educational practices in Malaysia and beyond.

Keywords: English communication skills; higher education; language proficiency; language learning strategies; Teaching English as a Second Language

1. Introduction

Mastering a language is a complex endeavour, demanding dedicated effort and practice to refine linguistic abilities (Hashim et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2022). In our increasingly interconnected world, proficiency in English is significant, serving as a cornerstone for global competitiveness amidst the fluid exchange of goods, services, and ideas (Hashim et al., 2019). As English-language materials become more accessible in educational settings and cross-cultural interactions become commonplace, students face a growing imperative to hone their language skills (Hashim et al., 2019). Particularly in the realm of English as a Second Language (ESL), effective language learning techniques are essential for facilitating students' adaptation and fostering their independence (Chanderan & Hashim, 2022; Pawlak, 2021).

Groundbreaking research by Rubin (1975) paved the way for understanding Language Learning Strategies (LLS), delineating strategies that delineate successful and unsuccessful language learners, a foundation further expanded upon by Oxford (1990, 2017). These insights have profoundly shaped our comprehension of how learners approach language acquisition, a field further enriched by recent advancements in language learning methodologies. Evolving educational landscapes, exemplified by practices like flipped learning and blended learning (Jerry & Yunus, 2021; Kiang & Yunus, 2021; Ramalingam et al., 2022; Santhanasamy & Yunus, 2022; Shin & Yunus, 2021; Öztürk & Çakıroğlu, 2021), alongside problem-based learning (Tran & Tran, 2020), underscore the dynamic nature of language education. Integration of social media platforms (John & Yunus, 2021; John et al., 2021; Yunus et al., 2019) and innovative digital tools (Didi, 2019; Maqbool et al., 2020; Nair & Yunus, 2021; Wong & Yunus, 2020) cater to diverse learning needs, while gamification, mobile learning, and interactive quizzes deepen our understanding of technology's role in language acquisition (Govindasamy et al., 2019; Halim et al., 2020; Hashim et al., 2018; Lukas et al., 2020; Ni et al., 2020; Rafiq et al., 2021; Rajendran & Yunus, 2021; Shin & Yunus, 2021). Perceptions of social networking among undergraduates (Azlan & Yunus, 2020), preparedness for employment (Rahman et al., 2023), and learner empowerment strategies (Teng & Zhang, 2020) all impact LLS.

Additionally, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) methods, as elucidated by Hashim et al. (2019), empower students to tailor their learning journey to their styles and objectives. Oxford (1990, 2017) underscores the pivotal role of learning strategies in enabling students to become more self-directed learners, a concept further expounded upon by Chanderan & Hashim (2022) and Lai et al. (2022), who categorize LLS into intentional communication, formal language usage, and inferential comprehension. In sum, this introduction sets the stage for delving into

the multifaceted realm of LLS, recognizing their pivotal role in shaping teaching and learning outcomes while elucidating the evolving landscape of language education.

English Language Issues at Higher Education in Malaysia

Addressing English language issues in Malaysian higher education, where English is a second language after Malay, requires culturally resilient educators dedicated to teaching a diverse student population (Al-Saggaf et al., 2020). Therefore, TESL students encounter multiple ethnicities and cultures, emphasizing the need for effective teachers who prioritize cultural understanding. Building upon successful language learning blueprints, as suggested by Rubin (1975), recent research supports the idea that good learners may employ unique approaches to teach others (Atmowardoyo, 2018; Feng & Webb, 2020; Lou & Noels, 2019; Sheikh, 2018). Additionally, Rubin's features of effective language learners, including communication, acceptance of mistakes, structure, frequent language use, direct language use, and information understanding, remain crucial. Moreover, uniqueness and adaptability are emphasized, prioritizing TESL students' needs. Encouraging the adoption of distinct instructional models and frameworks for teaching English and daily living, Lai et al. (2022) recommend cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective methods. Within these methods, cognitive strategies like repetition, translation, and note-taking alter cognitive approaches, while metacognitive strategies include self-evaluation, monitoring, planning, clarification, and cooperation. Furthermore, socio-affective methods address language learners' anxiety (Hashim et al., 2019; Russell, 2020). Integrating these paradigms into daily English training is essential for a holistic language learning experience (Lai et al., 2022). To provide a new additional perspective aligned with emerging knowledge and insights, language learning alternatives must be expanded, empowering students with individualized learning practices to improve English communication ability. Additionally, future English teachers should anticipate TESL students to be articulate and self-sufficient, positioning them as valuable assets (Hashim et al., 2018). Lastly, this study employs a phenomenological approach to investigate TESL students' English communication behaviors outside of class at a local higher education institution, aiming to enhance their proficiency.

