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Assessment of Language Learning Strategies Used by Students in Gummi Local Government, Zamfara State

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Abstract

This study was carried out to investigate the levels and frequency of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) used by senior secondary schools' students in Gummi local Government, Zamfara State, Nigeria. That was because of the complaints from different stakeholders that there was poor performance of the students in the national examinations. Descriptive survey research was used in the study. The population of the 6874 secondary schools' students in the Local Government. Multistage sampling techniques was used to select sample size. A total of 208 senior secondary schools two (SS II) students were randomly selected and took part in this study. The participants completed the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire. The data collected were computed and analyzed via descriptive statistic. The findings of the study were that there were very low frequencies of the level of each strategy used by secondary schools in learning English language. The overall use of the strategies was in low-use level. At the end of the study, the pedagogical implications and recommendations were provided. One of which is that students should be given opportunities to reflect on their own learning process so that they may become aware of the criteria of their idea and how it influenced their language learning.

Introduction

English language is an official language in Nigeria and a widely used medium of communication among different ethnic groups in the country. It is a medium of instruction and compulsory school subject that must be passed at all levels of education... (Danladi, 2008). With this status, the government agencies, parents, the employers and general public have been complaining of poor learning of communication skills and the general performance of students in the subject. However, various researches conducted blamed English language teaching methods, professional qualities of language teachers, and language teaching and learning environments (Abdullahi, 2003; Sa'ad, 2007) [1, 18]. For instance, Yau in Abdullahi (2003) [1] stated that the objectives of teaching and learning are always associated with using the right methods. Poor teaching methods are therefore associated with students' failure and that leads to poor achievement of curriculum objectives and performance in the subject and the overall academic endeavor. These authors have overlooked the role that students play in their learning process.

However, from the early 1970s, researches have been redirected to the investigation of the effects of social, psychological, and affective variables on the second language learning. Among these variables are: motivation, attitudes, personality, learning styles, and learning strategies (Khalil, 2005) [9]. This is because based on the various researches conducted, teachers and researchers concluded that no single method of language teaching and research findings would mark the start of a universal success in teaching of Second Language (L2) (Brown, 2007) [3]. L2 learners play a significant role in their language learning accuracy and fluency. It was on this ground that Brown (2007) [3] noted that success in language learning depends on the efforts exerted by language learners regardless of the what language teachers exercised with their teaching methods. Thus, students-centered method language instruction has a strong relationship with language learning. This initiation has led to numerous studies investigating individual Language Learning Strategies (LLS) and their relationship to achievements in learning L2 or Foreign Languages (FL) (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006) [8].

The efforts exerted by the language students activate their learning process and make them to exhibit a kind of behaviour for active, interactive, and cooperative learning. The implication of this, is that L2 learning has to consider learners' individual

learning differences which requires much more from the students than from the teachers (Noor, Ismail, AbdulAziz, & Babikkoi, 2012) [12]. Different language learners have different learning features which include among others personal characteristics, language learning styles, as well as language learning strategies. The research finding moved toward a common consensus regarding these features that language learners consciously or unconsciously employ a variety of learning strategies in their learning process. According to Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) [8], the overall research findings indicated that both the frequency with which learners apply language learning strategies and the strategies they choose are the distinguishing characteristics between more successful and less successful language learners.

Language Learning Strategies (LLS)
The term *strategy* is an ancient Greek word *strategia,* which literally *means* or *actions* taken for the purpose of winning a war (Ching-Yi, Shu-Chen & Yi-Nian, 2007) [4]. Technically, the term refers to the tactics for the execution of a task. In education, strategies simply mean plans or tactics employ in teaching, learning process, or solving problems. Learning entails acquisition of behavior or assimilation. Therefore, learning strategies has been defined by Wenden in Kuo (2010) [10] as the various operations that learners use in order to make sense of their learning. This conception indicates that learning strategies are active effort that students employed to participate in the learning process. This can be by operationalizing their domains of knowledge to acquire necessary skills. For instance, the learners plan, compete, and manipulate tools where necessary, using different tactics, to receive, store, process inputs and retrieved these inputs for meaningful outputs.

