

# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES TRAINING ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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## Abstract

English is prescribed as a compulsory subject in Myanmar Education System. It is also significant in shaping students' academic achievement. Therefore, to make secondary school students improve in English, it is needed to find different ways. Language learning strategies and their training models have been got a lot of attention and popularity in the field of English language learning. Therefore, a study was conducted as a training of language learning strategies to make improve English language achievement of secondary school students. As the sample of the study, a total of 51 secondary school students (38 males and 13 females) were chosen. To examine the effectiveness of language learning strategies training, a paired sample *t* test was used to analyse the data. According to the result, it was found that English language achievement of low achievement group improved significantly by training with language learning strategies used by high achievers.

**Keywords:** English Language Achievement, Language Learning Strategies, Language Learning Strategies Training

## Introduction

According to Aristotle (1976), man is a rational animal and that what sets him apart, what raises him above the animals, is that he has the ability to reason, and it is very clear that he cannot reason without language (cited in Modrak, 2001). Language is essential for human beings and it is the cause of civilization. Because of language, men can express their feelings and thoughts, share their experience and communicate each other. Language can also make any communication effective. In such a way, they establish a balanced and adaptable living through language.

Among different languages, the language which is used all over the world as an international language and the link among different people from different language backgrounds in all parts of the world is English. According to Crystal (1997), approximately '2' billion people communicate in English worldwide; '450' million speak English as a first language along with '500' million who speak it as a fluent second language, and another '1' billion use it as a foreign language. Nearly one third of the world's population is studying English, and predictions suggest that by 2050, half of the world population will be proficient English speakers (cited in Thandar Soe, 2015).

English is regarded differently in different places of the world: some use it as a first language, some as a second language and the others as a foreign language. As for Myanmar, it is used as a foreign language and prescribed as one of academic subjects in education. According to Francis and Rivera (2007), language is the gateway for learning and the vehicle that facilitates acquisition of new knowledge through direct and indirect interaction with other humans, as well as through the reflective processes of introspection (cited in Thandar Soe, 2015).

Therefore, there were findings that English language positively correlated with over all academic achievement of the students. For example, Hamzah (2013) examined the effect of English language proficiency towards social capital and academic achievement among 81 undergraduate students enrolled in Economics courses from year two and three in University Utara Malaysia (UUM). The findings showed that there was a positive relationship of English language proficiency towards academic achievement.

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Therefore, it can be said that the students' achievement in their education depends upon English language achievement. In other words, if students' academic achievement is desirable, their English language achievement must be upgraded. Here, finding the different ways to make improve students' English language achievement becomes important much.

Wenden (1985) reminded us by using an old proverb which states: If a man was given a fish, it was enough to eat for a day. If how to fish was taught, it was enough to eat for a lifetime. This proverb reminded that if students are provided only spoon-feeding teaching, the problems would be solved just shortly. However, if the strategies of how to solve the problems were taught, the learning would be able to manage in the life-long. Language learning strategies are processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in actions taken to enhance the learning or use of a second or foreign language through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about that language (Cohen, 1990).

Many studies also verified that there was a significant positive relationship between language learning strategies use and successful English language learning. For instance, Takeuchi (1993) conducted a survey on 78 Japanese first year students of English at a women's college in Kyoto and concluded that this study confirmed that the self-reported frequency of some language learning strategies was positively related to proficiency of English. Also, Kato (2005) indicated that language learning strategies had several important implications for teaching English to Japanese university students. Next, Kyungsim and Leavell (2006) discovered that the more active strategy users in their study made faster progress than those who employed strategies less often (cited in Kato, 2005).

Accordingly, different language learning strategies training models emerged in the field of language learning strategies to make learners improve in their English language. Rubin (1981) claimed that the strategies are not the preserve of highly capable individuals, but could be learned by others. O'Malley et al. (1994) also stated that the learning strategies of good language learners, once identified and successfully taught to less competent learners, could have considerable potential for enhancing the development of second language skills; and that second language teachers could play an active and valuable role by teaching students how to apply learning strategies to varied language activities and how to extend the strategies to new tasks both in the language classroom and in content areas requiring language skills.

Therefore, the present study is an attempt to explore the effectiveness of language learning strategies training on students' English language achievement as a way of improving English language achievement of secondary school students.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The main aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of language learning strategies training on secondary school students' English language achievement.