2. Literature Review

Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

Numerous studies underscore the importance of integrating language learning approaches into second language acquisition (Gibson et al., 2019; O' Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 2017; Russell, 2020; Teng, 2023; Teng & Zhang, 2020). Additionally, effective learners employ diverse methods, with research showing that proficient strategy use enhances second language performance (Bruen, 2011; Cohen, 2014; Purpura, 1997; Savignon, 2019; Thomas et al., 2022). Factors such as national origin, age, gender, and learning style influence language learning processes (Dörnyei, 2001; Montero-SaizAja, 2021; Oxford, 1989; Pawlak, 2021; Rao & Huang, 2019; Teng & Zhang, 2020). Therefore, communication strategies, including circumlocution, production, and language learning, necessitate reciprocal meaning-finding (Kusevska, 2019; Tarone 1980), while distinctions are

made between LLS and skill learning strategies (Feng & Webb, 2020; Lim et al., 2021; Nair et al., 2021; Rod 1994). Othman et al., (2022), along with Chamot and O'Malley (1987) and Chamot (2004), define LLS as purposeful activities employed by learners to acquire and retain language and subject matter information. However, challenges persist in terms of consistency, validity, and application, with the impact of learning environment and task on strategy adoption noted (Brown et al., 2019).

Factors Affecting Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

a. Gender

Gender and motivation play significant roles in language learning (Chamot & O'Malley, 2004; Montero-SaizAja, 2021; Pawlak, 2021). Research suggests that females tend to utilize compensation and affective learning techniques more than males (Griffiths, 2003, 2020; Green & Oxford, 1995; Montero-SaizAja, 2021; Pawlak, 2021), with women showing a preference for metacognitive approaches (Montero-SaizAja, 2021). However, the impact of gender differences on language learning processes may not be significant and requires further investigation (Griffiths, 2003, 2020; Rianto, 2020).

b. Motivation

Motivation and attitudes are crucial in language learning, as highlighted by Gardner (1985), encompassing integrative motivation, which focuses on social interaction, and instrumental motivation, centered on personal goals (Gardner Robert and MacIntyre Peter 1993; Khamis & Wahi, 2021). Various motivations in English communication learning, such as enhancing TESL students' self-esteem and competitiveness, have been studied. While student motivation may not consistently correlate with English learning achievement, teachers' motivational strategies significantly influence language acquisition, emphasising the pivotal role of lecturers in promoting student engagement and academic progress (Khamis & Wahi, 2021; Luis & Beamud, 2021; Noori, 2021; Omar et al., 2020; Rahardjo & Pertiwi, 2020; Selwyn & Pariña, 2018). Moreover, motivation impacts classroom activities and learning methods (Filgona et al., 2020; Pawlak, 2021), with factors like gender, course, and enjoyment influencing its dynamics (Dörnyei, 2001).

c. Experiences in Studying a Language

Limited research exists on the relationship between language strategy usage and English study experience. Tanaka and Kutsuki (2023), and Nola and Oliver (1999) examined this relationship, finding that study abroad program influence thinking patterns, learning styles, and language proficiency (Opper et al., 1990; Zhang, 2020). These experiences shape language learning approaches, particularly in the context of studying or living abroad (Gong et al., 2020; Oxford, 1996).

Good Language Learners

a. Personality Characteristics

Self-esteem, curiosity, and risk-taking are pivotal in language learning (Filgona et al., 2020; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Teimouri et al., 2022; Zhang, 2020), alongside factors like motivation and optimism. Motivation, whether instrumental or integrative, varies depending on the learning environment, with

intrinsic motivation often more influential (Brown, 2000). While attitude significantly impacts learning, the distinction between motivation and attitude remains unclear (Gardner, 1985). External pressures can adversely affect both motivation and learning attitudes. Although motivation can enhance learning outcomes, it does not solely determine success. Additionally, introverted learners may find spoken English more accessible, despite their slower learning pace, as personality traits like openness and conscientiousness play significant roles in language learning (Bruso et al., 2020; Hashim et al., 2018).

b. Learning Styles

Ambiguity tolerance is crucial for overcoming inconsistencies and misunderstandings, benefiting academic achievement (Brown, 2000). However, excessive tolerance may impede learning progress, while impatience with ambiguity can facilitate language learning (Filgona et al., 2020; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Teimouri et al., 2022). Different jobs require varying degrees of independence and field reliance (Brown, 2000). Field independence has been linked to classroom second language development (Shehni & Khezrab, 2020), with field-dependent students excelling in communication but field-independent students performing better in exams and classes (Jialing, 2019). Over-reliance on visual and inductive methods may hinder language learning, necessitating a diverse approach by educators.

c. Learning Strategies

Learning strategies, as described by Rubin (1975), encompass methods and techniques for knowledge acquisition. These include metacognitive strategies for self-awareness and organization, cognitive strategies for integration and mnemonics, and socio-affective language usage techniques (O'Malley et al., 1985; Zhang, 2020). Competent language learners compensate for errors, exploit their strengths, acquire language in meaningful chunks, and utilize mistakes for improvement. Success in second language acquisition often involves a combination of metacognitive, cognitive, and communicative strategies (O'Malley et al., 1985; Zhang, 2020).

