Identifying Grammar Learning Strategies among Rural Upper Primary ESL Students: Insights from Low-Enrolment Schools

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Abstract
The regulations of language, commonly referred to as grammar, hold a significant role in ensuring the precision of both verbal and non-verbal communication. Specific individuals acquire a new language effortlessly, whereas others encounter challenges. The varying speeds of language acquisition can be attributed to their diverse learning strategies. Past research has revealed how learners in rural primary schools acquired their Language Learning Strategies (LLS) in grammar knowledge. Still, more needs to be conducted on the learners' preferred Language Learning Strategies (LLS) in the rural low-enrolment primary schools in Sabah and Sarawak. Therefore, this study employed the Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory (GLSI). This inventory consists of 70 statements, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale, to identify, analyse, and explore the language learning strategies (LLS) commonly employed by learners in rural low-enrollment primary schools in Sabah and Sarawak for learning English grammar. A survey was conducted among 40 pupils selected through purposive sampling. Data collection included administering questionnaires in class, and analysis was performed using SPSS Version 29 to calculate the percentage and mean for each strategy. The research findings revealed that social strategy is the predominant language learning strategy for English grammar among students attending low-enrolment primary schools in Sarawak and Sabah.
Keywords: Language Learning Strategies (LLS), Grammar, Low-enrollment schools, Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory (GLSI)

Introduction
        Malaysia boasts a diverse population with many ethnicities, meaning that English might not be the native tongue for many individuals. According to Kaur and Metom (2017), Sabah is home to over 40 ethnic groups, including the Kadazan-Dusun, Murut, and Bajau, while Sarawak boasts a similarly diverse population, comprising indigenous groups such as the Iban, Bidayuh, and Orang Ulu (Mering, 2016). These ethnic communities possess unique languages,

traditions, and belief systems that contribute to the vibrant cultural landscape of both states. Instead, they may primarily speak languages (with different dialects), such as Malay (Bahasa Malaysia) as the national language, Mandarin for the Chinese community, Iban or Bidayuh for the Dayak people in Sarawak, and Dusun and Kadazan for those in Sabah. In East Malaysia alone, with over 40 distinct ethnic groups, English often serves as a secondary or tertiary language for the populace. Language learning is entirely different from acquisition.

Children naturally acquire language without consciously learning its rules and conventions, leading to the mastery of their native tongue. However, for English as a Second Language (ESL) students, there is a greater need for thorough language education to grasp the grammatical structures of the target language effectively. Over the years, the importance of acquiring language proficiency, notably in the context of a second language (L2), has markedly escalated, primarily within the educational sphere, where heightened attention is directed toward learners. Language learning strategies (LLS) are essential for L2 learning and teaching because they develop learning autonomy and language competence and promote active and self-directed involvement. In recent decades, there have been significant advances in the research of LLS, including improvements in conceptualising the construct, the key themes of empirical investigations, and the methods used. However, as Pawlak (2018) points out, there are not many empirical studies of Grammar Learning Strategies (GLS); for instance, Anderson (2005) states: "What is generally lacking in the research are studies that specifically target the identification of learning strategies that L2 learners use to learn grammar and understand the elements of grammar."

Grammar is crucial to language proficiency, especially in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. 'Grammar' can be broadly defined as a set of rules governing the structure and usage of a language (Dutta & Mukherjee, 2019). As a result, grammar knowledge is essential for written and oral communication in any language. Adherence to linguistic rules or grammatical principles is critical for effectively transmitting verbal and nonverbal messages, ensuring the delivery of clear and meaningful sentences. This study is designed to identify GLS in rural upper primary English L2 students, focusing on the low-enrolment schools in East Malaysia. As mentioned, the different ethnicities among the students in these states may influence their GLS in English language learning. As a result, rural upper primary English L2 students use the Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory (GLSI) by Pawlak (2018) to identify GLS.

Literature Review
English Language Learning in Malaysia

English is mandatory in all Malaysian primary schools, highlighting its significance for young students who must become proficient in it for different global objectives. Proficiency in English is fostered by prioritising the enhancement of four essential language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Furthermore, to ensure that English as a Second Language (ESL) learners gain fluency and accuracy, the Ministry of Education adheres to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). This paradigm integrates grammar and vocabulary across fundamental language skills (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021).