The specific objectives were:

- (1) To examine whether high English language achievers were high language learning strategies users or not;
- (2) To investigate whether low English language achievers were low language learning strategies users or not;
- (3) To explore language learning strategies used by high English language achievers;
- (4) To find out whether low English language achievers were improved in their English language achievement or not by training with language learning strategies used by high English language achievers;

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

Hypothesis 1: High English language achievers were high language learning strategies users.

Hypothesis 2: Low English language achievers were low language learning strategies users.

Hypothesis 3: low English language achievers were improved in their English language achievement by training with language learning strategies used by high English language achievers.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**English Language Achievement:** The ability to repeat language elements that have been taught and mastered. (Oxford, 1990).

**Language learning strategies:** Specific actions taken by the learner to make learning faster, more enjoyable, more effective, and more transferrable to new situations (Bong, 2021).

**Language learning strategies Training:** A training in the use of learning strategies in order to improve their learning (Oxford & Nyikes, 1990).

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

One group pretest-posttest experimental research design was utilized in the present study.

### **Sampling**

In Myanmar Education System, there are two levels in secondary school level: lower secondary school level and upper secondary school level. In the lower secondary school level, Grade 6 and Grade 7 are included while the upper secondary school level includes Grade 8 and Grade 9. Among them, Grade 9 students were selected as a target population. By using purposive sampling technique, a total of 51 Grade 9 students (38 males and 13 females) were selected from No (1) Basic Education High School (Minbu), Minbu (Sagu) Township, Minbu District, Magway Region.

### **Participants**

Since the purpose of this study was to train the low English language achievers with language learning strategies used by high English language achievers, the primary step is to select the students with low and high English language achievement.

Firstly, a total of 1838 Grade 9 students were administered with English language achievement test and strategies inventory for language learning as a pretest. Secondly, based on descriptive analyses of English language achievement scores, the students were classified into three groups. The students with above the (+1) standard deviation from the sample mean were regarded as the high achievement group, the students with scores below the (-1) standard deviation were identified as the low achievement group. And, the students whose scores were between (-1) standard deviation and (+1) standard deviation were taken as the moderate achievement group.

Finally, 51 Grade 9 students (38 males and 13 females) from the low achievement group and low strategies users were selected as the participants to conduct this study during 5 weeks with a schedule of three times a week: a two-hour class session.

### **Instrumentation**

In the present study, the three instruments were used for collecting the data. They are the strategies inventory for language learning, the instruments for intervention and English language achievement tests for pretest and posttest.

### **I. Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)**

To examine language learning strategies of the students, the present study used Oxford's (1990) Version 7.0 of the Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), designed for English as Foreign Language/English as Second Language learners. The SILL uses a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 ("Never or almost never true of me") to 5 ("Always or almost always true of me"). The taxonomy of strategies consists of 50 statements about strategies used by language learners covering six broad categories of strategies, each represented by a number of items in Table 1.

**Table 1** Item Distributions of Strategies Inventory for Language Learning

Strategies	Item Range	Number of total Items
Memory	Items 1-9	9
Cognitive	Items 10-23	14
Compensation	Items 24-29	6
Metacognitive	Items 30-38	9
Affective	Items 39-44	6
Social	Items 45-50	6
<b>Total</b>		<b>50</b>

## II. Instrument for Intervention

Although there were many training models of language learning strategies, the intervention protocol was based on Oxford's Training Model of Language Learning Strategies (1990). Because, students used of language learning strategies were investigated by Oxford's (1990) SILL and also, it has been used widely and confidentially in the field of language learning. Among the fifty strategies of strategies inventory for language learning, the twelve strategies of language learning used by high achievement group were filtered and trained to low achievement group.

For the intervention plan, 20 reading passages were retrieved from Google Images. After that, the lesson plans were prepared by selecting most relevant 15 reading passages combined with language learning strategies used by high achievement group on the basic of Oxford's Training Model of Language Learning Strategies (1990). After planning the instrument for intervention, expert review was taken from the two junior assistance teachers who teach English in Basic Education Schools and one assistant lecturer from Department of Methodology, Magway Education Degree College in order to examine whether the reading passages and lesson plans were relevant with Grade 9 students or not. And then, the experimental study was performed with three parts: the first section was demonstrating by the researcher, the second one was self-learning by the students and third one was for the section of practicum. Among each section, 15 minutes was taken as a break time to retain students' attention.