Language Learning Strategies (LLS) Classification

This study delves into the classification of LLS, drawing upon a comprehensive review of existing literature. Scholars such as Cohen (2014), Stern (1992), O'Malley et al. (1985), Oxford (1990, 2017), and Rubin (1975), have significantly contributed to this field by categorizing LLS and exploring their effectiveness. Initially, Naiman et al. (1978) proposed five main techniques, while subsequent research by O'Malley et al. (1985) delineated LLS into cognitive, socio-affective, and metacognitive categories. Further classifications by Wenden and Rubin (1987), Oxford (1990, 2017), Stern (1992), and Cohen (2014) have enriched our understanding of LLS, highlighting their diverse nature and role in language acquisition. This manuscript synthesizes these classifications and discusses their implications for language teaching and learning, aiming to provide educators with insights into the multifaceted strategies employed by language learners (Pawlak, 2021; Teng, 2023).

Ways to conquer challenges in Speaking English

Research on motivation and learning strategies' impact on English language learning outcomes varies globally across academic levels, subject areas, and socio-cultural contexts. Effective speaking teaching methods in higher education, like dialogue memorization and drilling, are crucial for improving communication skills (Reddick, 2018). Cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies positively influence language learning among gifted higher education students, fostering proactive learning and higher achievement (Šafranĳ, 2019). Malaysian undergraduates prefer metacognitive and social strategies over memory and affective strategies in language learning (Chanderan & Hashim, 2022). This study uses a phenomenological lens to explore TESL practicum students' LLS, aiming to uncover effective approaches for enhancing language competency within this demographic through an investigation of their experiences and perceptions.

a. Views of Educators

Teaching methods that overcome psychological barriers, provide a friendly environment, implement authentic exercises, and create a non-threatening learning environment can help ESL students improve their English communication skills. Additionally, teachers should teach coping skills and use positive teaching methods like music, poetry, and board games. Gamification in ESL classrooms can boost motivation, prevent demotivation, improve vocabulary, foster positive grammar attitudes, and creative English writing (Abdul Halim et al., 2020; Yaacob, 2022; Hashim et al., 2019; Rafiq et al., 2019; Redjeki & Muhajir, 2021). Creating a supportive, encouraging, and compassionate environment in the classroom is crucial for helping students overcome their anxiety about speaking English and developing their English communication skills (Khoshlessan & Das, 2017; Miskam & Saidalvi, 2018; Zhang et al., 2020). Incidentally, these educators' views aim to provide insights to facilitate students' language learning experiences.

b. Views of Students

Independent speaking activities can boost collaborative learning and problem-solving in a supportive environment. Teaching fundamental presenting skills and providing opportunities for public speaking practice through reading English books, watching films, and engaging in communicative language education (Männistö et al., 2020; Rao, 2019) may enhance students' confidence and real-world communication skills (Charoensukmongkol, 2019; Cohen, 2014; Pazilah et al., 2019; Tom et al., 2013). Task-based language learning is a growing trend in communicative language teaching (Hien, 2021; Kartal et al., 2019; Kellner & Attorps, 2020; Takal & Ibrahim, 2019). According to Kashinathan and Abdul Aziz (2021), pre-university students should master presentation structure, starting and conclusion, and spoken and unspoken communication. Pronunciation exercises, along with music, poetry, and board games, can make speaking English both enjoyable and informative (Govindasamy et al., 2019; Halim et al., 2020; Hashim et al., 2018; Lukas et al., 2020; Ni et al., 2020; Rajendran & Yunus, 2021; Shang, 2021; Shin & Yunus, 2021).

Previous research assessments have highlighted certain gaps in the literature. While studies have examined how communication styles impact English language

learning in TESL contexts (Abdul Halim et al., 2020; Azar & Tanggaraju, 2020; Shu-Yun et al., 2020), limited attention has been given to the relationship between learners' methods and motivation within the TESL context in Malaysia (Luis & Beamud, 2021; Selwyn & Pariña, 2018). To address these gaps, this study aims to investigate motivational factors and linguistic learning techniques in TESL. By doing so, it seeks to bridge the divide between TESL motivation and conventional second language acquisition studies, as suggested by some scholars. Therefore, the study endeavors to explore and comprehend the lived experiences of TESL students regarding their LLS, with the overarching goal of understanding how these experiences contribute to the improvement of their language competency, as articulated in the research question.