In another conception, Rubin in Ching-Yi, Shu-Chen & Yi-Nian, (2007) [4] conceived LLS as the strategies which contribute to the development of the language system that the learners construct and affect learning directly. She stated that LLS include, "any set of operations, steps, plans, and routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval and use of information" (p.19). Language learning strategies can be deduced here to be any style, plan or tactic used by the students to transform language external inputs into internal and personal resources and skills for language proficiency and accuracy.

According to Wenden in Kuo (2010) [10], LLS can be defined from the aspect of language learning behaviors. It entails learning and regulating the meaning of a L2/FL, cognitive theory, such as learners' strategic knowledge of language learning, and the affective view, such as learners' motivation, attitude, etc. The perception involves the application of students' domains of knowledge to acquire language skills. The emphasis is on the ways in which language learners processed new L2 inputs with the kinds of strategies they use to understand, learn, or remember the inputs and produce meaningful output.

Similarly, Oxford (1990) [14] stated that LLS are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning. She proposed a more specific definition of learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and

more transferable to new situations" (p. 8). The collective effort of these definitions is that they all revolve round the four main components that students plan to receive, process, retain, and retrieve language skills in meaningful communication.

It is clear that there are no good or bad language learning strategies. Lan and Oxford (2003) [16] had stated that strategy is neither good nor bad; it is essentially neutral until the context of its use is thoroughly considered. What makes a strategy positive and helpful for a given learner must satisfy the following conditions:

1.   Relates well to the L2 task at hand,
2.   Fits the particular student's learning style preferences to one degree or another, and
3.   The student employs the strategy effectively and links it with other relevant strategies.

The strategies that fulfill these conditions make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations (Oxford, 1990) [14].

In view of Rubin and Wenden (1987) [20] at least five main features can be inferred from the literature reviewed. These are:

1.   Strategies play an important role in second language learning as they promote and facilitate language learning;
2.   Learners themselves are the actual agents of their use and choice of strategies as they are directly affected by them;
3.   Language learning as learning in general has to be internalized and strategies are in fact problem-solving mechanisms or techniques used by learners to cope with the complex process of learning;
4.   Learning strategies are not always observable to human eyes. This explains why foreign language teachers, in general are not conscious of them; and
5.   Strategies are flexible and it is logical to think that they can be taught and learners can be train in their management. As a consequence of that, it is possible to speak of 'strategies training' or 'learning training' as the techniques used by the teachers to make learners aware of the existence of their own strategies and train them in their practice.

Modern researches had found that teaching and learning occur as a result of mutual cooperation and interaction between teachers and students. Teachers assume the role of facilitators and monitors who help learners practice, think, pair, share, and generate knowledge to solve the problems. Thus, understanding of language learning strategies by the teachers enables them to discover the learning patterns of their students and translate this knowledge into their teaching strategies for the purpose of enabling their students to approach L2 learning autonomously and successfully, Nunan in Martinez, (1996) [11].

Classification of learning strategies
There are different classifications proposed by different authors. Kuo (2010) [10] identified five different authors each with his classification. This paper considered four as the most relevant because the fifth one is reduplication. They are presented in the table below for easy identification:

Table 1: Language learning Strategies Classification since the 1970s

Classes	Language Learning Strategies Classification	Researcher(s) and Year
	Nainman *et al*.,	Naiman, *et al*. (1978)
01.	Active task approach	
02.	Realization of language as a system and interaction	
03.	Realization of language as a means of communication	
04.	Management of effective demand	
05.	Monitoring L2 performance	
	Rubin	**Rubin, (1981)**
1	Strategies that directly affect learning	
01.	Clarification/verification	
02.	Monitoring	
03.	Memorizing	
04.	Guessing/inductive inference	
05.	Deductive reasoning practice	
2	Process that contributes indirectly to learning	
01.	Create opportunity for learning	
02.	Production trick	
	Brown and Palinscar	**Brown & Palinscar, (1982)**
01.	Cognitive strategies	
02.	Meta-cognitive strategies	
03.	Social-affective strategies	
	Oxford	**Oxford (1990)** [14]
1	Direct Strategies	
01.	Memory strategies	
02.	Cognitive strategies	
03.	Compensation strategies	
2	Indirect strategies	
01.	Meta-cognitive strategies	
02.	Affective strategies	
03.	Social strategies	