Therefore, the instrument for intervention was constituted of 15 reading passages and 12 language learning strategies based on Oxford's (1990) training model of language learning strategies.

## III. Instrument for Pre-test and Post-test

In the present study, in order to examine students' English language achievement, four English language achievement tests were developed with similar contents and similar test forms based on table of specifications, Grade 9 English text book and Grade 9 examination question format. The tests were administered to the same participants (Grade 9 students) in the preliminary testing. After revising some items, two sets of items within the allowance of difficulty index and discrimination power were selected. The parallel form reliability between the two tests was 0.3 ( $p < 0.01$ ). Using Cohen's (1988) guidelines, the effect size is medium for studies in this area. Therefore, after revising some items, one was administered as pre-test and another one as post-test.

## Intervention and Data Collection Procedure

Planning the intervention, intervention procedure, data collection, data analysis and results were presented in the following.

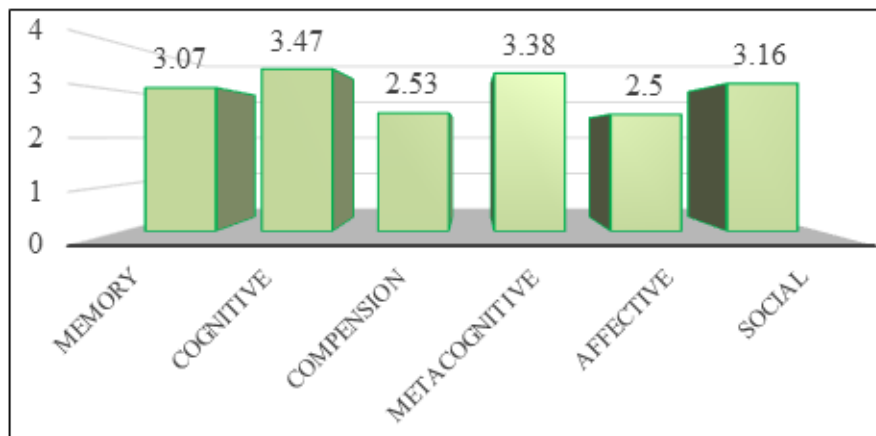
### Planning the Intervention

The purpose of the intervention was to examine whether low English language achievers can be improved or not if they were trained with language learning strategies of high English

language achievers. Therefore, whether high achievement group were high language learning strategies users or not, whether low achievement group were low strategies users or not and the language learning strategies used by high achievement group were investigated.

The first step was to examine whether high achievement group were high language learning strategies users or not. Descriptive statistic was employed to examine students' use of language learning strategies. According to Oxford (1990) classification, learners with a mean of 2.5 and under are low strategy users, learners with a mean of 2.5 to 3.5 are moderate strategy users and the mean for high users is more than 3.5.

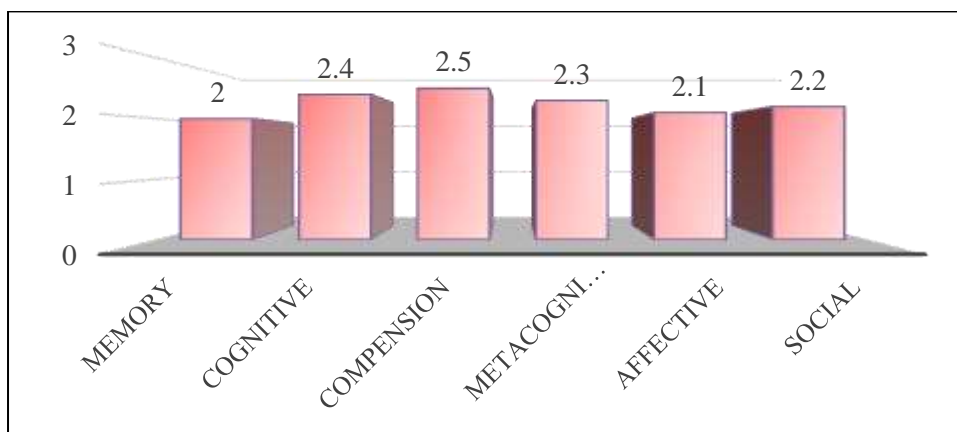
As it was shown in Figure 1, the high English language achievers applied all the strategies at different level of frequencies in order to get their English language achievement. Specifically, they used language learning strategies moderately when they learn English because each mean of strategies they used was between 2.5 and 3.5.