Research Question:

"How do TESL students' language learning experiences contribute to the improvement of their language competency?"

This study enhances TESL students' language competency and offers insights into assessing English proficiency, which is crucial for effective education. It informs ESL teaching practices and supports governmental efforts to advance English globally through research.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a phenomenological approach (Gill, 2020; Greening, 2019; Moustakas, 2011, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019; Reyes, 2023; Williams, 2021) to explore the experiences of LLS among TESL practicum students. The study aims to delve into the perceptions of TESL participants regarding a phenomenon and their current proficiency in English communication. Additionally, the philosophical stance of the research, embracing interpretivism, has been clarified (Frechette et al., 2020). This philosophical framework underpins the qualitative nature of the study and aligns with the interpretive nature of phenomenology, which seeks to understand individuals' subjective experiences and interpretations. Data collection utilized a purposive sampling technique, targeting TESL practicum students considered proficient learners and prospective ESL educators.

Participants Selection

Participants were selected based on the commonality of life experiences within a group of future ESL educators, their final semester status, and their participation in practicum experiences, exposing them to teaching environments. Initially, 15 participants volunteered with consent from a total population of 51; however, the study reached saturation at 13 participants, aligning with Moustakas (2011), Moustakas (2018), and Polkinghorne's (1989) recommendation of 5 to 25 participants. In-depth semi-structured interviews, lasting from 45 minutes to 2 hours, were conducted from August 2021 to August 2023 at a local public university. The aim was to gain comprehensive insights and analyze students'

LLS, involving students from the Faculty of Teaching ESL, selected based on their experiences and willingness to participate in discussions with the researcher.

Data Collection Methods and Interview Protocol Development

The study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth semi-structured interviews to delve into LLS in English communication learning. The interview protocol, developed to facilitate comprehensive exploration, was meticulously crafted with consideration of the study's objectives and the nature of qualitative inquiry (Roberts, 2020). Drawing upon existing literature and expert insights, the interview questions were thoughtfully formulated to capture personal and contextual factors crucial to understanding LLS. A preliminary study involving 12 TESL students from various local institutions allowed for refinement of the interview protocol, ensuring clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's aims. Structured into two parts, the protocol first collected socio-demographic data, followed by a focused inquiry into participants' perspectives on research questions. This organization aimed to streamline data collection while providing flexibility for participants to express their experiences. Among the participants, 9 interviews were conducted in person, while 4 were carried out online via platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, and Skype. This distribution was determined by practical considerations, including cost-effective, geographical distance, and the convenience afforded, particularly amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Audio recording software supplemented the interviews, ensuring thorough documentation of participants' responses. By meticulously crafting the interview protocol and leveraging physical and online platforms, the study aimed to glean nuanced insights into LLS from a diverse range of participants.

Conducting a Preliminary Study with Expert Collaboration

The preliminary study, conducted collaboratively with an expert (Malmqvist et al., 2019), encompassed various essential activities, including the development of interview protocols, coding practice, theme review, and findings validation. The expert, holding a PhD qualification and affiliated with a distinguished educational management institute under the Ministry of Education, brought invaluable expertise in research methodologies, ensuring meticulous planning, execution, and analysis of the study. Additionally, the study involved 12 TESL practicum students from different local institutions, distinct from the main study group. This preliminary investigation proved instrumental in anticipating potential complications before commencing the actual study, thereby enhancing its readiness and robustness.

Ensuring Rigours and Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

Validity and dependability are established through a meticulous examination of the instrument, interview protocol, data collection methods, and transcript management in the qualitative analysis. Trustworthiness is maintained through rigour in interpreting participant and interview realities. External validity is achieved through detailed descriptions of the study environment and participants. Member checking and external audits improve the conformability of themes.

a. Member Checking

In-depth semi-structured interview transcriptions were subjected to member checking for accuracy (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Lincoln & Guba 1986). Participants checked the transcriptions and descriptions via WhatsApp, preferring the convenience of social media. They returned the documents with minor amendments or without amendments, with minimal amendments for minor spelling errors.

b. External audit - Cohen's Kappa

Lincoln and Guba (1986) proposed methods to mitigate researcher bias and enhance conformability in qualitative studies, such as ongoing auditing and monitoring, utilizing Cohen's Kappa to evaluate constructs or emergent themes for this study, and calculating agreement coefficients among experts. These methods are implemented by PhD-holding experts from two public universities, who are affiliated with linguistic faculties and oversee doctoral researchers. Notably, these experts are distinct from the preliminary investigation, ensuring the quality and credibility of the study through their expertise in qualitative research methodologies.