Source: An Overview of the Language Learning Strategies, p. 139

This study employed Oxford (1990) [14] Language Learning Strategies Inventory. Oxford's (1990) [14] studied the previous classifications of LLS, synthesized the study results, and came up with her own language learning strategy. Kuo (2010) [10] states that in 1990, Oxford synthesized language learning strategies and divided it into two categories: direct strategies and indirect strategies. The Direct strategies are the specific ways that involve the use of language. They are sub-divided into memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. Indirect strategies on the other hand, do not directly involve using the language, but they support language learning (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990) [14]. They are further divided into meta-cognitive, affective, and social strategies. The Oxford's (1990) [14] language learning strategies are presented in the following table:

Table 2: Oxford's Classification

Type	Primary Strategies	Secondary Strategies
Direct Strategies	Memory strategies	i.　Creating mental linkages ii.　Applying images and sound iii.　Reviewing well iv.　Employing action
	Cognitive strategies	i.　Practicing ii.　Receiving and sending messages iii.　Analyzing and Reasoning iv.　Creating a structure for input and output
	Compensatory strategies	i.　Guessing intelligently ii.　Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing
Indirect Strategies	Meta-cognitive strategies	i.　Centering your learning Arranging and planning your learning ii.　Evaluating your learning
	Affective Strategies	i.　Lowering your anxiety ii.　Encourage yourself iii.　Taking your emotional temperature

Source: Language Learning Strategy System (Oxford, 1990, p. 17) [14]

Review of related Empirical Studies
Ching-Yi, Shu-Chen, and Yi-Nia (2007) [4] conducted study on the language learning strategies used by College EFL learners in Taiwan. A total of 1758 Taiwanese college EFL learners took part in the study. The participants completed two sets of self-reported questionnaire, including background characteristics and Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The data collected were computed and analyzed via descriptive statistics. The finding s of the study was that there was not great difference among the strategies of the students used. They are all at medium level.

Griffiths (2003) discovered a positive correlation between course level and reported frequency of language learning strategy use. In a study involving 382 students in a private language school in New Zealand, he found that language learning strategies were reportedly used significantly and more frequently by advanced students than by elementary students.

Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) [8] investigated language learning strategies use by ESL students in an intensive English language learning context. The study investigated LLS with 55 students having different cultural and linguistic backgrounds enrolled in college Intensive English Program (IEP).

Statement of the problems

English plays an important role in Nigeria. It is a medium of instruction and compulsory subject that must be passed at all levels of education in Nigeria (Danladi, 2008). Generally speaking, the majority of Nigerian students are not able to achieve the standard level of English proficiency which affects their overall educational performance (Anizoba, 2001 [2]; Usman, 2012). They lack self-confidence in their English proficiency. This can be identified from the West African School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) Chief Examiner's Reports. He said that over the years students are recording steady decline in performance. For instance, the Daily Trust (2010) reported that 'seventy five percent of the candidates who sat for May/June WAEC 2010 examinations failed to meet the minimum requirement into the tertiary institutions'. Again, the recently released WAEC result announced by the Head of WAEC National Headquarters, Charles Eguridu, stated that the May/June 2014 WAEC results had a total of 529,425 candidates representing 31.81% who obtained credit pass in five subjects including English language and Mathematics. He confirmed that there were overt students' ineptitude in English language. Therefore, this paper assessed the levels of the kinds of strategies that students used to learn English language in two secondary schools in Gummi local Government of Zamfara State.