**Figure 1** Graphic Representation of Strategies Used by High Achievement Group

Secondly, whether low achievement group were also low language learning strategies users or not was confirmed. Again, descriptive statistic was conducted to examine students' use of language learning strategies.

It was mentioned in Figure 2 that the low English language achievers also applied all the strategies at different level of frequencies in order to get their English language achievement. However, in checking descriptive statistic, it was found that students in low achievement group used language learning strategies poorly because each mean of strategies they used was 2.5 and under.

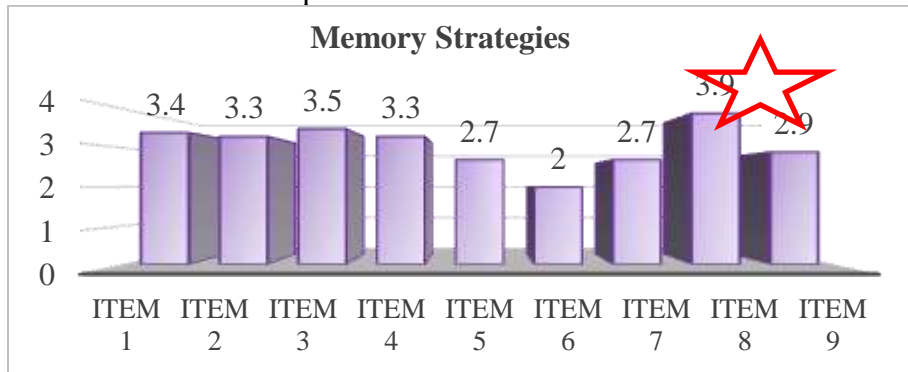


**Figure 2** Graphic Representation of Strategies Used by Low Achievement Group

The above results agreed with the previous studies that revealed in Kato (2005) that there was significant relationship between language learning strategies and English language achievements.

After investigating the high and low English language achievement group of the students, the next step of selecting language learning strategies used by high achievement group was performed.

In the followings, the means of strategies that high achievers utilized were presented. According to this, the items that those students highly used (mean value was more than 3.5) were selected to use in intervention practice.

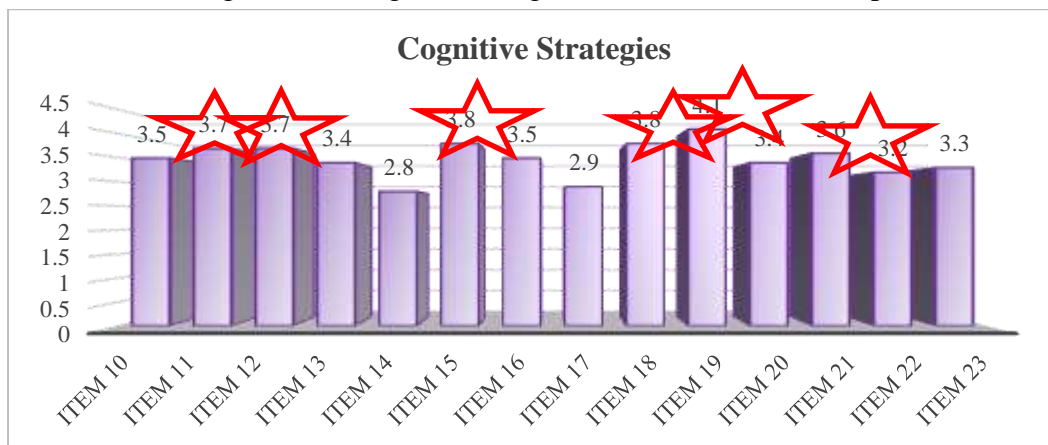


**Figure 3** Graphic Representation of Memory Strategies used by high achievers

In Figure 3, it was shown that the students in high achievement group applied the memory strategies moderately while they learn English. Strategy in item 8: “I review English lessons often”; was the most frequently applied item in this section. So, this item was picked to use in the intervention practice. According to Oxford (1990), memory strategies enable learners to store and retrieve new information of a new language. So, high achievers liked to use this strategies in their learning.