In language acquisition, mastering grammar is challenging to become proficient in English. Its intricacy necessitates memorising and implementing several grammatical concepts, such as English tenses and subject-verb agreement (Yaccob & Yunus, 2019). Unlike native speakers, who naturally acquire grammar and vocabulary from their surroundings, English as a Second Language (ESL) learners are frequently placed in educational

environments that require memorising and repeating exercises to master grammar and vocabulary. This technique may reduce motivation for language learning. Rafiq et al. (2019) emphasise the challenging nature of understanding grammatical rules, stating that their proper knowledge and application considerably exacerbate the difficulties of teaching and learning English.

Low-Enrolment Schools and Demographic Challenges

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Education has identified inadequacies that require action to achieve the goals outlined in the Malaysian Education Development (MED) Plan 2013-2025. This intervention promotes accessibility, equity, and quality in the educational system. An important objective is to tackle the significant disparities in educational resources between urban and rural regions. This discrepancy is most visible in the insufficient facilities and unequal distribution of instructors, which are especially obvious in low-enrollment schools (hereinafter referred to as LES), indigenous people schools (Orang Asli community schools), and those located in distant rural area (Asman et al., 2022). Many primary schools in Malaysia are classified as LES, which means they contain fewer than 150 students. It is troubling that approximately 90% of these schools, particularly those with less than 100 children, experience issues due to insufficient financial resources, subpar facilities, and a lack of well-trained teachers. This situation is exacerbated by a low teacher-to-pupil ratio inside LES, estimated at 1:6, according to Malaysian Ministry of Education data (KPM 2018), compounding low academic achievement. Furthermore, students enrolled in LES face additional challenges due to demographic differences.

The demography factor is an external aspect that considerably impacts the LES educational system and is vital in moulding pupils' language development. LES needs more resources and a workforce, particularly in rural locations such as islands, villages, or estates. What about the LES with multiethnicity on the island of Borneo? Therefore, students attending these educational institutions might be exposed to technological advancements differently than those attending urban schools. As a result, their learning progress may be slower, requiring more time to comprehend the academic topic completely. Despite these obstacles, technological progress has enabled some LES to acquire educational resources, although these remain restricted. Teachers in these schools are dedicated to meeting the educational needs of their students to ensure they receive quality learning experiences. For this study, as part of their instructional strategies, teachers utilise instructional videos to assist in teaching basic concepts like prepositions, which are categorised under grammar word classes, to evaluate the pupils' learning strategies.

Learning Strategies

Every learning process requires a manner or a strategy to be adapted to achieve the primary purpose of learning (Hardan, 2013). Learning strategies refer to learners' approaches or techniques to enhance their language learning experience. Among the essential things in the learning process are the specific content learning strategies (what) and how to use them. However, every individual learner may have preferred learning strategies that work best for them, some of which could benefit them, yet others may need to be more effective. The concept of "learning strategies" encompasses diverse methods and approaches learners can utilise to enrich their language acquisition process. This term holds various interpretations, with researchers offering multiple definitions. For instance, Brown (1980) characterised learning strategies as processes that have the potential to enhance learning outcomes

directly. Building upon this, Chamot (1987) expanded the definition to encompass processes, techniques, approaches, and actions that learners employ to support the comprehension and retention of linguistic and content-related information.

Furthermore, Wenden (1987) defines learning strategies as cognitive processes students use to navigate and interpret their educational experiences. According to Williams and Burden (1997), students complete or solve tasks using various resources during the learning process. Learning strategies are defined by Oxford (1990) as "conscious behaviours implemented by the learner to facilitate, accelerate, enrich, self-regulating, efficacious, and situationally transferable learning." O'Malley and Chamot (1990) explain this concept more, defining learning strategies as the techniques and resources that second language learners use to retain and structure linguistic data. Students proactively oversee their learning by utilising these tactics, which involve mental processes and behaviours that enhance understanding, acquisition, and memory of material. Language learning tactics are a crucial component of overall learning strategies. Learning strategies pertain to the methods and approaches used in language acquisition.