Table 1 displays Cohen's Kappa interpretation, with 1.0 indicating agreement among raters and 0 indicating no agreement (Viera & Garrett, 2005).

Table 1: Interpretation of Cohen's Kappa

Poor	Slight	Fair	Moderate	Substantial	Almost Perfect
0.0	0.20	0.40	0.60	0.80	1.0
Agreement					
< 0			Less than chance agreement		
0.01-0.20			Slight agreement		
0.21-0.40			Fair agreement		
0.41-0.60			Moderate agreement		
0.61-0.80			Substantial agreement		
0.81-0.99			Almost perfect agreement		

The external auditor's report contributes to the summary of raters' discussions and comments, while the researcher identifies themes in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: Rater 1 agreement

Themes	Agreed coded data	Disagreed coded data
Language Learning Strategies:	6/7	1/7
Total agreed/disagreed:	6/7	1/7

Table 3: Rater 2 agreement

Themes	Agreed coded data	Disagreed coded data
Language Learning Strategies:	7/7	0/7
Total agreed/disagreed:	7/7	0/7

Table 4 displays Cohen's kappa calculation results, indicating the mean value of 0.9995 in near-perfect agreement with the coded data, indicating the unit of analysis aligns with the study's themes.

Cohen's Kappa Equation:
$$K = \frac{fa - fc}{N - fc}$$

Table 4: Calculations for Cohen's Kappa

Rater 1	Rater 2	Mean Value of K
$K = \frac{6 - 1}{6 - 1}$ $= 0.999$	$K = \frac{7 - 0}{7 - 0}$ $= 1.0$	$K = \frac{0.957 + 1.0}{2}$ $= 0.9995$

The study's intercoder reliability, assessed using Cohen's Kappa, indicates the refinement and characterisation of emergent themes, with adjustments made following expert assessment, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of changes made upon expert review

Main Ideas	Before Review	After Review
Learning Strategies	Watching Movies & Online Videos Reading & Writing Self-Practice Listening to Music Teaching & Learning from Others Gamification for Learning Football Commentaries	Audio Visual Materials Reading for Leisure Note-Taking Self-Speaking Practice Listening to Music Teaching and Learning Gamification Football Commentaries

The researcher reworded terms based on interpretants' interpretations, dividing topics like "Reading & Writing" into "Reading for Leisure" and "Note-Taking", and renaming "Teaching & Learning from Others" with "Teaching and Learning" to resolve dual meanings.

4. Method

Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews improve qualitative research consistency, while phenomenology defines phenomena through participants' experiences. Phenomenological reduction reduces bias, while NVivo coding preserves data integrity. Personal experiences uncover themes related to participants' approaches to language learning and their utilisation of LLS. Data from reduction is evaluated, and the "search for essence" process aims to remove researcher bias (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019; Lorenz, 2019; Wicks, 2017).

Thematic Analysis

The interviews were analysed qualitatively using NVivo (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022; Sundler et al., 2019) suggested thematic analysis, involves several phases: familiarizing with the data, generating the first code, reviewing themes, and producing a scholarly report. The process involves copying, reading, and re-reading the data, marking initial ideas, and annotating each transcript with key concepts. Thematic maps are generated using NVivo's built-in capabilities, and a scholarly report is produced, presenting essential statements and graphic representations of the results.

Textural Description

The researcher created textural descriptions for each participant, synthesizing their experiences and meanings (Gill, 2020; Moustakas, 2018; Williams, 2021). A member checking exercise for accuracy was sent to participants, asking them to verify the description's accuracy and provide corrections. The researcher also thanked them with a thank-you letter.

Participants characteristics

The researcher interviewed 13 TESL students at a public university, using codes to anonymize their identities, as shown in Table 6. They provided information on gender, age, race, and study programmes.

Table 6: Characteristics of participants

Participants No.	Codes	Gender	Age	Race	Program of Study
1.	INF 01	Female	24	Malay	TESL UKM
2.	INF 02	Female	25	Indian	
3.	INF 03	Female	24	Malay	
4.	INF 04	Female	24	Malay	
5.	INF 05	Female	24	Malay	
6.	INF 06	Female	24	Malay	
7.	INF 07	Male	24	Malay	
8.	INF 08	Male	23	Malay	
9.	INF 09	Female	23	Iban	
10.	INF 10	Male	21	Chinese	
11.	INF 11	Female	24	Malay	
12.	INF 12	Male	24	Malay	
13.	INF 13	Male	25	Kadazan	

The study included 8 Malays and 5 men aged 21 to 25, with 13 participants providing feedback, indicating a discernible trend. Data collection continued until reaching theoretical saturation, where new insights became limited. The researcher then evaluated and described the participants' perspectives.