Concerning the items measuring the cognitive strategies, the result showed that the students in high achievement group applied the cognitive strategies moderately in their learning English. Specifically, strategies in item 11, 12, 15, 18, 19 and 21: “I try to talk like native English speakers, I practice the sounds of English, I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English, I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully, I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English and I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand”; were the most frequently applied ones in this section. Therefore, these items were taken to use in the intervention practice. According to Oxford (1990), cognitive strategies enable learners to understand and produce new language. That’s why, high achievers seemed to choose most of this strategies to use.

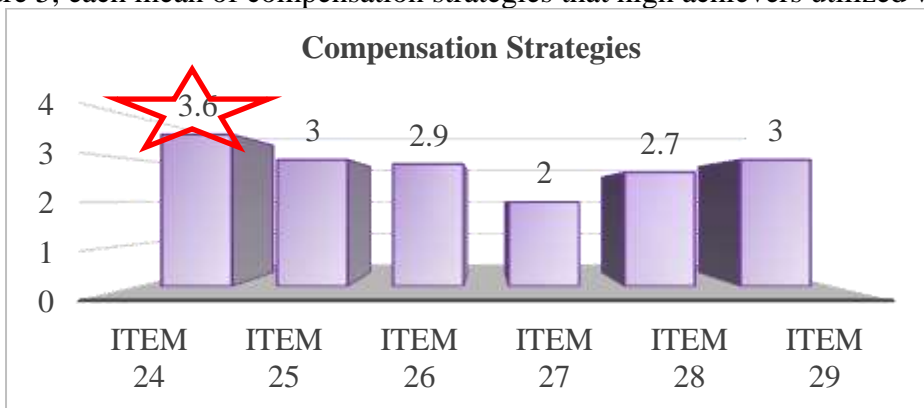
Each mean of cognitive strategies that high achievers utilized were presented in Figure 4.



**Figure 4** Graphic Representation of Cognitive Strategies used by high achievers.

When the answers of the high achievement group for the items handling compensation strategies was examined, it was shown that they applied the compensation strategies moderately while they learn English. Strategy in item 24: “To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses”; as the most frequently applied one in this section. So, this item was selected to use in the intervention practice. According to Oxford (1990), compensation strategies allow learners to use the language despite knowledge gaps. That’s why, high achievers wanted to choose some of this strategies to use.

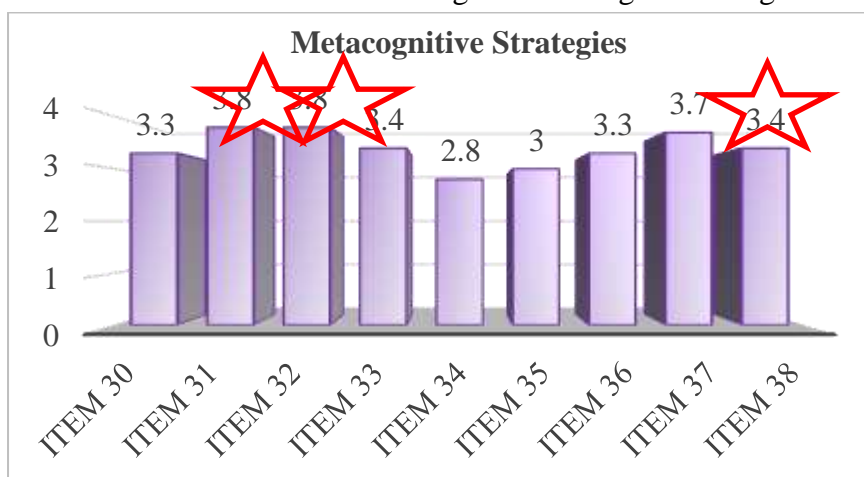
In Figure 5, each mean of compensation strategies that high achievers utilized were mentioned.



**Figure 5** Graphic Representation of Compensation Strategies used by high achievers.

Also, metacognitive strategies applied by high achievement group was examined. The data analysis revealed that the students utilized the metacognitive strategies moderately while they learn English. Strategies in item 31, 32 and 37: “I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better, I pay attention when someone is speaking English and I have clear goals for improving my English skills”; were the most frequently applied ones in this section. And thus, these strategies were chosen in order to be used in the intervention practice. According to Oxford (1990), metacognitive strategies allow learners to evaluate their own language learning pattern and coordinate the learning process. Therefore, high achievers used some of this strategies in their language learning.