Language Learning Strategies

Varieties of strategic instruments utilised across various scenarios have led to the emergence of substantial categorisations of language learning strategies (LLS). Despite not always being directly observable, learners use LLS consciously or unconsciously. Griffiths (2004) mentioned, "One of the difficulties with researching language learning strategies is that they cannot usually be observed directly; they can only be inferred from language learner behaviour". These strategies provide language teachers with valuable insights into students' assessments of the learning environment, their planning process, the selection of appropriate skills, and how they comprehend, acquire, or retain information presented within the classroom setting. Recently, there has been an increasing interest in investigating the diverse strategies employed by language learners to improve their learning outcomes, understanding, and retention (Rivera-Mills & Plonsky, 2007), where researchers have conducted thorough literature reviews to scrutinise the different types of learning strategies, the significance of learner autonomy and strategy training, as well as other factors including students' metalinguistic awareness and variables associated with the utilisation of learning strategies.

Rubin (1987) introduced innovative techniques employed by proficient or accomplished learners, which she subsequently observed in her research. According to Rubin, three strategies learners use contribute directly or indirectly to language learning (Hardan, 2013). These encompass cognitive, linguistic, and interpersonal tactics. Cognitive and metacognitive approaches to learning strategies strongly influence learners' language systems. As these strategies evolved, Oxford's (1990) significant taxonomy categorizes language learning strategies into two primary classes: direct and indirect, each further divided into six groups. Table 1 presents a summary of the taxonomy of language learning strategies.

Table 1
Oxford (1990) Summary of the Taxonomy of Language Learning Strategies

Direct Strategies	**Memory**	1. Creating mental linkages 2. Applying images and sounds 3. Reviewing well 4. Employing action
	Cognitive	1. Practising 2. Receiving and sending messages strategies 3. Analysing and reasoning 4. Creating structure for input and output
	Compensation Strategies	1. Guessing intelligently 2. Overcoming limitations in speaking and writing
Indirect Strategies	**Metacognitive Strategies**	1. Centering learning 2. Arranging and planning learning 3. Evaluating learning
	Affective Strategies	1. Lowering anxiety 2. Encouraging oneself 3. Taking emotional temperature
	Social Strategies	1. Asking questions 2. Cooperating with others 3. Empathising with others

This taxonomy notably gave rise to Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory of Language Learning Strategy (SILL), which was adapted and slightly modified Pawlak (2018) for empirical research on Grammar Learning Strategy (GLS) conducted in this research.

Importance of Grammar and the Grammar Learning Strategy
English is an intricate language with several grammatical rules to master (Rossiter, 2021). Grammar mastery is crucial for English language learners, forming the foundation for effective communication and fluency; English language learners who grasp grammar can compose cohesive sentences, accurately communicate their thoughts, and comprehend written or spoken English. Lim et al (2021) assert that a comprehensive grasp of grammar is essential for achieving fluency in any language. It allows individuals to proficiently integrate different word categories into precise sentence patterns, creating cohesive and meaningful statements.

Learners' proficiency level in Malaysia is a cause for concern (Lim et al., 2021). Prior research has shown that students face difficulties acquiring language proficiency due to their insufficient comprehension of the linguistic framework, usually known as grammatical principles (Salleh et al., 2020)

According to Pawlak (2008), there needed to be more research on strategies learners apply to learn grammar or GLS. In light of the development of learning strategies, the insufficiency of empirical investigations of GLS has been highlighted in significant overviews of LLS (Pawlak, 2018). Oxford et al (2007), as cited in Pawlak (2018), referred to GLS as the "Second Cinderella" of LLS research, attributing this neglect to the dominance of the communicative approach during the peak of study strategy research. In a related context, Pawlak highlighted Oxford's (2017) observation that "grammar learning strategies have received the least attention and consideration among all areas of L2 strategies." Consequently, Pawlak has devised a tool to generate valid and reliable data on using strategies for learning targeted language grammar. In 2018, Pawlak developed the Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory (GLSI) to examine its psychometric properties and to uncover the underlying factors associated with the various types of GLS included in the tool. Recognising the importance of grammar in language acquisition and the role of learners' strategies, understanding these aspects is essential for refining instructional approaches and methodologies in teaching and learning.

Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory (GLSI)

GLSI is used as its validity and reliability tool for collecting data on strategies for learning and gaining the most significant control over the target language, ESL, and grammar in this study. According to Pawlak (2018), "Its high construct validity is evidenced by the integration of items with contemporary research in grammar instruction and Language Learning Strategies (LLS), supported by mostly statistically significant, predominantly moderate, positive correlations between the GLSI and Oxford's (1990) SILL. These correlations were observed overall and within the categories and subcategories covered by both instruments. As there are few details on grammar learning strategies used by learners in primary school, this study aims to record the influence of the GLS used in their learning. On the other hand, the demography of the low-enrollment schools may contribute to the pupils' grammar learning strategies. There is a complex relationship between strategy use and attainments. Magogwe & Oliver (2007) reported that proficiency can be linked to particular strategy types in primary school settings. The research tool, GLSI, was designed with 70 five-point Likert-scale items. It integrates the competing classifications developed by (Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Methodology
Research Design
The research utilises a quantitative approach, utilising the Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory (GLSI) as the primary tool for gathering data. The inventory aims to thoroughly investigate the Grammar Learning Strategies (GLS) employed by advanced language learners in three low-enrolment rural schools in Sarawak and one in Sabah, Malaysia. Quantitative research involves gathering and analysing numerical data to reveal patterns, correlations, and trends within a specific population or sample. This methodology empowers researchers to systematically examine hypotheses, ascertain causal connections, and generate findings applicable across various fields, guiding evidence-based practices (Cresswell, 2018). This

approach involves a structured framework to systematically analyse the prevalence, frequency, and effectiveness of Grammar Learning Strategies (GLS) among advanced language learners. Using the GLSI, we aim to understand students' strategies to improve their language learning. Selecting three rural schools in Sarawak and one in Sabah of low-enrolment students provides a diverse and representative sample, allowing insights into how Grammar Learning Strategies (GLS) are utilised in different regional and socio-cultural contexts. We use this quantitative approach to gather empirical data to inform educators, policymakers, and stakeholders about effective language learning strategies in rural educational settings.

Participants

This study involves 40 students selected from three rural primary schools in Sarawak and one rural primary school in Sabah of low-enrolment students, utilising a purposive sampling technique. The participants are advanced language learners attending primary levels at these schools. The purposive sampling technique selects participants who meet specific criteria relevant to the study's objectives. According to Yin (2014), in purposive sampling, one does not look for the most representative cases; one selects the most informative ones about the research questions.   This approach allows for the targeted inclusion of advanced language learners from rural low-enrolment primary schools in Sabah and Sarawak, ensuring a diverse and representative sample. By selecting participants based on predefined characteristics, the study aims to capture nuanced insights into Language Learning Strategies utilised by advanced language learners in rural educational settings at the primary level, specifically in low-enrolment schools.

Research Instrument

The research utilised the Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory or the GLSI. This inventory comprises 70 statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale, delineating various Grammar Learning Strategies (GLS). These strategies are categorised into four primary classifications (A, B, C, and D) and the four subcategories representing the broad types of cognitive GLS (B1, B2, B3, and B4). The participants were asked to indicate the degree to which each statement reflects their strategic learning, using a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where one signifies "does not apply to me at all" and five indicates "perfectly describes my actions and thoughts."

Table 2
Description for each part of the questionnaire.

Part	Description
A	Metacognitive GLS
B	Cognitive GLS
B1	Cognitive GLS
B2	Cognitive GLS
B3	Cognitive GLS
C	Affective GLS
D	Social GLS

Each statement was rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, allowing participants to express their agreement or disagreement based on their experience with Language Learning Strategies (LLS). The scale was defined as follows for participants' reference:

Table 3
Likert scale description for each Language Learning Strategy Statement

Scale	Description
1	It does not apply to me at all
2	Usually does not apply to me
3	Somewhat applies to me
4	Usually applies to me
5	It perfectly describes my actions and thoughts

Data Collection Method & Data Analysis Procedure
This research included 40 pupils from three rural areas, including low-enrollment schools in Sabah and Sarawak, Malaysia. The data gathered were analysed descriptively to provide an organised presentation of data. Descriptive statistics are computed to summarise the frequency of each grammar learning strategy. Measures such as mean, median, mode, and standard deviation are calculated to provide a comprehensive overview of how often participants employ different strategies. The descriptive analysis was conducted using the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 29 to provide a quick analysis and validate the result.