Objectives of the study

The purpose of this study is to assess secondary schools' students' use of Language Learning Strategies (LLS). The paper therefore attempts to achieve the following objective:
1. Find out the levels of Language Learning Strategies used by secondary schools' students to learn English language.
2. To ascertain the frequency of Language Learning Strategies used by language learners according to the language skills.

Research questions

This study aimed to assess language learning strategies used by Zamfara state students to achieve English language proficiency. The paper seeks answers to the following research questions:
1. What are the levels of LLS used by Senior Secondary schools in English language?
2. What is the frequency of Language Learning Strategies used by language learners according to the language skills?

Research design, population, and samples

This is descriptive survey research, designed to assess the language learning strategies used by Gummi Local Government students to acquire English language as a second language. The population comprised of all the eleven (11) senior secondary schools in Gummi local Government, Zamfara State and they have a population of six thousand eight hundred and seventy-four (6874) students. However, only SS II students participated in the study because their level of maturity and education is high enough to enable them complete the instrument in this study.

The sample for this study was drawn from four stratified secondary schools: two schools from the rural and urban locations, and single sex and co-educated settings. The purpose of this selection is to have a fair representation of each of the school's based on locations and gender. A total of two hundred and eight (208) SS II students were randomly selected from the secondary schools as the sample for this study. This was in accordance with Krejcie and Morgan (1971) table of determining sample size which states that two hundred and ten (210) should serve as sample for the population that is up to four hundred and sixty (455). The procedure used in the selection of sample was yes and no fish bowl method. Those that pick yes were those that participated in the study.

Instrumentation

The instruments of this study involved a questionnaire Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL).

The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

The Strategy Inventory for language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990) [14] was first designed as an instrument for assessing the frequency of use of language learning strategies by students at the Defense language Institute in Monterey, California. Two revised versions of the SILL exist, one for foreign language learners whose native language is English (80 items) and the other for learners of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL, 50 items). It is estimated that 40 to50 major studies, including a dozen dissertations and theses, have been done using the SILL. These studies have involved an estimated 10000 language learners. Within the last 10 to 15 years, the SILL appears to be the only one language learning strategy instrument that has been extensively checked for reliability and validated in multiple ways (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995, p. 4) [15]. In this current study, the ESL/EFL 50 items version 7.0 of SILL was employed as an instrument to investigate EFL learners' use of language learning strategies. The version 7.0 of SILL contains of 50 items, and characterized into six subscales: (a) memory strategies (items 1 to 9), (b) cognitive strategies (items 10 to 23), (c) compensation strategies (items 24 to 29), (d) meta-cognitive strategies (items 30 to 38), (e) affective strategies (items 39 to 44), (F) social strategies, (items 45 to 50). These SILL 50 items are evaluated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. The number indicates how often the learner uses the strategies. Never or almost never true of me =1, Generally not true of me =2, Somewhat true of me =3, Generally true of me =4, Always or almost always true of me =5. In studies worldwide, the SILL's reliability using Cronbach's alpha is ordinarily in the range of the .90s (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995, p. 370) [15].

Method of data analysis
The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data collected. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations were implemented in order to investigate the use of language learning strategies. However, a reporting scale that can be used to tell students which groups of strategies they use the most in learning English are: (1) 'High Usage' (3.5–5.0), (2) 'Medium Usage' (2.5–3.4), and (3) 'Low Usage' (1.0–2.4).

Results
Research Question 1: What is the level of LLS used by Secondary Schools students in Zamfara State?

Table 3: Responses of Level of usage of LLS

Strategies	N	M	SD
Memory	208	2.24	0.95
Cognitive	208	1.37	0.63
Compensation	208	2.36	1.22
Meta-cognitive	208	2.37	1.14
Affective	208	2.44	1.15
Social	208	2.33	1.11
Overall Strategy Use	208	2.19	1.03

Source: Field Survey, 2015, N=208

The above table illustrates that the mean of the overall strategy use was 2.19, which was approximately at a medium degree. According to the results, the most frequently used strategy was affective strategy (M=2.37 and SD=1.15) and followed by meta-cognitive strategy (M=2.37 and SD=1.14), compensatory strategy (M =2.36 and SD=1.14), social strategy (M =2.33 and SD=1.11), memory strategy (M =2.24 and SD=0.95) and cognitive strategy (M =1.37 and SD=0.63). There was not a big difference among the frequent use of each strategy that learners report using.