Data Analysis for Qualitative Data Using NVivo

The study used 13 in-depth interviews, recorded and transcribed in NVivo, following Edlund Bengt's (2011) proposition as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Phases of NVivo data analysis

Phase	Procedures Applied
Phase 1: Descriptive	Specifics of the project and the study methodology Sources Attributes Values Classifications
Phase 2: Topic	Identifying obvious topics Creating initial nodes
Phase 3: Analytic	Merging nodes into hierarchies Data sets
	Models and relationships Using queries Running queries Matrix coding query Cross-case query analysis
Phase 4: Drawing Conclusion	Verification Developing theories

The study interviewed TESL students from a public university using NVivo to analyse the data. Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process, was employed to extract meaning. Conclusions were drawn after verifying the findings and obtaining expert validation.

5. Findings

Research Question:

How do TESL students' language learning experiences contribute to the improvement of their language competency?

TESL students' English communication learning skills are examined using NVivo. Figure 1 shows eight themes: (a) audio-visual resources, (b) leisure reading, (c) note-taking, (d) music, (e) self-speaking practice, (f) instruction, (g) gamification, and (h) football commentary.

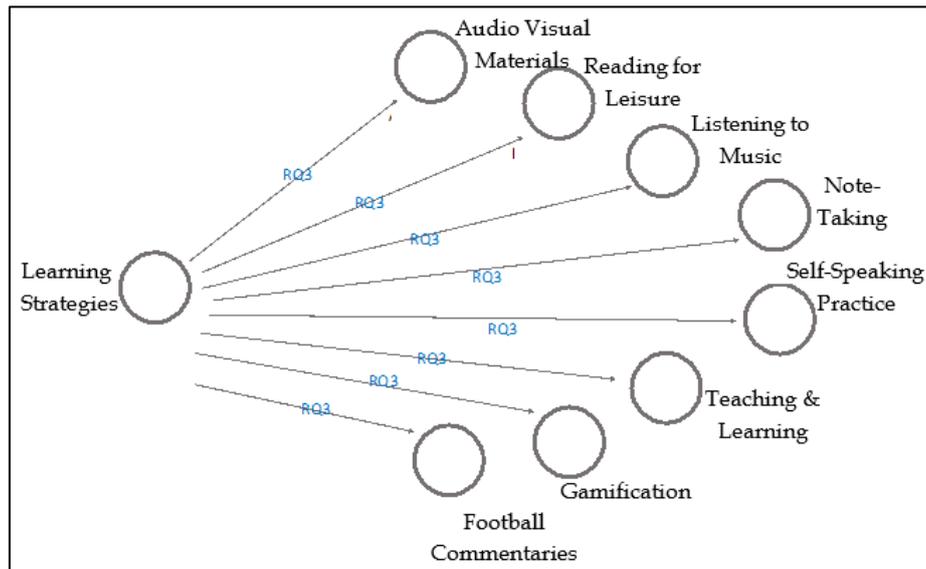


Figure 1: Emerging themes for research objective using NVivo

Interview transcripts reveal that some participants, including INF 07, INF 08, and INF 12, find football commentaries interesting and entertaining, particularly those featuring Peter Drury and Martin Tyler.

“One unique method that I found very useful in helping me improve my speaking proficiency is football commentary ... You know, those commentators. Peter Drury ... and another one is Martin Tyler. ... because I am a huge football fan. ... these British commentators when they try to. ... You imagine yourself in environment where you can't really watch the game, but you just listen and you just listen to the commentary through radio. So that involves a lot of imagery, a lot of word play. So that's actually one of the things that motivate me because I feel like they're very accurate when they describe the game. They're very concise. They know how to describe what it's actually like to be on the field of 11 players. ... So when the listeners are listening to his commentary, they can actually visualize what's actually going on the field” (INF 07).

INF-7 and INF-8 find football commentaries fascinating as they allow them to imitate commentators' bombastic vocabularies, while INF-7 finds commentators' words like poems and describes his favourite commentator as a source of interest.

“Peter Drury. Yes, he commented on football. But the way the word he uses, it's like he is writing a poem. ... Yes, exactly ... It literally like writing a poem. The word play is absolutely magnificent. He would that is something he would say the word play is really nice. It literally give me goose bumps. ... Yes, yes, he gives us goose bumps, listening to him, makes us feel so ... Yes he gives us goose bumps. It does ... [Does he has in YouTube about Peter Drury] ... There are a lot. He doesn't have a YouTube channel of his own, but a lot of people. Lot of people talking about him. He's often named like the poet of football because he illustrates everything.” (INF 08).

INF-12 and INF-8 deemed football commentator Peter Drury a poet, enhancing their comprehension of football matches and introducing new sports vocabulary.