Furthermore, the data were presented as visuals to help readers understand. Histograms and bar charts were used to visually represent the frequency distributions and relationships identified through quantitative analysis. Visual representations of the data offer a clear and intuitive way to comprehend complex data sets.

Findings & Discussion
The taxonomy of Grammar Learning Strategies (GLS) involves a structured classification into four distinct categories: Metacognitive, Cognitive, Affective, and Social (Oxford, 1990). Each category encapsulates a range of strategies employed by language learners to effectively acquire and internalize grammar rules and structures. The Survey of Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory (GLSI) is designed to align with these categorizations, offering a comprehensive assessment tool to delve into the nuances of learners' grammar learning approaches. Through the GLSI, learners' preferences, strengths, and challenges across the Metacognitive, Cognitive, Affective, and Social domains are systematically explored and quantified (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994).

Grammar Learning Strategy Inventory (GLSI)
Table 4
Metacognitive GLS used by pupils in learning English

Metacognitive Strategy	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
I preview the grammar structures to be covered in a lesson.	26 (65.0%)	7 (17.5%)	4 (10.0%)	1 (2.5%)	2 (5.0%)	1.65
I pay attention to grammar structures when reading and listening.	30 (75.0%)	8 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1.38
I look for opportunities to practise grammar structure in many different ways.	29 (72.5%)	8 (20.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1.43
I try to find more effective ways of learning grammar.	31 (77.5%)	5 (12.5%)	2 (5.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1.40
I know my strengths and weaknesses when it comes to grammar.	27 (67.5%)	5 (12.5%)	5 (12.5%)	2 (5.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1.63
I have specific goals and objectives in learning grammar.	31 (77.5%)	6 (15.0%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.0%)	1.40
I schedule grammar reviews in advance.	34 (85.0%)	4 (10.0%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1.25
I pay attention to grammar structures in my own speaking and writing.	32 (80.0%)	4 (10.0%)	2 (5.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1.38
Total						11.52

From the data in Table 4, we observe that certain segments scored notably higher mean score, with a value of 1.65, while others scored lower, with a value of 1.25. These scores reflect the varying degrees of usage of metacognitive strategy. Metacognitive grammar strategies, as described by Chamot and O'Malley (1994), involve learners actively managing and being aware of their own thinking processes and cognitive abilities while tackling grammar learning tasks. These strategies encompass activities like planning, monitoring progress, and assessing one's grasp of grammar concepts. Therefore, when pupils mention the strategy "I preview the grammar structures to be covered in a lesson," it indicates their recognition that grammar topics are consistently included in each lesson. This demonstrates their awareness of the importance of grammar and their readiness to engage with it in their learning journey.

Table 5
Cognitive strategies used by pupils in learning English.

Cognitive Strategies	Part B1: GLS used to assist the production and comprehension of grammar in communication tasks.					
	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
I try to use specific grammar structures in communication (e.g. telling a story).	29 (72.5%)	3 (7.5%)	4 (10.0%)	2 (5.0%)	2 (5.0%)	1.63
I read for pleasure and watch television to improve my knowledge of grammar.	28 (70.0%)	5 (12.5%)	3 (7.5%)	2 (5.0%)	2 (5.0%)	1.63
I notice (or remember) structures that cause me problems with meaning or communication.	33 (82.5%)	3 (7.5%)	1 (2.5%)	2 (5.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1.38
I notice (or remember) structures that are repeated often in the text.	33 (82.5%)	4 (10.0%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.0%)	1.35
I notice (or remember) structures that are highlighted in a text by italics, boldface,underlining, etc..	32 (80.0%)	4 (10.0%)	2 (5.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1.38
I notice (or remember) structures that are emphasised orally through pitch, repetition, etc.	36 (90.0%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.0%)	1.25
I notice structures that are repeated extremely frequently in a short period of time (e.g. the past tense in a series of stories over the course of a few lessons).	32 (80.0%)	6 (15.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1.30
I pay attention to how more proficient people say things and then imitate.	22 (55.0%)	4 (10.0%)	4 (10.0%)	5 (12.5%)	5 (12.5%)	2.18
I compare my speech and writing with that of more proficient people to see how I can improve.	31 (77.5%)	6 (15.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1.38
I use Google or other search engines to see how a specific grammar structure is used in meaningful contexts.	38 (95.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1.18
Total						14.64
Cognitive Strategy	Part B2: GLS used to develop explicit knowledge of grammar.					
	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
I pay attention to rules provided by the teacher or coursebook.	36 (90.0%)	2 (5.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1.18
I try to understand every grammar rule.	37 (92.5%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1.18

