Research Article

Language Acquisition Practices and Barriers of Taiwanese Elementary School ESL Learners

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

English is widely utilized as a lingua franca in today's globalized world for diverse purposes, including business, politics, education, and healthcare. Consequently, English as a Second Language (ESL) education has gained increasing importance, as proficiency in English is now considered essential for personal and professional growth. This study examined the language acquisition practices and barriers of Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners at Tucheng Elementary School during the 2024–2025 school year. All 43 learners participated through complete enumeration, with questionnaires administered during the first 15 minutes of class. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods, including frequency, percentage, mean, and independent f-tests and t-tests. Results revealed that learners frequently guessed word meanings through context but struggled with recognizing unfamiliar words. Memory and cognitive strategies, such as rhyming and phonetics, were widely used, while strategies like using flashcards or watching English programs were less practiced. Moreover, a significant difference was found in language barriers by gender ($p < 0.05$), indicating that female learners experienced slightly higher levels of communication anxiety compared to males. Learners also demonstrated metacognitive awareness and social interaction tendencies but seldom practiced with peers. These findings suggest the need for balanced, student-centered teaching approaches that integrate social and cognitive strategy training to enhance language learning outcomes among young Taiwanese ESL learners.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English today serves as the world's lingua franca, connecting people across business, politics, education, and healthcare (Rao, 2019; Dawi & Hashim, 2022). Its dominance continues to grow as global competition intensifies, making it increasingly important even in countries where it is not the native language. With English now recognized as the universal language of science, technology, and international cooperation (Huo, 2020), the study and teaching of English as a Foreign or Second Language (EFL/ESL) have taken center stage. The shift from teacher-centered instruction to learner-centered education has redefined language classrooms, encouraging learners to take ownership of their progress and focusing on the process of learning rather than the product alone (Ali & Zaki, 2019). Within this new paradigm, language learning strategies (LLS) have become a crucial element, as they help students consciously plan, monitor, and evaluate how they acquire language (Al-Jarf, 2019). While every person has an innate capacity to learn a language, mastering a second one demands persistence, consistent exposure, and purposeful practice using strategies that match learning goals (Adan & Hashim, 2021). In this context, learning strategies (LS) act as roadmaps that guide students toward achieving their objectives. As Cohen (1995) explained, these are intentional techniques that help students manage the learning process. Specifically, language learning strategies (LLS) are techniques devoted to language acquisition, while language barriers refer to both linguistic and psychological obstacles that impede communication, such as vocabulary gaps, pronunciation issues, or anxiety about speaking (Chien, 2010; Mahdi, 2024a). Numerous studies have shown that these barriers can weaken confidence and cause learners to withdraw from communicative tasks, often due to fear of making mistakes or struggling with limited vocabulary (Mahdi, 2024b; Savaşçı, 2014). When learners begin to associate communication with failure, their motivation and willingness to participate decline. Beyond individual limitations, broader systemic factors have also contributed to the challenges learners face in acquiring English. Research shows that weak planning, limited guidance, and unstructured lessons have led to subpar results in many contexts (Al-Tamimi, 2019a). Other studies highlight emotional and social difficulties shyness, fear, peer pressure, and anxiety as well as insufficient instructional strategies that fail to strengthen vocabulary for real-life use (Alrasheedi, 2020a). The COVID-19 pandemic further complicated matters. The sudden shift to online learning left many students struggling with technology, poor connectivity, and isolation, leading to decreased motivation and higher stress levels. Yet, some students found value in online platforms once they became familiar with them (Al-Samiri, 2021; Al-Oqaily et al., 2022). In many cases, low motivation and linguistic limitations created a cycle of avoidance that prevented active engagement (Alqurashi & Althubaiti, 2021; Musabal & AbdAlgane, 2023a).

Anxiety, in particular, has been identified as one of the most significant obstacles in language learning (Hakim, 2019). Students who view language learning as a threat to their self-image tend to avoid participation, limiting their practice and progress. Various studies confirm that learners face intertwined language, psychological, and material barriers that hinder their learning process (Nugroho et al., 2022a). For instance, pronunciation and vocabulary remain persistent challenges that affect fluency and comprehension, while poor classroom conditions, lack of feedback, and teacher-related factors can exacerbate these difficulties (Ghafar & Amin, 2022a). Research by Kheryadi and Hilmiyati (2021) and Franscy and Ramli (2022) showed that learners often struggle not only with grammar and vocabulary but also with anxiety and lack of involvement in class. These barriers reinforce each other, making it harder for students to express themselves freely and confidently.

Scholars have further pointed out that external factors such as teaching quality, the first language's influence, cultural differences, and limited access to learning resources also shape learners' experiences (Ramli et al., 2021; Alrabai, 2016). To overcome these, classroom environments must be designed to reduce fear, promote interaction, and encourage language use in authentic settings (Ghafar & Amin, 2022b). Teachers consistently report that pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns are among the most difficult areas for learners to master (Hwaider, 2017). Although some studies identify gender-based variations in challenges (Muhammed, 2017; Nadesan & Shah, 2020), others find no significant differences, suggesting that teaching approaches should be sensitive to individual needs rather than broad categories (Mahdi, 2024c; Maranatha & Sengkey, 2023; Nadila et al., 2022).

Parallel to this, a large body of research has explored how different language learning strategies contribute to performance. Studies reveal that metacognitive and cognitive strategies like goal setting, self-monitoring, repetition, and problem-solving consistently predict higher achievement, while social and compensation strategies support learners when they face communication breakdowns (Rao, 2016; An et al., 2021; Wael et al., 2018). Oxford's (2016) Strategic Self-Regulation (S2R) model remains a cornerstone in this area, emphasizing how learners combine cognitive, affective, motivational, and social strategies to self-direct learning. Research across cultural contexts, such as those by Habók et al. (2021) and Bećirović et al. (2021), confirms that while preferences vary, effective learners tend to employ a wider and more balanced range of strategies. However, not all learners use these strategies effectively, and some studies suggest that success depends more on how strategies are applied rather than how often they are used (Rianto, 2020; Charoento, 2017).

Within speaking-focused instruction, learners often rely on repetition and imitation to improve pronunciation and fluency, while compensation strategies like using gestures or synonyms help sustain interaction despite gaps in knowledge (Marpaung & Widyanotoro, 2020; Dorand, 2020). Social strategies, including collaboration and role-playing, promote confidence and engagement, especially in interactive, technology-based settings (Basalama et al., 2020; Istiqomah et al., 2019). Affective and memory-based strategies, though less common, can ease anxiety and aid retention by using emotional expression, imagery, and association (Pertiwi & Suwartono, 2019; Zou, 2022). Together, these strategies highlight the importance of teaching approaches that consider both emotional and cognitive aspects of learning.

Recent studies emphasize that teachers must first understand the strategies and barriers their students use before

implementing interventions (Garita, 2021). In online and hybrid learning environments, such understanding becomes even more critical to ensure that instructional methods remain effective (Sandorova & Betak, 2021). Learners who actively and consciously employ a variety of strategies consistently achieve better outcomes (Oxford, 1990; Dieu, 2023). Beyond linguistic competence, strategy training fosters confidence, self-awareness, and resilience qualities essential to becoming proficient and independent language users. To this end, several scholars recommend incorporating personality-aware pedagogy, cultural awareness, and communication strategy training that helps learners overcome anxiety and participate more fully in class (Nomatova, 2021; Kustati *et al.*, 2023; Pratama & Zainil, 2020; Mahdi, 2024d; Leonard, 2018).

Despite the abundance of international studies exploring language barriers and learning strategies, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these factors interact in Taiwanese elementary EFL classrooms, particularly among Grade 5 learners. In Taiwan, exposure to English is largely limited to school hours, where instruction often emphasizes grammar and test preparation over communication. Young learners rarely have opportunities for authentic language use outside the classroom, which affects both their motivation and their ability to internalize strategies effectively. While research in other Asian contexts such as Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Vietnam has examined barriers like anxiety, pronunciation, and limited vocabulary, these studies focus mainly on older or tertiary learners. Very few have captured the unique realities of Taiwan's early-grade learners, where cultural expectations, parental attitudes, and school-based pressures combine to shape the learning environment.