"One of the commentators ... like the poet of football. ... Yeah. ... Yeah, how the arranged sentence like beautifully written. And yeah, so because I think English footballs, the commentators, they like to exaggerate a little bit. So that gives the. ... Energy when we watch the football. So yeah, I I really love that, that part, the commentary and all that. So that's I think where I pick up some of the words." (INF 12).

Appreciation for Football Commentaries

The findings reveal a notable appreciation for football commentaries among participants, particularly those featuring commentators Peter Drury and Martin Tyler. This enthusiasm underscores the potential novelty of football commentary as an engaging and immersive tool for language learning among TESL students. The vivid imagery and wordplay highlighted by participants suggest that such commentaries offer a unique opportunity for learners to engage with authentic language in a meaningful context. Additionally, the characterization of Peter Drury as a "poet of football" by some participants further emphasizes the linguistic richness and cultural significance embedded within these commentaries.

Impact of Football-related Content on Language Learning

The study's findings also shed light on the impact of football-related content on language learning motivation. Despite initial disinterest in reading, participants were motivated to engage with English-language material, specifically football-related news and social media. This suggests that leveraging students' existing interests, such as football, can serve as a powerful catalyst for language learning engagement and proficiency development.

Identified Language Learning Strategies (LLS)

The identification of eight LLS, including metacognitive, social, memory, and emotional methods, provides valuable insights into effective pedagogical approaches for TESL students. The incorporation of real-world activities such as music, poetry, board games, and creative writing emerges as particularly promising strategies for reducing anxiety and enhancing self-confidence. These findings align with existing literature on the importance of incorporating authentic and diverse learning experiences to promote language acquisition and proficiency.

Implications and Future Directions

The implications of these findings extend beyond the classroom, highlighting the importance of incorporating authentic and engaging content, such as football commentary, into the language learning curricula. Educators should consider integrating diverse real-world activities and leveraging students' interests to create meaningful language learning experiences. Future research could explore the effectiveness of specific football-related content and activities in different language learning contexts and examine the long-term impact on language proficiency and cultural competence among TESL students.

5. Discussion

Language Learning Strategies (LLS) Employed by TESL Students

Self-directed language learning has replaced teacher-centered instruction, enhancing students' independence and comprehension in ESL and EFL. Research shows these methods are easier, more effective, and portable. Teachers should identify strengths and weaknesses, using flexible techniques like audiovisual materials, leisure reading, note-taking, self-speaking practice, music listening, gamification, and football commentaries (Hashim et al., 2019; John & Yunus, 2021; Rafiq et al., 2021). Further research is needed for enhanced English communication teaching.

Research on learning techniques helps teachers understand students and identify weaknesses. Consequently, participants use various methods to improve public speaking, learn vocabulary, and gain confidence. Popular approaches include watching films and online videos, reading for fun, taking notes, and listening to music for fun English learning. Moreover, news, self-help, and motivation books are popular for enhancing language skills (Didi, 2019; Kiang & Yunus, 2021).

Self-speaking practice is the most common language acquisition method for TESL students (Shang, 2021), which boosts communication (Abdul Halim et al., 2020). Many students participate in activities such as practicing in front of a mirror or recording themselves to enunciate the language correctly (Bakar et al., 2017). Additionally, some engage in global group chats or use online applications for language practice, allowing them to converse in the language and meet new people (Nair et al., 2021; Rajendran & Yunus, 2021; Shin & Yunus, 2021; Yunus et al., 2019).

TESL students also engage in learning English through gamification and teaching-learning methods. They often share their knowledge with friends and family, while some opt for English lessons at tutoring facilities (Yaacob, 2022). In addition, gamification has been shown to make acquiring English language proficiency both interesting and successful (Govindasamy et al., 2019; Halim et al., 2020; Hashim et al., 2019; Lukas et al., 2020; Rafiq et al., 2019; Wong & Yunus, 2020).

The researcher suggests that football commentary is an effective method for learning English, as participants enjoy watching football games and listening to commentators using colourful language and vocabulary. This method helps learners learn new words and their usage in everyday discourse. The study's conclusions could be expanded from two perspectives: TESL students as future teachers and good language learners.

TESL Prospective teachers

As future language teachers, TESL students are expected to be proficient and competent educators. Studies suggest effective approaches to address English communication issues among TESL students, emphasizing the importance of creating a supportive environment (Maqbool et al., 2020; Nair & Yunus, 2021; Didi, 2019). Teachers should recognise students' abilities and tailor activities to their personalities, thereby enhancing motivation (Rusli et al., 2018). Additionally,

engaging students with relevant tasks in an authentic learning environment is crucial for their success (Khoshlessan & Das, 2017; Miskam & Saidalvi, 2018; Zhang et al., 2020). Further research is needed to explore the relationship between students' learning strategies and their motivations in TESL education (Filgona et al., 2020; Luis & Beamud, 2021; Pawlak, 2021; Selwyn & Pariña, 2018).