Based on Table 5, part B for cognitive strategy is divided into four parts, B1, B2, B3 and B4. In part B1 which focuses on the production and comprehension of grammar in communication tasks shows the highest mean of 2.18 and the lowest, 1.18. This shows that the pupils prefer the strategy of "I pay attention to how more proficient people say things and then imitate". Proficiency in grammar enhances communication by facilitating language fluency and expression. When individuals possess a strong command of grammar rules and structures, they can articulate their thoughts more fluently and accurately, leading to smoother and more effective communication exchanges (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Additionally, proper grammar usage conveys professionalism and credibility, enhancing the impact of one's communication in academic, professional, and social settings (Crystal, 2003). Hence, paying attention to how proficient speakers use grammar and then imitating their language patterns can help pupils develop greater accuracy, fluency, and proficiency in grammar usage, ultimately leading to more effective communication.

Part B2 which focuses on developing explicit knowledge of grammar through cognitive strategy shows the highest mean of 1.33 and the lowest, 1.00. The first preferred strategy is "I work with others to discover grammar rules". Collaborating with others to discover grammar rules is pivotal for language learners due to various reasons. Firstly, it fosters a shared learning experience wherein learners engage in interactive discussions, exchange insights, and collectively explore grammar concepts (Slavin, 1996). This collaborative approach cultivates a sense of mutual support among learners. Secondly, collaborative learning exposes pupils to diverse perspectives and approaches, enriching their understanding of grammar rules from different angles (Bruffee, 1999). By participating in group activities and discussions, learners gain new insights and challenge their assumptions about grammar. The second preferred strategy for this part is "I memorise whole phrases containing specific language forms". Memorizing whole phrases containing specific language forms is crucial for language learners as it offers numerous benefits as it facilitates contextual learning by providing insight into how language forms are naturally used in real-life situations (Nation 2001). Additionally, memorizing whole phrases promotes fluency and automaticity in language production, enabling learners to recall and use common expressions effortlessly (Pawley & Syder 1983) Hence, pupils tend to memorise whole phrases containing specific language forms is essential for language learners as it supports contextual learning, natural language acquisition, fluency development, cultural understanding, and effective communication.

Part B3, focuses on the development of implicit knowledge of grammar. The highest mean score, 2.25 where pupils prefer the strategy " I try to apply new rules carefully and accurately in specific sentences (e.g. to complete a gap)" Applying new rules carefully and accurately in specific sentences is crucial for language learners across various aspects of language acquisition. Firstly, it ensures accuracy in communication, preventing misunderstandings and enabling learners to convey their intended meaning effectively (Thornbury, 2002). Secondly, it serves as an indicator of language proficiency, demonstrating that learners have internalized grammar rules and can use them appropriately in different contexts (Ellis, 2008). Hence, pupils are able to practice new rules in specific sentences, which helps them develop fluency, as they integrate grammar rules seamlessly into their speech and writing through repeated practice.

The last part, B4, focuses on how pupils deal with corrective feedback on errors in production of grammar. The highest mean score goes to the strategy "I pay attention to teacher correction when I do grammar exercises and try to repeat the correct version" (1.60).

Paying attention to teacher corrections during grammar exercises and repeating the correct version is crucial for language learners. Firstly, it allows learners to learn from their mistakes by providing valuable feedback on errors (Lightbown & Spada 2013). Secondly, repetition of the correct version reinforces proper grammar usage, helping learners internalize grammar structures (Thornbury 2002). Additionally, consistent practice and reinforcement of correct grammar usage contribute to building accuracy and fluency in language skills (Richards & Schmidt 2002). Being that said, pupils prefer to pay attention to teacher corrections and repeating the correct version during grammar exercises for learning from mistakes, reinforcing correct usage, building accuracy and fluency, facilitating effective communication, and building confidence in language proficiency.