This study directly responds to that gap by examining the language learning strategies and barriers experienced by Grade 5 ESL learners at Tucheng Elementary School. It aims to identify which strategies these learners use most frequently, what specific linguistic and non-linguistic barriers they encounter, and how these insights can inform practical, locally grounded interventions that teachers can adopt in their classrooms. By connecting strategy use and learning obstacles within a single, real-world context, the study not only builds on global literature but also contributes context-specific understanding that reflects the lived experiences of Taiwanese students. In doing so, it seeks to provide educators and policymakers with evidence-based guidance for improving teaching practices, adjusting curricula, and fostering more inclusive and motivating learning spaces. Ultimately, the study hopes to enrich Taiwan's EFL landscape by highlighting the voices of its young learners and tailoring pedagogical responses to their distinct challenges something global studies have yet to fully achieve.

1.1. Conceptual framework

Language acquisition practices are actions made by the learner to aid in the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of knowledge. This may include learning techniques, behaviors, activities, learning to learn, problem-solving, and study skills. Relatively, language learning practices are specific behaviors, actions, or procedures that learners use to learn the input, understanding, and output of the target language in order to make learning more

fun, efficient, and effective. Regardless of what they are called, strategies can improve learning efficiency and effectiveness. Language acquisition strategies are beneficial in both formal, academic contexts and informal, non-academic environments that is, for both learning and acquisition. The purpose of this paper is to assess the language acquisition practices used by grade 5 learners to move toward proficiency or competence in English as a second or foreign language.

Moreover, to look into the language acquisition practices and language barriers faced by Taiwanese ESL learners, few demographic profiles were considered such as age and gender. Therefore, age-wise young learners are more apt at picking up pronunciation and phonology due to brain plasticity. They are however less able to pick up advanced grammar and lexis in the absence of proper scaffolding. Older learners have more advanced cognitive capabilities to learn the rules of grammar but are less able to achieve native-like pronunciation. They are also likely to employ translation more and grapple with worry about getting things wrong, which hinders practice.

While, as far as gender is concerned studies show that gender differences can influence motivation and attitudes towards language learning. For example, girls perform better than boys in language learning at lower grade levels due to possibly communication and social orientations. Girls will also be more comfortable in language-based settings, while boys may perform better in more kinesthetic, task-oriented activities. Such inclinations, however, vary according to cultural orientations and must be approached cautiously to avoid stereotypes.

Consequently, to examine their language acquisition practices, six dimensions were focused in this study such as direct strategies memory, cognitive, and compensation and indirect strategies metacognitive, affective, and social.

Direct strategies are those that work with the target language directly such as mental processing of the language. These approaches encompass cognitive, memory, and compensatory techniques. Since they aid in information recovery and storage, the direct strategies are advantageous to the pupils.

Memory strategies are a type of strategy stated by Oxford to have been utilized for thousands of years; they are also known as mnemonics. It is a technique designed expressly to assist learners in retaining new information and retrieving it later. Memory tactics are direct strategies that involve grouping techniques, imagery, and mental associations. This strategy aids learners in retrieving and storing information, which is fundamental for building language proficiency.

Cognitive strategies are defined as those that help learners engage with the content by mentally organizing the pieces into groups or making notes of key details that they want to remember. It is a skill that involves manipulation or alteration of the language in some direct way, e.g., through reasoning, analysis, note keeping, functional practice in naturalistic settings, formal practice with structures and sounds, etc. Cognitive methods are straightforward techniques that support language learners in producing and comprehending the target language. These consist of translating word knowledge from one language to another, taking notes, reasoning, summarizing, and analyzing, helping learners to apply language rules and patterns.

Compensation strategies are activities used to compensate for

knowledge gaps, such as inferring (guessing) while listening or reading, or employing synonyms or circumlocution while speaking or writing. In other definitions, it is a technique that allows learners to utilize language to fill gaps in their target language. They involve guesses, gestures, and synonyms. It is important for language learners to solve knowledge limiting difficulties in order to understand and produce language, fostering confidence and smoother interactions.

Indirect strategies are approaches to support language learning indirectly such as metacognitive, affective, and social methods. Using goals, planning, organization, and practice opportunities help language learners take charge of their cognitive processes. Metacognitive strategies are the first technique described by Oxford as an indirect strategy that serves to manage learning in general. It focuses on centering, organizing, planning, and evaluating learning or it is a behavior used to center, organize, plan, and assess one's learning. These "beyond-the-cognitive" strategies are employed to exert "executive control" over the learning process. Metacognitive strategies help learners organize their learning process, such as arranging, planning, organizing and evaluating learning, setting goals, and paying attention promoting autonomy and self-reflection for more targeted improvement.
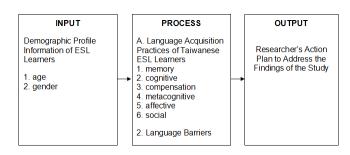
Affective strategies include techniques such as self-reinforcement and positive self-talk that assist learners in gaining greater control over their language learning-related emotions, attitudes, and motivations. According to Oxford, affective methods are vital for controlling language learners' emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values. They help learners manage emotions like anxiety or frustration, which can otherwise hinder their language progress.

Social strategies are behaviors that engage other individuals in the language learning process. Examples include questioning, cooperating with peers, and developing empathy. It is the final approach listed by Oxford, who emphasizes that language and social activity are inextricably linked because language is actualized through communication. Social strategies support interaction with others, facilitating practical language practice and the acquisition of cultural nuances.

In addition to examining the language learning processes, there is a need to comprehend ESL learners' language barriers because such barriers have direct implications for their ability to understand content, communicate effectively, and participate fully in academic and social environments. Having established these barriers, teachers can set up supportive measures that can enhance learning outcomes and reduce the possibility of frustration or exclusion for ESL learners. Common hindrances are limited vocabulary, especially for formal words; difficulty with grammar and sentence structures fundamentally different from the home language; difficulties with pronunciation, which can undermine confidence in speaking; and limited exposure to cultural context in language, like idioms, expressions, and humor, which typically lie in usage. Additionally, ESL students can have difficulty processing speed for language, and it becomes challenging to follow instructions or contribute input to dialogue as quickly as native speakers. By overcoming these challenges through special support, for example, vocabulary building, formal practice of grammar, pronunciation exercises,

and cultural context exposure, ESL students can overcome language obstacles and academically achieve.

In conclusion, understanding and addressing language acquisition practices and language barriers are crucial for supporting ESL learners' academic success and personal development. By recognizing the diverse challenges they face, educators can implement strategies that foster a more inclusive and effective learning environment. Such awareness not only bridges communication gaps but also encourages ESL learners to confidently engage, ensuring that they thrive in both language acquisition and broader educational pursuits. Subsequently, when these variables are assessed, the researcher will craft an action plan to address the findings of the study.

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Figure 1. Paradigm of the study

1.2. Research questions

To assess the language acquisition practices and barriers of Taiwanese ESL learners at Tucheng Elementary School, the study answered the following queries:

i. What is the demographic profile information of the Taiwanese ESL learners in terms of their:
- gender; and
- age?

ii. What is the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners in the following dimensions:
- memory;
- cognitive;
- compensation;
- metacognitive;
- affective; and
- social?

iii. Is there a significant difference in the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile?

iv. What is the extent of language barriers of Taiwanese ESL learners?

v. Is there a significant difference in the extent of language

barriers of Taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile?

vi. What is the researcher's action plan to address the findings of the study?- training of local trainers, action plan or teachers' capability building in teaching English

1.3. Null hypotheses

In light of aforementioned proceedings, the following assertions were advanced:

i. There is no significant difference in the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile.

ii. There is no significant difference in the extent of language barriers of Taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The acquisition of English as a Second Language (ESL) relies heavily on learners' ability to employ effective strategies that enhance comprehension, communication, and retention. Oxford's (2016) Strategic Self-Regulation (S2R) Model underscores the role of cognitive, metacognitive, and affective processes in self-directed learning, where students consciously monitor and adjust their strategies to improve outcomes. Studies conducted across diverse contexts (Rao, 2016; Wael *et al.*, 2018; Habók *et al.*, 2021) reveal that successful learners integrate multiple strategies such as contextual guessing, repetition, and social interaction to reinforce linguistic competence. However, other research (Charoento, 2017; Rianto, 2020) contends that effectiveness depends less on strategy frequency and more on how learners adapt these techniques to local classroom realities and individual motivation.