Figure 6 described each mean of metacognitive strategies that high achievers applied.

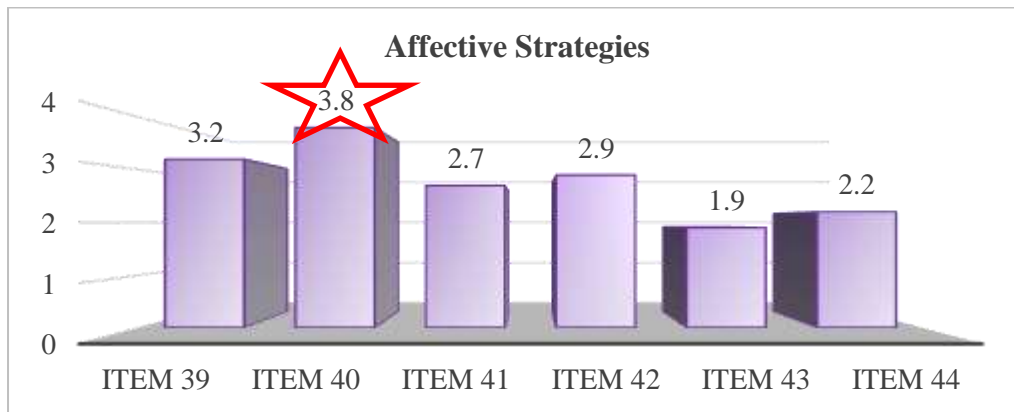


**Figure 6** Graphic Representation of Metacognitive Strategies used by high achievers.

When the language learning strategies used by high achievement group was investigated, it was described that the students in high achievement group applied the affective strategies moderately while they learn English. Strategy in item 40: “I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake” was the most frequently applied one in this section. Therefore, this item was taken to use in the intervention practice. According to Oxford (1990),

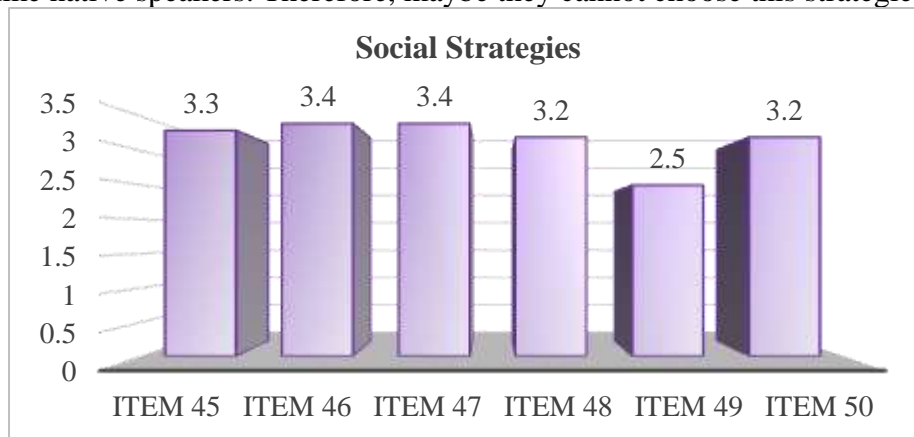
affective strategies help learners gain control and regulate personal emotions, attitudes, and values. Therefore, high achievers needed this strategies in their language learning.

Each mean of affective strategies that high achievers applied was shown in Figure 7.



**Figure 7** Graphic Representation of Affective Strategies used by high achievers.

Regarding the use of language learning strategies, the students had shown that they applied the social strategies moderately while they learn English. Nevertheless, there was no strategy that students highly used in learning English. In Figure 8, each mean of social strategies that high achievers applied was presented. According to Oxford (1990), social strategies allow users to interact with users such as asking questions and cooperating with native speakers. Most of Myanmar students have less access to interact with native speakers nor someone who can speak like native speakers. Therefore, maybe they cannot choose this strategies to highly use.