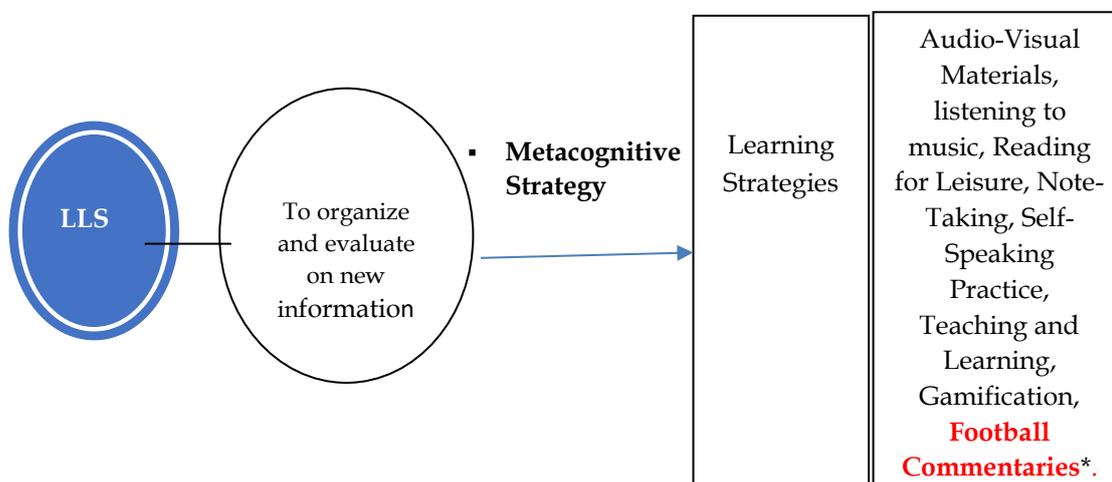


Figure 2: TESL students' LLS

The study recommends that future TESL teachers utilise Oxford's metacognitive LLS, while also remaining open to emerging tactics. This underscores the importance of flexibility in approach for future educators.

TESL Students as Good Language Learners

Language learning involves various factors, such as personalities, styles, and methods. Therefore, success in language acquisition relies on self-worth, curiosity, and risk-taking (Filgona et al., 2020; Gardner, 1985; Gibson et al., 2019; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Russell, 2020). Motivation and attitude impact language learning, though specific mechanisms are unclear (Russell, 2020), ambiguity may hinder or aid learning, and impulsive learners tend to make more errors (Brown, 2000). Furthermore, successful language learners possess traits like reflexivity-impulsivity and field dependence-independence (Othman et al., 2022).

Presentation skills are essential for boosting confidence and fostering teamwork among English-language learners (Männistö et al., 2020; Rao, 2019). TESL students utilise various resources, such as books and films, to enhance learning experiences (Cohen, 2014; Pazilah et al., 2019). Contemporary methods like CLT and task-based learning enhance English proficiency (Hien, 2021; Kartal et al., 2019; Kellner & Attorps, 2020; Takal & Ibrahim, 2019; Toro et al., 2019), and reduce speaking anxiety (Shang, 2021), thus improving presentation abilities (Charoensukmongkol, 2019; Tom et al., 2013). Nevertheless, TESL research predominantly focuses on instructional methods.

6. Conclusion

This study's theoretical implications, rooted in Oxford's LLS, support cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. Methodologically, the use of qualitative

phenomenology, purposive sampling, and technology highlights its innovative approach. Pedagogically, the research emphasizes autonomous learning through language strategies for outdoor activities, covering listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Policymaker implications emphasize the need for learner-centered language education, while practical implications benefit language practitioners in the TESL context. Additionally, learners' training implications suggest positive educational outcomes and enhanced social and emotional development through diverse language strategies, fostering creativity and problem-solving skills.

In conclusion, the significance of learning a second language, particularly English, for various professions has led to the widespread adoption of language learning methodologies. In Malaysia, English serves as a second language, posing challenges for TESL from diverse backgrounds. This study significantly contributes to ESL teaching enhancement by providing valuable insights for assessing students' English language competency and growth. Furthermore, it catalyzes pedagogical research and experimentation, aligning with the government's objectives to promote English as a global language.

However, the findings of this study are limited in generalizability due to the small sample size and single-institution context. Future research should address these limitations by incorporating additional participants, larger samples, and improved analysis. Research should also explore self-determination theories, Oxford's LLS System, the Adaptive Control Thought Model, and self-development. Furthermore, a new LLS inventory may be examined to enrich the field of TESL education.

9. References

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