Despite the benefits of strategy use, barriers remain a persistent challenge in second language acquisition. Emotional and linguistic constraints such as anxiety, limited vocabulary, and pronunciation difficulties continue to affect learners' willingness to communicate (Hakim, 2019; Nugroho *et al.*, 2022). Studies emphasize that fear of errors and social embarrassment can hinder oral participation and self-confidence (Ghafar & Amin, 2022; Pertiwi & Suwartono, 2019). These affective barriers often coexist with systemic issues, including teacher-centered pedagogy and minimal exposure to authentic language contexts (Al-Tamimi, 2019; Alrasheedi, 2020). In collectivist Asian settings, the emphasis on examination success and cultural norms of restraint further discourage active engagement and experimentation in language learning (Ramli *et al.*, 2021; Bećirović *et al.*, 2021).

While extensive literature has examined language learning strategies among adolescent and tertiary learners, limited research explores how elementary school students, particularly in Taiwan, navigate language learning processes and barriers. Most Taiwanese classrooms still prioritize grammar-based instruction and rote memorization over communicative competence, restricting opportunities for meaningful language use (Hsu, 2017; Chang & Ku, 2022). Consequently, younger learners often depend on repetition or translation rather than on strategy-based learning that fosters autonomy and confidence. Gender-related studies have shown mixed findings, with some indicating that female learners demonstrate higher motivation and anxiety levels than males (Nadesan & Shah, 2020; Mahdi,

2024), suggesting the need for differentiated instruction tailored to learner profiles.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the interplay between language acquisition practices and barriers among Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners. It situates global strategy theories within the local educational context to illuminate how cultural norms, teaching practices, and emotional factors shape learners' experiences. By synthesizing global insights with Taiwan's early-grade realities, this research contributes a context-specific understanding of how young learners develop, regulate, and struggle with language acquisition strategies thereby informing pedagogical approaches that promote balanced, student-centered, and anxiety-reducing ESL instruction.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter discussed the methodology such as the overview of the research design, the study's geographical context, the population being examined, the sample size and sampling strategies, the research tools employed, and the statistical procedures for data analysis.

3.1. Research design

To assess attributes and any variations among the variables, language acquisition practices and barriers of Taiwanese ESL learners at Tucheng Elementary School a descriptive comparative design was carried out. When using a descriptive comparative approach, descriptive data from several categories such as gender, age, and educational attainment are contrasted. Additionally, it addresses the what, where, when, and how questions and depicts events in a methodical and correct manner (Alsawalqa, 2021; Nurse Key, 2017).

3.2. Research environment

In April of the 11th year of the Republic of China, the school was approved to establish the 72nd branch of the Beimen Teaching Center, using private houses to hold classes. In June of the same year, a new building was constructed in the city (No. 195 Tucheng Road). It was independently named in the 24th year of the Republic of China. Tucheng Public School rebuilt a new campus at No. 32 Chengdong Lane (the current site of the school) on September 29. In August of the 34th year of the Republic of China, it was renamed Tucheng National School in Annan District, Tainan City. In January of the following year, it was renamed again. In the 57th year of the Republic of China, the government fully implemented the nine-year national education system, and the school was renamed Tucheng national primary school.

Tucheng Elementary School presently has 47 Grade 5 learners. Conducting the research study in this particular school allows a more focused and contextually rich analysis of educational dynamics and learner demographics in terms of language acquisition and language barriers in English. Moreover, learning English as a second language brings forth various challenges associated with nationality and cultural identity. These factors encompass the necessity of preserving fluency in one's first language, adapting to varying educational practices, managing societal expectations regarding language proficiency, comprehending cultural subtleties in English-speaking settings,

and reconciling language learning with one's cultural identity and pride. Individual factors such as extracurricular involvement, attitudes towards the English language, and preferred learning styles add layers of complexity to the experience. Additionally, the researcher is familiar with Tucheng Elementary School's resources, administrative systems, and infrastructure, which facilitated the research process. Her established relationships also with colleagues, faculty, and staff enhanced collaboration and streamline the process of seeking support. Conducting this research within her designated school can contribute to enhancing the teaching methodologies for both Local and Foreign English teachers, ensuring optimal English learning.

3.3. Respondents of the study
To examine the language acquisition practices and barriers of Taiwanese ESL learners, the study was able to gather 43 ESL learners from grade 5 level at Tucheng Elementary School in the 2024-2025 school year. Given that all learners are ESL learners, a complete enumeration technique was used. This sampling method is employed in surveys and data analysis to evaluate every element within a specific set. It consists of selecting, acquiring, and quantifying a segment of the population to provide a representative sample based on defined criteria. This approach is particularly beneficial for small sample sizes, as it enables an accurate assessment by considering the entire distribution of the test statistic (Patil *et al.*, 2010).

The distribution of the aforementioned respondents in Tucheng Elementary School is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents of the study

Section	Learners
Grade 5 learners	43
Total	43

3.4. Data gathering procedures
The researcher initiated the study by seeking approval from the principal and academic director to allow her to gather information on language acquisition practices and barriers of Taiwanese ESL learners. She also obtained consent from parents or guardians through a permit letter. During the waiting period for the permit and informed consent, the researcher prepared a set of questionnaires for all grade 6 ESL learners at Tucheng Elementary School. Once the necessary approvals were secured, the researcher distributed the questionnaire at the beginning of class, dedicating the first 15 minutes to this task. She thoroughly explained the study's objectives, the confidentiality of the learners, and the proper completion of the questionnaire. Additionally, she ensured that all learners comprehend the instructions and encouraged them to ask questions. After the completion of the questionnaires, the researcher personally collected all materials. The gathered data then underwent tallying and statistical analysis. To maintain the confidentiality of the learners, all completed questionnaires were shredded after the data had been interpreted and discussed. The researcher initiated the data gathering process in November 2024 and finished February 2025.

3.5. Data gathering instrument
The instrument of the study was a questionnaire attached in Appendix B. This questionnaire encompassed 3 sections. The first section intended to gather demographic information of the learners, focusing on their age and gender. The second section evaluated the learners' self-reported language acquisition practices covering aspects such as memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. This portion was adapted from Dahmash's (2023) study, "*An Investigation of Language Learning Strategies Used by Female Saudi EFL Students.*" It underwent slight modifications, including the reduction of indicators to those pertinent to the study's context and the alignment of indicators with the capabilities of grade 5 learners. This section included 29 items. The third section examined the extent of language barriers faced by learners in their pursuit of English as a second language. This portion was fully adopted from Wangdi's (2022) study on "A Study of Grade Six Students' Difficulties in Learning English Vocabulary in Wangduephodrang District Bhutan." Additionally, to facilitate better understanding and reduce potential bias, the questionnaire was translated into a simplified Chinese version.

3.6. Statistical treatment
In order to analyze the data, a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed. This encompassed frequency and percentage calculations, mean values, and the use of independent f-test and t-tests.

To determine the percentage distribution of the demographic profiles of the Taiwanese ESL learners in terms of their age and gender frequency and percentage calculations were utilized.

Moreover, to calculate the mean values on the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners in the following dimensions such as memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social; and the extent of language barriers of Taiwanese ESL learners mean was used.

Whereas, to look into the significant difference in the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile; and the significant difference in the extent of language barriers of Taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile independent f-test and t-test analyses were employed. All statistical analyses were conducted at a significance level of 0.05, ensuring rigorous scrutiny and interpretation of the findings.

The subsequent table featured the four-point Likert scale designed to measure the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners at Tucheng Elementary School, covering aspects such as memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies:

Table 2. Rating scale

Scale	Range	Descriptive Equivalent	Qualitative Description
4	3.26-4.00	Always [A]	Very Highly Practiced
3	2.51-3.25	Often [O]	Highly Practiced
2	1.76-2.50	Sometimes [S]	Moderately Practiced
1	1.00-1.75	Rarely [R]	Least Practiced

Moreover, the subsequent table featured the four-point Likert scale designed to measure the extent of language barriers of Taiwanese ESL learners:

Table 3. Scale

Scale	Range	Descriptive Equivalent	Qualitative Description
4	3.26-4.00	Always [A]	Very Much of a Problem
3	2.51-3.25	Often [O]	Much of a Problem
2	1.76-2.50	Sometimes [S]	Somewhat of a Problem
1	1.00-1.75	Rarely [R]	Least of a Problem

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussions of the results of the study are presented in this chapter. This chapter also includes the presentation of the analysis, interpretations, and implications of the study.