Table 6
Affective GLS used by pupils in learning English

Affective Strategy	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
I try to relax when I have problems with understanding or using grammar structures.	23 (57.5%)	8 (20.0%)	8 (20.0%)	1 (15.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1.68
I encourage myself to practise grammar when I know I have problems with structure.	23 (57.5%)	4 (10.0%)	10 (25.0%)	3 (7.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1.83
I try to use grammar structures even when I am not sure they are correct.	18 (45.0%)	10 (25.0%)	10 (25.0%)	2 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1.90
I give myself a reward when I do well on a grammar test.	36 (90.0%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1.28
I notice when I feel tense or nervous when studying or using grammar structures.	36 (90.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1.25
I talk to other people about how I feel when learning grammar.	37 (92.5%)	2 (5.0%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1.10
I keep a language learning diary where I include comments about language learning.	40 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1.00
Total						10.04

From the information in Table 6, it is evident that a certain section receives a significantly higher mean score, reaching a value of 1.90, whereas the lowest score is 1.00. These scores illustrate the varying degrees of implementation of cognitive strategies. Cognitive grammar strategies entail learners' active involvement with grammar through a variety of cognitive processes, including analysis, synthesis, and problem-solving (Ellis, 2005). These strategies focus on understanding grammar rules and structures through mental activities and logical reasoning. Therefore, when pupils mention the strategy "I try to use grammar structures even when I am not sure they are correct," it suggests that they are developing a profound

understanding of grammar rules and structures. By employing cognitive processes such as analysis, synthesis, and problem-solving, students can better comprehend the underlying patterns and principles of grammar.

Table 7
Social GLS used by pupils in learning English.

Social Strategy	1	2	3	4	5	Mean
I ask the teacher to repeat or explain a grammar point if I do not understand.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.5%)	4 (10.0%)	35 (87.5%)	4.85
I ask the teacher or more proficient learners to help me with grammar structures.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.5%)	4 (10.0%)	35 (87.5%)	4.85
I like to be corrected when I make mistakes using grammar structures.	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	2 (5.0%)	36 (90.0%)	4.83
I practise grammar structures with other students.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (15.0%)	34 (85.0%)	4.85
I try to help others when they have problems with understanding or using grammar.	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	5 (12.5%)	32 (80.0%)	4.65
Total						24.03

According to Table 7, three items exhibit an identical mean score of 4.85, with the lowest at 4.65. Social grammar learning strategies entail collaborative interaction and engagement with peers or instructors to bolster grammar acquisition (Ellis, 2005). Among the most prevalent strategies employed by students in social contexts are "I ask the teacher to repeat or explain a grammar point if I do not understand" (4.85), "I ask the teacher or more proficient peers to assist me with grammar structures" (4.85), and "I practice grammar structures with other classmates" (4.85). These findings underscore the substantial utilization of social strategies by students, highlighting their propensity to seek assistance, exchange insights, and engage in grammar practice within authentic communicative settings.

Discussion
Research question: What is the most preferred language learning strategy among the students in low-enrollment schools in Sabah and Sarawak learning English Grammar?

Table 8
Ranking of Preferred Grammar Learning Strategy

Grammar Learning Strategy Categories	Total Mean Score	Ranking of Preferred Oxford's LLS
Metacognitive	11.54	3
Cognitive	16.54	2
Affective	10.04	4
Social	24.03	1

The total mean for each of the four language learning methods is shown in Table 8. According to the survey questionnaire results, the most common strategy language learners use in the low-enrollment schools in Sabah and Sarawak is social strategy, with a total mean score of 24.03. Due to the practicality of the strategy, this strategy has been ranked as the most used language learning strategy. The findings show that the student's language learning strategy often employed begins with social (24.03), cognitive (16.54), metacognitive (11.54) and affective (10.04).