**Figure 8** Graphic Representation of Social Strategies used by high achievers.

To sum up, the 12 language learning strategies highly applied by the high English language achievers were collected for the intervention practice and each was shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** Language Learning Strategies Selected for Intervention Practice

No.	Strategies	Item to be Used	Total Number of Item to be Used
1.	Memory Strategies	Item 8	1
2.	Cognitive Strategies	Item 11,12,15,18,19, 21	6
3.	Compensation Strategies	Item 24	1
4.	Metacognitive Strategies	Item 31, 32, 37	3
5.	Affective Strategies	Item 40	1
6.	Social Strategies	-	-
<b>Total</b>			<b>12</b>



## Intervention Procedure

Before the intervention practice of the study was conducted, permissions for the intervention and data collection were requested to the township educational officer (TEO) and the headmaster. An intervention practice was performed at No (1) Basic Education High School, Minbu, Magway Region for five weeks in late January and February, 2020.

Firstly, the participants were interviewed to confirm whether they are low strategies users or not. Most of the students revealed that they rarely used language learning strategies while they learnt English. Some students said that though they want to use language learning strategies in their learning English because they wanted to get high achievement, unfortunately, they did not know any language learning strategies and how to use them. Some students replied that they did not know using language learning strategies and they just followed the teaching of their teachers from schools and private tuitions that they did not even have enough time to study.

Then, they were introduced with the intervention protocol and expected benefits and also, encouraged to participate actively and they could ask questions whatever they wanted to know. After that, the intervention was carried out according to the lesson plans. The lesson plans were combined with reading passages, language learning strategies used by high achievement group, worksheets, group work activities, discussions as well as question and answer methods. The procedure followed Oxford's (1990) Language Learning Strategies Training model. It was carried out step by step in the following:

- (1) Learners are asked to immerse into an authentic language task without instructional cues;
- (2) Suggest and demonstrate other helpful strategies, mentioning the need for greater self-direction and expected benefits, and making sure that the students are aware of the rationale for strategy use;
- (3) Allow learners plenty of time to practice the new strategies with language tasks and show how the strategies can be transferred to other tasks;
- (4) Provide practice using the techniques with new tasks and allow learners to make choices about the strategies they will use to complete the language learning tasks;
- (5) Help students understand how to evaluate the success of their strategy use and to gauge their progress as more responsible and self-directed learners.

As the schedule was three periods in a week, the first period was demonstration of the researcher how to learn a reading passage by using language learning strategies, the second one was their self-learning another reading passage and giving feedback by the researcher and the third one was the session of evaluating the success of their strategy use.

After the intervention procedure, the posttest was administered with English language achievement test.

## Data Analysis and Results

To examine students' English language achievement before and after intervention, the paired sample *t* test was conducted. According to the statistical analysis results, the mean scores differed prominently at  $p < 0.001$ . Therefore, it can be concluded that students' English language achievement was different before and after the intervention. Again, the analysis of mean values, the mean of English language achievement after the intervention practice was higher than that of before the intervention practice. So, it can be said that English language achievement of students was significantly higher than before intervention at  $p < 0.001$  and it was shown in Table 3. It also meant that the intervention practice was effective for making improvement in students' achievement in English language. After all, it can be concluded that practicing language learning

strategies of high English language achievers could improve well English language achievement of students in low achievement group.

**Table 3** Paired Sample *t* test Results of English Language Achievement Before and After Intervention

Intervention	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Before	9.61	4.03	-8.54	-18.71	50	.000
After	18.16	4.73				

Note. The mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

To sum up, the data analysis was conducted to examine whether low English language achievers can be trained with language learning strategies used by high English achievers to improve their English language achievement. The results pointed out that by training students with poor English language achievement with language learning strategies used by high English language achievers, their English language achievement was improved than before the intervention.

### Discussion

According to the intervention practice results, it can be concluded that low English language achievers can be made to improve in their English language achievement by training language learning strategies used by high English language achievers. So, this research pointed out that language learning strategies can be trained to make improvement in English language achievement. In other words, the more students were trained with language learning strategies, the more English language achievement they can get. So, the parents and the teachers should investigate their children's use of language learning strategies, should encourage their children or students to use language learning strategies in learning English and their children and students should be trained with different language learning strategies. The educators should consider language learning strategies uses and training to put in regular teaching-learning program via the student-teachers and teachers in Universities of Education, Education Degree Colleges and Refresher Courses of Basic Education.

### Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of language learning strategies on students' English language achievement. Language learning strategies uses of the high and low English language achievement groups were found out. Language learning strategies used by high achievers were carefully selected and trained to low achievement group. After that, English language achievement of low group before and after the intervention was compared. According to the results, it can be proved that low achievement group can be improved by training with language learning strategies used by high achievement group.

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