4.1. Profile of the respondents

Table 4 presents the demographic profile information of the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners in terms of their gender and age. As gleaned in the table, the majority of Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners at Tucheng Elementary School are 11-12 years old, with a total of 24, comprising 55.81% of the total population, followed by those in the age range of 10-11 years old, with a total of 19 or 44.19%. Evidently, no (0%) grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners are between 12-13 and 14 years and above. Evidently, no Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners fall within the 12-13 or 14 years and above categories. This finding indicates that language acquisition practices in ESL learning at this level are primarily shaped by learners within a specific developmental stage, thus emphasizing the need for age-appropriate teaching strategies.

As to sex, most of the grade 5 ESL Taiwanese learners at Tucheng Elementary School are male, with a total of 22 (51.16%) and female learners have a total of 21, comprising 48.84% of the total population of the study. This small gender difference indicates that both male and female learners have almost equal participation in ESL learning; thus, there is a need for instructional approaches that cater to diverse learning preferences regardless of gender.

The study includes 43 Grade 5 ESL Taiwanese learners who took part in it at Tucheng Elementary School. The sample is fairly representative of the practices and challenges in language acquisition at this level within a typical academic setting; the results could therefore be taken as suggestions for further intervention actions to improve proficiency in English.

Table 4. Profile of the respondents

Profile	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age		
10-11 years old	19	44.19
11-12 years old	24	55.81
12-13 years old	0	0
14 years old and above	0	0
Sex		
Male	22	51.16
Female	21	48.84
Total	43	100.00

4.2. Level of language acquisition practices of taiwanese ESL learners

This section presents the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners in terms of memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social.

4.3. Memory

The level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners regarding memory at Tucheng Elementary School is presented in Table 3. The results of the findings were that using rhymes to remember new English words was highly practiced among Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners with a mean of 2.57. This finding suggests that Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL students of Tucheng Elementary School consider rhymes as a significant mnemonic technique in learning English vocabulary. This is also consistent with the instructional style of ESL teachers, who frequently make use of songs, chants, and rhyme activities to make learning more enjoyable. The highly structured elementary education system in Taiwan, which involves the use of repetition as an instructional tool, will help make this method most effective. Students are also constantly exposed to rhyming devices through children's literature, the media, and classroom exercises, making it a familiar and comfortable learning method.

From Otchere-Larbi and Amoah (2020), one of the most culturally rich and captivating resources, easily utilizable in a classroom setting, and offering a much-needed break from soporific class activities, is rhymes. Lefebvre *et al.* (2015) quoted further that nursery rhymes belong to an approved tradition of work with children at early years' stages. Numerous generations of kids have studied and memorized nursery rhymes at home and school. Pourkalhor & Tavakoli (2017) further observe that the majority of children are fascinated with singing songs, and they can effectively transform their habitual way of learning a foreign language through rhythmic sounds for educational purposes.

Moreover, Magbule's (2016) research paper in Kosovo found that songs, rhymes, and chants are effective tools for the acquisition of a foreign language in a play atmosphere without exerting pressure on children that they are learning a new language. They are replete with lexicon as they use natural language. The repetition and musicality of these tools provide important support to learners for the learning of new expressions. When

teaching a second language to beginners, it is easier for them to sing or recite a rhyme in English than it is to communicate personal information, wants, or needs. Similarly, Grofcikova and Macajova (2021) established that the use of rhyming activities in teaching English (a second language) to young children, was effective in developing phonological awareness if it was fun and interesting. Young children love singing and picking up vocabulary and sentence structures and the rhythm of the language becomes simple through music. According to Conesa and Rubio (2015), rhymes and songs also play an important role in teaching English as a foreign language in primary school. Rhymes and songs relate important didactic claims with fun, activity, and motivation. Just by accident, children get to know parts of the foreign culture and treat it as part of enrichment for their own life. According to Adu (2018), redundancy on the part of rhymes helps children commit vocabulary and rhythm about language learn to memorize the lyrics of the rhyme quickly, and develop some skills of listening and comprehension. Reciting and acting out scenes from stories and rhymes are good language skills builders. Songs, chants, and rhymes are an integral part of a quality early childhood program since they are not only fun, but they carry enormous educational value and thus require to be taught to learners of early childhood education. Educators utilize the rhymes for many reasons, including supporting transitions, as a way of enriching thematic units, and as a motivator to focus children and have them get their bodies moving. According to Redig (2018), in the early childhood classroom, introducing experiences with music supports the English language learner in developing literacy skills.

On the other hand, they moderately practiced the use of flashcards to remember new English words, with a mean of 1.90. The moderate use of flashcards implies that, although they are a part of ESL instruction, they are not the main tool for memory retention. ESL teachers in Taiwan often include flashcards in their lessons, but students are more accustomed to learning in a structured way through textbooks and teacher-led activities. The importance of workbook exercises and written drills in Taiwanese classrooms minimizes the chances of independent and interactive learning strategies like flashcards. Additionally, the preference for classroom-based instruction over self-study limits students' engagement with flashcards outside of guided activities.

However, Muhyiddin (2019) mentioned that teaching English to young learners needs media to help the teachers deliver the materials since the media is the channel of communication. The media help deliver information and can help to make the teaching process simple and perfect such as the use of Flashcards. Muhyiddin, (2019) also mentioned that Flashcard media does not only enhance the ability to listen, speak read, and write but flashcards can also train the abilities of students in vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and spelling. Additionally, Widya et al., 2018 stated that flashcards are practical media to help teachers and students in the teaching and learning process, especially in teaching students.

Studies (Aulia 2018; Harisanty et al. 2020) on teaching creative writing using flashcards suggest many advantages in language teaching. These include consolidating vocabulary, and

motivating learners by gaining interest. They can be used for any age group or ability group of learners, are portable and can be used at any time, can be arranged to create a logical grouping of the target words, are cost-effective, offer a visual link to second language learners, and can be used for practicing structure and word order or for a variety of games. In addition to student vocabulary improvement, flashcards help with foreign language comprehension (Harisanty et al., 2020). Flashcards that have images may give meaning to abstract ideas faced by ESL learners (Sartika 2020). Flashcards are considered a medium of explanation through which teachers may elucidate the meaning of ideas while diversifying strategies in class Aulia (2018). Flashcards are used in presenting learning material in an attractive way and facilitate understanding of explanations made by the teachers (Sartika 2020).

Generally, the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners moderately practiced the use of memory for their language acquisition, with an overall mean of 2.29. This result implies that memory strategies are moderately used in Taiwanese ESL classrooms, reflecting a balanced but structured approach to language learning. ESL teachers follow a curriculum that prioritizes reading, writing, and exam preparation, shaping how students develop their memory skills. The education system's strong focus on academic performance leads to structured drills being more common than varied memory techniques. To further improve language acquisition, incorporating more interactive memory strategies alongside traditional methods can help reinforce vocabulary retention and enhance student engagement.

Consistent with this, Abbassi et al. (2018) discuss that a sequence of memory strategies slowly accumulates improvement in their remembering and recalling words. Similarly, Alzaidi (2018) states that the use of strategies in class enables learners to monitor their performance and view the English language as a system and as a medium of communication. Aljurbuja (2020) emphasizes that memory teaching strategies help learners to learn, memorize, and rehearse vocabulary. Mohamad et al. (2021) assert that memory methods as a learning approach in vocabulary learning are more productive than employing word records.

Additionally, memory strategies possess the flexibility to modify themselves to suit students' specific needs, an important feature in second-language acquisition (AlJafar, 2019). Nguyen and Gu (2022) are convinced that the successful implementation of memory strategies is a key aspect of assisting language learners in achieving maximum retention and competence with words in classroom contexts. A number of advantages are observed in employing memory strategies in the improvement of English vocabulary learning and remembering, including improved retention, vocabulary knowledge, recall and recognition, better language processing, greater confidence, skilled communication ability, and lasting language capacity, as noted by Liu et al. (2021).

The work of Agila Salazar and Agila Salazar (2024) shows that participants are convinced that memory strategies help to learn and memorize English words. Such memory strategies connect new words or ideas with existing ones, and students improve their understanding and recall. Developing mental connections allows for information organization in a more meaningful way, so it can be recalled more readily. Song and Lee (2021)

argue that creating mental linkages, using pictures and sound, summarizing properly, and utilizing action strategies may help with the memory process due to other forms of input to the sensory apparatus. One can relate new vocabulary through images, sounds, or even gestures and recall it more easily (AI-Khresheh & AI-Ruwaili, 2020).