Research Question 2: What is the frequency of the usage LLS on different language skills?

Table 4: Frequency of usage of based of Language Skills

Strategy	Frequency of use in learning language skills					
	No. of Respondents	Listening (%)	Speaking (%)	Reading (%)	Writing (%)	Total
Memory	208	60(29%)	35(17%)	73(35%)	40(19%)	100%
Cognitive	208	41(20%)	46(22%)	69(33%)	52(25%)	100%
Compensatory	208	31(15%)	50(24%)	81(39%)	46(22%)	100%
Metacognitive	208	40(19%)	58(28%)	56(27%)	54(26%)	100%
Affective	208	71(34%)	23(11%)	73(35%)	41(20%)	100%
Social	208	64(31%)	52(25%)	48(23%)	44(21%)	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 4 shows that 73 respondents representing 35% use memory strategy in learning L2 reading skills. The lowest L2 learning skills where students utilize their memory strategy is writing which has 40 respondents with 19%. In the utilization of cognitive learning strategies, 69 respondents representing 33% use the strategies of understanding and production strategies in L2 learning. The compensatory strategies utilized in L2 learning has 81 respondents representing 39% on the same reading skills where 31 respondents representing 15% compensate L2 learning in listening activities. On the frequency of the use of metacognitive strategies, 58 respondents representing 28% utilize the strategy when learning speaking skills and the lowest is the listening where 40 respondents representing 19% use the strategy. On the frequency of the usage of affective strategies, 73 respondents representing 35% utilize the strategy in learning L2 reading and the lowest skills where it is utilized is speaking where 23 respondents representing 11% utilize the strategy. On the social strategies, 64 respondents representing 31% utilize social strategies when learning L2 listening where 44 respondents representing 21% utilize the strategies while learning L2 writing skills.

Findings and discussions
Generally, there was not a big difference among the frequent use of each strategy that senior secondary schools' students in Gummi Local Government report using, they are all in medium-use level. The ranking order of the use showed that the most frequently used strategy was affective strategies and followed by meta-cognitive strategies, compensatory strategies, social strategies, cognitive strategies and memory strategies. The findings of the study reveal that there were low strategies used by Senior Secondary Students in Gummi Local Government which is 2.19. Thus, they do not apply the strategies as frequently as they could in English language learning. The finding was inconsistent with the previous studies conducted by Ching-Yi, Shu-Chen, & Yi-Nian (2007) [4], Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) [8], and Griffiths (2003).
The inconsistencies found in this study made the researcher to conclude that poor performance of secondary school students in English language is attributed to them under utilizations of their language learning strategies. This is because Wharton (2000) research demonstrated a significant correlation between the two factors, indicating that the higher a student's language proficiency rating, the more frequent the strategy use.

Pedagogical implications
The findings derived from this study suggest some pedagogical implications. The implication of this findings is that English language learning would continue to suffer and students be failing. This is so because students are not

effectively using language learning strategies which are core components of second language acquisition.

Conclusion

This study provided relevant information about secondary schools' students' use of language learning strategies. It explored the relationship of the students' gender in the strategies use. These LLS profiles can guide the planning of language teachers' instructional planning, strategy assessment, and instruction training activities for EFL teachers based on the learner strategy needs identified in the study.

Recommendations

This paper recommends the following:

1. Students should be given opportunities to reflect on their own learning process so that they may become aware of the criteria of their idea and how it influenced their language learning.
2. The language courses should be structured to include activities that encourage the linguistic and communicative development of the students.
3. The learner training and language training should be integrated so that the language instructors carry out their language monitoring effectively.
4. The paper recommends that materials production should redirected from teaching materials to learning materials where learners' guide is provided to completely show that education is now learner centered.
5. The learning factors (age, and language levels) should be in the mind of the materials producer for effective language.

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