Social learning strategies were assessed as the most common strategies among the students because they are inherently collaborative and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and skills. Students learn a lot in school by talking and working with peers or teachers. Social learning strategies promote a supportive learning environment and enhance grammar performance. The finding was supported by Juniar and Carisa (2020), who also discovered a preference for social learning strategies among students when learning grammar in class. Therefore, it is crucial for educators to incorporate these strategies into their teaching practices. By doing so, they can create a more engaging and effective learning experience that leverages the power of collaboration. Social learning strategies promote a supportive learning environment and enhance grammar performance. Emphasising social learning can lead to more proficient and confident use of grammar in real-world contexts. Ultimately, this approach not only improves grammar skills but also encourages active participation and deeper understanding of language concepts within the ESL classroom.

Implications and Conclusion

The result indicated that most students used social learning strategies to learn grammar. According to Cahyani et al (2022), engaging in grammar learning through interaction with teachers and peers can enhance enjoyment, motivation, and self-confidence and provide ample opportunities for direct grammar practice. Fostering cooperation through scaffolding, where teachers temporarily support learners, aligns closely with the social learning strategy. This method encourages collaboration and interaction among students and teachers, allowing learners to work together to understand grammar rules and concepts. For students who prefer social learning strategies, this approach enhances engagement, comprehension, and social skills by providing opportunities for peer interaction, feedback, and shared learning experiences, ultimately leading to a more effective grammar learning process. When one student assists another in understanding a concept or tackling a problem, it reinforces their understanding and cultivates a sense of shared responsibility for learning within the group (Feng, 2023).

Furthermore, establishing a supportive classroom environment that encourages social learning strategies is especially valuable for students who prefer this approach, particularly in grammar learning. Teachers should create a supportive environment where students feel comfortable. For example, teachers can give different grammar materials that are easy to understand, which helps students feel less anxious. Using pictures and visuals in class can also help students understand grammar better and keep them interested. It was found that the learning atmosphere supported them and that their peers assisted them in mastering the target language. When the students have difficulties learning, they, without a doubt, share their problems with others and let their friends help them learn more about the target language (Lestary & Wahyudin, 2020). Hence, the cultivation of a supportive learning environment encourages the utilisation of social learning strategies among peers, which in turn aids in grammar acquisition and contributes significantly to overall language proficiency.

Encouraging independent learning within the social learning strategy involves providing opportunities for students to explore grammar concepts on their own while still fostering collaboration with peers. Letting students learn independently can make learning grammar more fun and help them improve. Encouraging independent learning is another effective strategy for facilitating grammar acquisition among pupils. By empowering students to take charge of their learning, teachers foster a sense of ownership and autonomy, making learning grammar more enjoyable, entertaining, and appealing. Sharing discoveries with peers enhances collaborative learning and reinforces grammar concepts through social interaction. Promoting independent learning within a supportive social environment equips students with valuable skills, enhancing their engagement and motivation in mastering grammar. These shifts toward self-guided learning promote student independence and enhance overall learning outcomes in grammar proficiency. Survey findings suggest that pupils prefer visual aids to grasp grammar concepts, enabling them to comprehend the subject matter more effectively while mitigating the pressure associated with textual instruction alone. Furthermore, visual representations inspire and captivate students, fostering a deeper engagement with the material. Creative and imaginative depictions of grammar concepts or literary works can particularly resonate with pupils, further stimulating their interest in grammar learning (Lee, 2020).

In summary, the findings of this study provide compelling evidence that rural upper low-enrollment school areas in Sabah and Sarawak pupils prefer specific cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies when learning grammar. Grammar teachers must identify and employ strategies that resonate with their students and effectively facilitate grammar acquisition. Serving as facilitators of learning, teachers play a pivotal role in guiding students toward utilising efficient grammar strategies, thereby enhancing their proficiency in English grammar. Moreover, educators should be attuned to the individual strategy preferences of their students and adapt their grammar instruction accordingly. By doing so, teachers can create a more conducive learning environment tailored to their students' unique needs and learning styles. This personalised approach is likely to result in more effective grammar learning outcomes. Considering the evident prevalence of social strategies among students, educators may contemplate implementing a buddy system. Through this collaborative approach, students can engage more actively in their learning process alongside their peers. It promotes teamwork and allows less proficient students to learn and adopt effective grammar learning strategies from their more proficient peers. Ultimately, such collaborative efforts have the potential to enrich the grammar learning experience and contribute to overall academic success in English language proficiency.

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