Table 5. Level of language acquisition practices of taiwanese ESL learners in terms of memory

Part A – Memory	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	2.19	Moderately Practiced
I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	2.45	Moderately Practiced
I connect the sound of a new English word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word.	2.50	Moderately Practiced
I use rhymes to remember new English words.	2.57	Highly Practiced
I use flashcards to remember new English words.	1.90	Moderately Practiced
I physically act out new English words.	1.93	Moderately Practiced
I review English lessons often.	2.48	Moderately Practiced
Overall Mean	2.29	Moderately Practiced

4.4. Cognitive

Table 6 presents the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners in terms of cognitive skills at Tucheng Elementary School. As gleaned in the table, Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners highly practiced the sounds of English, with a mean of 2.69. This result indicates that Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners at Tucheng Elementary School prioritize practicing the sounds of the target language as one of the main cognitive strategies for language learning. The strength in pronunciation reveals that ESL teachers pay more emphasis on phonetic exercises, oral drills, and repetition to support the development of students' correct speech patterns. The structured approach in Taiwanese classrooms, where oral recitation and pronunciation practice are common, supports this finding. Additionally, mastering English sounds is crucial for effective communication, making it a fundamental aspect of ESL instruction.

Derwing and Munro (2015) and Jones (2018) highlighted that pronunciation is a fundamental component of communicative competence since it permeates all spheres of human life, in which the speaker and the hearer work together to produce and understand each other's utterances. In second language (L2) learning, learners who have pronunciation problems are less likely to be properly understood in oral communication irrespective of their excellent grammar and vocabulary (Foote and Trofimovich, 2018). Moreover, pronunciation enhances learners' ability to decode spoken English more efficiently (Seyedabadi *et al.*, 2015), and research has shown that pronunciation instruction improves listening skills (Ahangari *et al.*, 2015; Kissling, 2018). In this respect, good pronunciation provides grounds for L2 learners' subsequent development of oral skills.

From a teaching perspective, teachers hold strongly to the belief that pronunciation instruction plays a very important or crucial role in the lives of their students across almost all contexts and situations (Darcy, 2018). For instance, the teachers in the research of Couper (2017) cited that pronunciation is an integral part of English learning that helps their learners achieve communicative success. Interestingly, the teacher participants in Nguyen's (2019) study reported pronunciation to be the most important of all language skills. Other studies have also reported that students regarded pronunciation as an important feature in learning English (Levis, 2015; Pardede, 2018). In general, these studies indicate that students well acknowledged their pronunciation problems and showed a great interest in learning pronunciation. However, Nguyen and Newton (2020) reported that only half or less of the time was spent on pronunciation. They also found that pronunciation activities are often not planned, but instead occur infrequently. During some lessons, pronunciation is brought up several times whereas sometimes it is neglected (Foote *et al.*, 2016).

On the other hand, watching English language TV shows ranked last, with a mean of 1.83, interpreted as moderately practiced. The results show that watching English-language TV programs is the least used cognitive strategy, which means that the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL students are not exposed to authentic English media. This is because they prefer Mandarin-language content, have limited screen time at home, and cannot understand naturally spoken English without subtitles. ESL classrooms in Taiwan have structured lesson plans, which leaves little room for using TV shows as a learning tool. Also, the rapid speech and informal expressions in English media pose comprehension challenges and make students less willing to take up this method.

A study by Poštic (2015) found that students who were born in a non-English country but had watched American cartoons in childhood developed an American accent over time. This vital development occurs with little effort and almost without their realization. Therefore, watching cartoons allows a young learner to immerse himself in a foreign culture, which creates an environment for learning and acquiring the English language. Several researchers (San Jose & Vicencio, 2018; Sipra *et al.*, 2016; Nurhayati, 2015) have emphasized that watching TV cartoons is interesting and enjoyable to children and creates instinctive motivation to view and continue watching

(Prosic-Santovac, 2017). Moreover, Morales *et al.* (2017) showed that when children watch cartoons in English, they can learn to stress certain words and present the required meaning during communication because cartoon characters exaggerate their speech, which makes it possible for learners to differentiate words through intonation.

Overall, the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners moderately practiced the use of cognitive for their language acquisition, with an overall mean of 2.26. This result implies that overall, cognitive strategies are moderately practiced, indicating that while students engage in structured classroom-based learning, their independent cognitive learning outside school is limited. The education system's emphasis on structured instruction contributed to this, as students rely more on teacher-led activities than self-directed cognitive learning strategies. To improve language acquisition, increasing opportunities for

exposure to real-world English such as incorporating more multimedia resources, interactive listening activities, and student-led discussions could help students develop a more comprehensive understanding of the language.

In the study of Dawadi (2017), learners indicated that this cognitive strategy is associated with limitations in producing the language. This affects introvert learners as they are not as active as extrovert learners. Learners also acknowledge the importance of speaking skills to practice what they have learned (Altay & Saracaloglu, 2017). Other than that, learners repeat sounds to improve their pronunciation when learning speaking skills (Wael *et al.*, 2018). Cognitive strategies were used by learners in practicing, receiving, and sending messages, followed by creating sentence structures by taking notes (Salam *et al.*, 2020). Cognitive strategies also help learners to enrich their vocabulary (Marpaung & Widyanotoro, 2020).

Table 6. Level of language acquisition practices of taiwanese ESL learners in terms of cognitive

Part B – Cognitive	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
I say or write new English words several times.	2.52	Highly Practiced
I practice the sounds of English.	2.69	Highly Practiced
I start conversations in English.	2.00	Moderately Practiced
I watch English language TV shows.	1.83	Moderately Practiced
Overall Mean	2.26	Moderately Practiced

4.5. Compensation

Table 7 presents the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners in terms of compensation at Tucheng Elementary School. The findings revealed that the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners highly practiced making guesses to understand unfamiliar English words, with a mean of 2.98. This finding suggests that Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL students at Tucheng Elementary School engage in guessing strategies as a means to comprehend unfamiliar English words, hence a major compensation strategy in their language acquisition. The common deployment of this strategy is supported by ESL teachers who integrate context-based learning, reading comprehension exercises, and vocabulary development activities into the curriculum. Taiwanese learners are also ready to infer from standardized tests, where they read unfamiliar words and phrases without necessarily translating them literally. The existence of English texts with minimal translation also compels them to rely on the context to interpret new words, further consolidating their ability.

Conversely, the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL students moderately utilized gestures when they could not remember a word while communicating in English with a mean of 2.26. The findings reflect that students employ gestures less when they are unable to remember words, suggesting the systematic character of Taiwan's ESL teaching. Educational work in schools stresses verbal clarity and grammatical correctness, refraining from any major emphasis on nonverbal communication as a stopgap assistance. The academic curriculum's overconcentration on writing and reading rather than on speaking English also limits the opportunities available for students to practice using body

gestures while expressing themselves in English. Secondly, Taiwanese culture itself prefers calm and formal expressions, and thus more students do not want to make use of body language when speaking English. These all cumulatively result in a rate of gesture usage lower than the guessing strategy usage.

Overall, the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL students highly practiced the application of compensation for their language learning, with a general mean of 2.57. This result indicates that compensation strategies are effectively integrated into Taiwanese ESL classrooms, with students demonstrating a high ability to continue conversations regardless of language differences. The high overall mean of 2.57 supports the fact that the students are acquiring valuable problem-solving skills in effective communication. The lesser use of gestures, however, indicates a lack of competence in applying varied modes of communication techniques. To counter this, ESL instructors should include more engaging activities like role-playing, real-life conversation settings, and group discussions, which will make students more willing to employ verbal and nonverbal strategies to improve their English skills.

The use of compensation strategies was highlighted in the findings (Alhaysony, 2017; Dawadi, 2017; Dorand, 2020; Fussalam & Kurniawan, n.d.; Grisales & Cruz, 2017; Lestari & Wahyudin, 2020; Marpaung & Widyanotoro, 2020; Muslimin, 2019; Salam *et al.*, 2020; Saputra & Subekti, 2017; Syafryadin *et al.*, 2020; Taheri *et al.*, 2020; Wael *et al.*, 2018; Wahyuni, 2019; Zakaria *et al.*, 2018). 15 out of 40 articles mentioned that compensation strategies were the most frequently used in learning speaking skills. Another study also highlighted

compensation strategies as the second most favored strategies, as learners depended on this strategy especially when they need to produce the language (Dawadi, 2017). Compensation strategies help learners to improve their fluency in speaking skills (Marpaung & Widyanotoro, 2020). Syafryadin *et al.* (2020) found that competent and poor learners both use compensation strategies differently in delivering intended messages. Compensation strategies act as an alternative strategy in guiding learners to overcome difficulties in mastering the language (Syafryadin *et al.*, 2020). When learners are lost for words, they use gestures, mime, or synonyms to get the message across. The findings indicated that learners were aware of their language limitations when they used compensation strategies in speaking (Wahyuni, 2019).

Further, Gül Peker and Erdemir (2021) have studied and discussed compensation strategy instruction (CSI), and according to them, the results suggest that "learners can be taught how to use compensation strategies and that CSI may be useful for improving learners' communicative competence in a speaking class.

Table 7. Level of language acquisition practices of taiwanese ESL learners in terms of compensation

Part C – Compensation	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	2.98	Highly Practiced
When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	2.26	Moderately Practiced
I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	2.56	Highly Practiced
If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	2.50	Moderately Practiced
Overall Mean	2.57	Highly Practiced

4.6. Metacognitive

Table 8 presents the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners in terms of metacognitive at Tucheng Elementary School. The Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners highly practiced trying to find out how to be a better learner of English, with a mean of 2.80. This result implies that Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners at Tucheng Elementary School actively seek ways to improve their English learning, making self-improvement a key aspect of their metacognitive strategies. This high level of practice suggests that students are aware of their learning needs and take deliberate steps to enhance their language skills. ESL teachers reinforce this behavior by guiding students to reflect on their learning processes, set personal language goals, and adopt effective study habits. Additionally, Taiwan's education system, which emphasizes academic excellence, encourages students to develop self-directed learning strategies to perform well in language assessments and classroom activities.

On the contrary, the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners moderately practiced looking for opportunities to read as much as possible in English, with a mean of 1.90. The findings indicate that students only moderately practice looking for opportunities to read extensively in English, which reflects certain limitations in their exposure to English texts. Taiwanese students primarily engage with English through textbooks and structured school materials rather than independent reading. The availability of English books and resources may also be limited, especially outside of major cities, reducing students' access to diverse reading materials. Furthermore, the dominance of Mandarin in daily life means that students are not naturally exposed to English-language content outside the classroom, making independent reading less of a habit. The pressure of academic workloads and the prioritization of subjects like math and science may also contribute to students allocating less time to reading in English.

Generally, the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners moderately practiced the use of metacognitive for their language acquisition, with an overall mean of 2.38. This result implies that while metacognitive strategies are practiced to a moderate extent in Taiwanese ESL classrooms, there is significant potential for further development in fostering independent learning behaviors. The overall mean of 2.38 suggests that while students are becoming more self-aware of their learning process, they do not consistently engage in practices like extensive reading, which could greatly enhance their language acquisition. The focus on structured classroom activities, coupled with the heavy emphasis on exams and academic subjects other than English, limits the opportunities for students to apply metacognitive strategies outside the classroom. To better support language acquisition, schools should incorporate more opportunities for self-directed learning, such as encouraging independent reading, promoting English-language media consumption, and helping students develop personalized learning goals. By providing resources and activities that foster these behaviors, students can be better equipped to take control of their learning process and improve their overall English proficiency.

Based on the findings, 28 out of 40 articles found from the search that mentioned meta-cognitive strategies were most frequently used by language learners for speaking skills (Adi *et al.*, 2019; Alfian, 2021; Alhaysony, 2017; Alihusni *et al.*, 2018; Altay & Saracaloglu, 2017; Aziz & Shah, 2020; Basalama *et al.*, 2020; Citra & Zainil, 2021; Dawadi, 2017; Dorand, 2020; Grisales & Cruz, 2017; Habok & Magyar, 2018; Hashim *et al.*, 2018; Istiqomah *et al.*, 2019; Khumhom & Taylor, 2019; Kurnia, 2019; Lestari & Fatimah, 2020; Lestari & Wahyudin, 2020; Masbirorotni & Fajaryani, 2020; Muslimin, 2019; Ong *et al.*, 2018; Parnrod *et al.*, 2017; Rianto, 2020; Sitompul *et al.*, 2019; Syafryadin, 2020; Wael *et al.*, 2018; Wahyuni, 2019; Zakaria *et al.*, 2018). Results were consistent with studies from 2011 until 2014, as reported, whereby meta-cognitive strategies were frequently used (Dawadi, 2017). This indicated that there has not been much difference in the most frequently used strategies over a year's gap. Learners who used meta-

cognitive strategies were able to self-monitor their learning process, which means that they can be identified as successful learners (Dawadi, 2017; Wahyuni, 2019). Learners were able to plan, organize, and set goals when learning (Lestari & Fatimah, 2020; Wael *et al.*, 2018). In using meta-cognitive strategies, learners are more independent. Learners are also aware of the learning strategies used when they are in the learning process. They could arrange and plan their learning strategies and self-evaluate their performance (Adi *et al.*, 2019; Wael *et al.*, 2018). Independent learners produce good language learners. By acknowledging them, they could help low achievers to achieve better results.

Table 8. Level of language acquisition practices of taiwanese ESL learners in terms of metacognitive

Part D – Metacognitive	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	2.43	Moderately Practiced
I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	2.62	Highly Practiced
I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	2.55	Highly Practiced
I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	2.80	Highly Practiced
I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	2.31	Moderately Practiced
I look for people I can talk to in English.	2.07	Moderately Practiced
I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	1.90	Moderately Practiced
Overall Mean	2.38	Moderately Practiced

4.7. Affective

Table 9 presents the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners in terms of affective at Tucheng Elementary School. The Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners highly practiced trying to relax whenever I feel afraid of English, with a mean of 2.69. This result indicates that Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL students at Tucheng Elementary School consistently practice how to deal with learning anxiety and worry about English, particularly by trying to relax when they feel scared. This behavior indicates that students know the emotional struggles of language acquisition and actively utilize relaxation strategies to cope with them. ESL teachers create a classroom environment in which error is normal and exercises to reduce anxiety, such as deep breathing or self-compliments, are integrated into lessons. For instance, teachers can provide practice in speaking with no requirement to perform perfectly well, allowing the students to express themselves freely and reduce fear of doing something incorrectly. This approach helps students manage their emotions, reduce anxiety, and become more confident in using English.

Contrariwise, the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners moderately practiced rewarding themselves or treat themselves when they do well in English, with a mean of 2.46. The findings indicate that students moderately reward themselves for doing well in English, although this practice is less consistent than the use of relaxation techniques. While students understand the motivational value of self-reward, they are not yet fully integrating this strategy into their learning routines. The Taiwanese educational system focuses much on external reward, i.e., grades, exams, and approval from the teacher, which is likely to cause students to consider external rewards over internal rewards. For instance, students can work hard to earn good grades on English tests due to the stress of satisfying academic requirements, but not reward themselves for individual achievement or effort in language acquisition.

In general, the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners highly practiced the use of affective for their language acquisition, with an overall mean of 2.58. This result implies that, overall, affective strategies are effectively practiced in Taiwanese ESL classrooms, as students are actively using emotional regulation techniques like relaxation to cope with the challenges of language acquisition. The large overall mean of 2.58 confirms that students are coping very well with the affective side of learning English. However, the moderate use of self-reward strategies reveals an area for improvement in enhancing intrinsic motivation. To enhance affective strategies, ESL programs must provide more room for students to set and reflect on personal learning goals. For instance, teachers may introduce students to systems in which they monitor themselves and reward themselves on the achievement of milestones, again emphasizing internal motivation and self-reward in their learning process.

Affective strategies were named less often as the most applied strategy in language learning (Aziz & Shah, 2020; Citra & Zainil, 2021; Dawadi, 2017; Grisales & Cruz, 2017; Koc, 2017; Pertiwi & Suwartono, 2019; Taheri *et al.*, 2020). Affective strategies were found to be the least favored since it is also related to the level of proficiency among learners (Dawadi, 2017). Affective strategies were less emphasized since less attention was given to emotional factors when learning English (Lestari & Wahyudin, 2020). In a supportive learning environment, learners learn better with help from successful learners. Adult learners, on the other hand, paid less attention to affective strategies (Dawadi, 2017). Other than that, it was found that in this new learning environment, learners used music in learning as one of the ways to decrease their anxiety (Wael *et al.*, 2018; Widhayanti, 2018). Discussing feelings with other learners also helps with anxiety (Widhayanti, 2018).

Table 9. Level of language acquisition practices of taiwanese ESL learners in terms of affective

Part E – Affective	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of English.	2.69	Highly Practiced
I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	2.52	Highly Practiced
I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	2.46	Moderately Practiced
I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	2.64	Highly Practiced
Overall Mean	2.58	Highly Practiced

4.8. Social

Table 10 presents the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners in terms of social at Tucheng Elementary School. The findings demonstrate that the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners highly practiced asking for help from English speakers, with a mean of 2.86. This finding suggests that Taiwanese Grade 5 ESL students at Tucheng Elementary School are active in asking for assistance from English speakers when they are faced with learning or using difficulties. The high mean score of 2.86 suggests that students feel confident and at ease asking for help, which accounts for the fact that they attach importance to cooperation and appreciate the role played by extraneous help in enhancing their English proficiency. ESL educators probably instill this practice through the cultivation of an engaging class environment in which clarification-seeking is supported. As an instance, instructors might engage students in activity with native speakers or fluent speakers of English to make the learners feel comfortable and empowered to clarify any question during conversations and in the process make their language learning even stronger.

On the other hand, practicing English with other students ranked last, with a mean of 2.00, interpreted as moderately practiced. The findings indicate that students moderately practice engaging in English conversations with their peers, as evidenced by the mean of 2.00. This lower level of practice indicates that although students understand the value of peer interaction, they do not always practice having spontaneous English conversations with peers. This may be because the Taiwanese education system gives priority to the individual student's performance, wherein students prefer putting emphasis on paper tests and mechanical memorization of facts over creating conversational competency. Also, a fear of embarrassing oneself in front of friends or a concern about losing face can be cultural influences leading to students' reluctance to practice English with their peers. Opportunities to engage in casual peer-to-peer English chat in the classroom are not always guaranteed, and thus students will be less likely to practice outside of organized work.

Overall, the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners highly practiced the use of memory for their language acquisition, with an overall mean of 2.52. This result implies that, overall, social strategies play an important role in Taiwanese ESL learners' language acquisition. The total mean of 2.52 indicates that although students actively ask for assistance from English speakers, they do not practice English with peers as much. This points to the necessity of offering students more chances to practice with each other using English, promoting collaborative and peer-based learning. In response to this deficiency, ESL programs could include more group discussions, pair work, and interactive practice in classes. Developing a classroom environment where students are urged to speak English in casual situations with their friends will not only enhance their oral skills but also make them more confident and at ease with the language.

12 out of 40 articles mentioned the use of social strategies as the most often used strategies for speaking skills (Altay & Saracaloglu, 2017; Basalama *et al.*, 2020; Dorand, 2020; Grisales & Cruz, 2017; Hashim *et al.*, 2018; Istiqomah *et al.*, 2019; Koc, 2017; Lestari & Wahyudin, 2020; Mam, n.d.; Naaim & Hashim, 2019; Ong *et al.*, 2018; Wael *et al.*, 2018). The tendency to use social strategies for speaking skills started to emerge with the use of technologies in language European Journal of Educational Research 2061 learning. However, social strategies were indicated as among the least preferred strategies to be used by language learners in some studies, especially when learners were asked to communicate with others in correcting their speech (Dawadi, 2017). When using social strategies, learners seek clarifications when practicing speaking skills from people they trust (Wael *et al.*, 2018). Learners who use social strategies are more outspoken as they find ways to practice the English language (Lestari & Wahyudin, 2020). Activities such as role play could be a good way to practice language in the classroom.

Table 10. Level of language acquisition practices of taiwanese ESL learners in terms of social

Part F – Social	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	2.71	Highly Practiced
I practice English with other students.	2.00	Moderately Practiced
I ask for help from English speakers.	2.86	Highly Practiced
Overall Mean	2.52	Highly Practiced

4.9. Summary of the level of language acquisition practices of taiwanese ESL learners

Table 11 presents the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners at Tucheng Elementary School. The Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners highly practiced the affective practices for their language acquisition, with a mean of 2.58. This result implies that Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners at Tucheng Elementary School prioritize affective practices in their language learning, with a mean of 2.58. Students persistently employ strategies for regulating their emotions, including relaxation strategies to control anxiety and self-motivation strategies to maintain interest in English. This indicates the high value Taiwanese schools give to emotional well-being, backed by ESL teachers creating a stress-free, positive learning environment. Students are encouraged to view mistakes as part of the learning process, which builds confidence and reduces the fear of failure. The practice of emotional regulation is critical in helping students persist in learning a foreign language despite challenges.

On the other hand, cognitive practices ranked last among the language acquisition practices for the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners, with a mean of 2.26, interpreted as moderately practiced. Conversely, cognitive activities received the lowest ranking with an average rating of 2.26 and signify that the students are moderately involved with cognitive strategies in the form of problem-solving or critical thinking, since the comparatively lesser priority for the cognitive strategies by the test-preparation-and-grammar-rules-dominant rote-memorization-intensive traditional Taiwanese school system. Therefore, there is less room for students to use cognitive strategies such as deep thinking or self-reflection in spoken language contexts, as they might experience in actual conversations. Overreliance on textbooks and the controlled classroom environment also results in fewer opportunities for students to use English in informal settings, depriving them of the opportunity to use the language naturally in active ways favorable to cognitive processes.

Overall, the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL students moderately applied the specified practices in their language acquisition, with a general mean of 2.44. This finding suggests that, generally, the moderate application of the language acquisition strategies, with a general mean of 2.44, highlights the importance of a more balanced practice in language learning in Taiwanese ESL classes. Whereas the emotional regulation in learning English by the students is in control, the cognitive strategies of the learners are not as mature. The middle range in cognitive strategies represents a need to adjust educational patterns to focus on enhancing interaction with the language in depth. There ought to be greater facilitation for practice among students to experience English through socialized, contextual learning, where the learners are mentally tested. This may involve activities like debates, problem-solving exercises, and creative writing, which promote students to think critically, analyze structures of language, and use English flexibly. Through enhanced cognitive engagement, students will be in a better position to process and utilize English efficiently, thereby strengthening their emotional resilience as well as cognitive skills. In terms of six categories, metacognitive strategies were

the high school learners' priority. This result is supported by the previous studies (e.g., Kunasaraphan, 2015; Tabeti, 2017; Vo & Duong, 2020). However, this finding contradicts Ngo's (2015) conclusion that metacognitive strategies were not used as frequently as social and affective strategies. More specifically, Duong *et al.* (2019) found that cognitive and affective listening learning strategies were the most commonly used, while metacognitive and social strategies and compensation and memory strategies were used at moderate and low levels, respectively. It is assumed that when metacognitive strategies were the first choice for managing their learning process, the high school students became more aware of their English language learning because they had an obvious target.

Table 11. Summary of the level of language acquisition practices of taiwanese ESL learners

Dimensions	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Part A – Memory	2.29	Moderately Practiced
Part B – Cognitive	2.26	Moderately Practiced
Part C – Compensation	2.57	Highly Practiced
Part D – Metacognitive	2.38	Moderately Practiced
Part E – Affective	2.58	Highly Practiced
Part F – Social	2.52	Highly Practiced
Overall Mean	2.44	Moderately Practiced

4.10. Significant difference in the level of language acquisition practices of taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile

Table 12 presents the significant difference in the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile in terms of age and sex.

The F-test results revealed no significant difference in the level of language acquisition practices of Taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile in terms of age and sex. The null hypothesis was accepted at a 0.05 significance level, as proven by the significant values of 0.81 and 0.51, respectively. These results indicate that the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners' language acquisition was at the same level regardless of their age and sex. This implies that students of different age groups and sexes show equal levels of engagement in language learning practices. These results have implications that suggest the students' learning experience in language is influenced more by aspects like the quality of education, classroom atmosphere, and personal motivation than by students' demographic profiles.

The findings indicate that the factors influencing language acquisition practices in this sample are independent of age and sex. ESL programs and teaching methods appear to be equally effective for all students, suggesting that the strategies used in the classroom do not differ based on these variables. The lack of major differences points towards the importance of factors like teaching strategy, learner engagement, and learning environment in shaping learners' language learning behaviors. This result testifies that all the learners, regardless of age and gender, are afforded equal facilitation and a chance to enhance their English language skills.

Table 12. Significant difference in the level of language acquisition practices of taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile

Profile	Mean	Level	t-value	p-value	Remarks	Decision
Age						
10-11 years old	2.36	MP	0.24	0.81	Not Significant	Accept H_o
11-12 years old	2.41	MP				
Sex						
Male	2.32	MP	0.67	0.51	Not Significant	Accept H_o
Female	2.46	MP				

p-value is significant at 0.05 level

4.11. Extent of language barriers of taiwanese ESL learners

Table 13 presents the extent of language barriers of Taiwanese ESL learners at Tucheng Elementary School.

The findings revealed that the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners always guess the meaning of words through context, with a mean of 2.53. This result implies that learners at Tucheng Elementary School regularly use contextual clues to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words. The employment of context to infer meaning is a pragmatic technique students use to deal with vocabulary deficits. The acquisition of this behavior is likely influenced by the organized instruction method used in Taiwanese classrooms, where holistic interpretation of texts and reading comprehension are valued. Moreover, ESL instructors might encourage context-based approaches to facilitate vocabulary building and language understanding. Nonetheless, the repeated use of the approach also reveals extensive dependence on it to overcome vocabulary deficits.

This result supports research by Teng (2019), who highlighted the significance of context-based vocabulary learning strategies in EFL contexts, and Yen and Wang (2021), who concluded that Taiwanese students tend to use contextual clues to process meaning because they lack vocabulary knowledge.

Conversely, difficulty in recognizing new words was the lowest, with a mean of 2.21, which translated as "often." This indicates that students are challenged in retaining and remembering new vocabulary. A major contributing factor is the lack of exposure to English outside the classroom, since everyday encounters where the language is used naturally in everyday contexts are rare. The writing- and grammar-oriented approach of the majority of Taiwanese education systems, with fewer interactive or vocabulary-building exercises, also restricts the word recognition of the students. Furthermore, the dominance of memorization techniques over communicative strategies often cannot guarantee long-term vocabulary retention.

This finding is backed by Hsu (2017), which identified that Taiwanese EFL learners suffer from vocabulary memorization issues due to a lack of authentic practice, and Chang & Ku (2022), which emphasized greater communicative and vocabulary-oriented ESL teaching.

Overall, the Taiwanese ESL students in Grade 5 often have language limitations, and the overall mean is 2.33. While students are found to be competent in making inferences from context regarding meaning, they are not able to identify and memorize new words, reflecting on the insufficient provision of vocabulary development measures. It reflects that the ESL schools should focus on vocabulary development as well as usage for practical purposes. Increasing exposure to English via authentic materials and promoting more conversational practice can facilitate word retention and reinforce language understanding. The traditional focus on grammar and limited out-of-class exposure limits opportunities for substantive vocabulary interaction. Without application in real-life contexts, students will continue to experience persistent language obstacles. Thus, ESL programs need to incorporate vocabulary-building exercises, authentic English media, and interactive learning experiences to maximize learners' proficiency.

This suggestion was echoed by Lee & Huang (2018), who advocated the use of authentic materials to boost vocabulary acquisition, and Chien *et al.* (2023), who underlined the value of real-world interaction in enhancing ESL learners' language learning.

Table 13. Extent of language barriers of taiwanese ESL learners

Language Barriers	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
I have a problem learning meaning of words	2.23	Often
I have a problem using new vocabulary in speaking or writing	2.47	Often
I have a problem pronouncing new vocabulary	2.33	Often
I have problem spelling new vocabulary	2.26	Often
I have problem recognizing new words	2.21	Often
I memorize the words without understanding meaning	2.26	Often
I have problem to understand and learn the words having the same pronunciation but different spelling and meanings	2.33	Often

I guess the meaning of word through the context	2.53	Always
Overall Mean	2.33	Often

4.12. Significant difference in the extent of language barriers of taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile

Table 14 presents the significant difference in the extent of language barriers of Taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile in terms of age and sex.

The F-test findings revealed no significant difference in the extent of language barriers of Taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile in terms of age, as evidenced by the significant value of 0.85. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted at the 0.05 level of significance. It is observed, which confirms that Taiwanese ESL students in grade 5 encountered language hurdles regardless of age.

Students of different ages confront the same English language barrier difficulties, suggesting that age does not matter in the way students perceive or overcome English language barriers. The findings indicate that all students, regardless of their different ages, experience similar difficulties when learning English. This can suggest that aspects such as pedagogy, individual motivation, or English learning outside class may be more significant in affecting the intensities of language barriers. On the contrary, the F-test findings revealed a significant difference in the extent of language barriers of Taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile in terms of sex, as proven by the significant value of 0.01. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected at a 0.05 significance level. This result implies that the sex of the Grade 5 Taiwanese ESL learners affects the extent of the language barriers.

This indicates that the sex of the students affects how they experience language barriers. It is possible that male and female learners may approach language acquisition differently, or they may face distinct challenges in language learning. For example, females are more likely to practice or be guided in groups, while males can be more challenged by active interaction or verbal retention. Such a difference in experience can be explained by classroom dynamics, individual learning style, or cultural expectations. There is a requirement for ESL courses to take these gender-based differences into account and modify teaching styles to suit the needs of all, so that male and female students both have an equal chance of bridging the gap in language.

Table 14. Significant difference in the extent of language barriers of taiwanese ESL learners when grouped by profile

Profile	Mean	Level	t-value	p-value	Remarks	Decision
Age						
10-11 years old	2.30	Often	0.19	0.85	Not Significant	Accept H_o
11-12 years old	2.35	Often				
Sex						
Male	2.68	Always	2.9477	0.01	Significant	Reject H_o
Female	1.95	Often				

p-value is significant at 0.05 level

5. CONCLUSION

The majority of the learners were aged 11-12 years old, and there was almost an equal number of male and female students. This implies that language acquisition practices in ESL learning at this level are mainly determined by the learners within a specific developmental stage, and there is a need for age-appropriate teaching strategies.

Compensation strategies were the most practiced language acquisition practices followed by metacognitive and cognitive strategies. The compensation strategies highly practiced, including guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words, indicate that students are developing problem-solving skills in overcoming communication challenges. Affective and memory strategies were the least commonly used ones, indicating a need for the support of these learners in terms of language anxiety and retention techniques.

When respondents were categorized by gender and age, statistical analysis revealed no significant differences in their level of language learning acquisition. This indicates that all students show the same level of interest in learning the language, irrespective of their age or gender. Thus, other factors, such as instructional strategies, classroom environment, and motivation, are more crucial factors than demographic variables.

The study revealed that language barriers are a common problem for learners in terms of vocabulary retention and recognition of new words, even when using contextual clues for comprehension. The findings highlight the need for structured vocabulary-building activities and exposure to authentic English materials to enhance language proficiency.

The study shows no significant difference in the extent of language barriers when learners were grouped by age. In contrast, a significant difference was observed when grouped by gender, suggesting male and female students find different challenges from each other in relation to language learning. This finding indicates that, even though language barriers are highly generic and shared among learners, instructional approaches should consider gender-based learning preferences to provide targeted support.

An action plan is recommended to be developed that focuses on capability-building programs and training for trainers at the local level, keeping in mind the challenges identified above. Such efforts should enhance instruction strategies, involve interactive language activities, and include structured support in vocabulary development and learner engagement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that ESL teachers adopt age-appropriate teaching strategies that align with the cognitive and developmental abilities of 11–12-year-old learners. Interactive storytelling, hands-on activities, and gamified learning approaches should be integrated into lessons to enhance engagement and reinforce language skills effectively.

It is suggested that ESL teachers incorporate activities that support memory retention and reduce language anxiety, as these strategies were the least practiced. The use of helpful devices, visualization techniques, and repetition exercises should be encouraged to improve vocabulary retention. Additionally, role-playing, peer collaboration, and confidence-building exercises should be introduced to help students overcome their fear of using English.

It is recommended that ESL teachers pay more attention to instructional strategies than demographic factors. It is further recommended that differentiated instruction, scaffolding techniques, and student-centered learning activities be adopted in order to promote an inclusive learning environment for all students.

It is recommended that ESL teachers institute structured vocabulary-building activities, word maps, contextual learning, and interactive games so that the problems associated with poor vocabulary retention and recognition are eradicated. On the other hand, learners need to be given exposure to authentic English materials, including storybooks, songs, and short videos that enhance comprehension as well as consolidate language skills.

ESL teachers are recommended to be gender-sensitive in their teaching methods. Male students respond more effectively to competitive, task-oriented activities, whereas female students can be more responsive to cooperative discussions and reflective exercises. Therefore, it is highly recommended that there be a balance of these approaches in learning facilitation for all genders equitably.

The teaching challenges identified can be addressed by ESL teachers receiving professional development that aims to advance instructional strategies, vocabulary instruction, and learner engagement. Localized training sessions and peer mentoring are suggested to develop the teachers' approaches and implement best practices for teaching their students.

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