



Receptive Skills And Strategies To Develop Them In Upper Primary Level Learners (ESL) In The Context Of Gujarat State

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Abstract

This paper critically analyses the most preferred receptive skills and discusses Strategies for developing them among upper-primary-level English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in Gujarat State, India. The study explores the theoretical foundations of receptive skills and provides practical strategies for their implementation in English language classrooms. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of receptive skills for primary-level learners in second language acquisition. The findings suggest that appropriate learning strategies significantly enhance listening and reading comprehension among upper primary school students in non-urban settings and are of significant value to educators, researchers, and policymakers in ESL education.

Keywords: Receptive Skills, Listening Skill, Listening Comprehension, Reading Skill, Reading Comprehension, Language Learning Strategies

Introduction

In the contemporary global landscape characterised by cross-cultural communication and globalisation, English language proficiency has become a critical component in educational systems worldwide. Considerable emphasis is now placed on second language acquisition for English as a Second Language (ESL) learner (Avelino et al., 2021). The proliferation of internet access has facilitated unprecedented availability of learning materials and educational resources from across the globe, particularly for English language learning. Language acquisition represents a complex, time-intensive process requiring considerable patience. This process incrementally enhances learners' language proficiency through systematic routines, methods, and procedures (Hashim et al., 2018).

Receptive skills, which encompass the ability to listen to and understand a language effectively, play a pivotal role in language acquisition. These skills primarily comprise reading and listening competencies. As Lakshminarayanan (2008, p. 57) aptly notes, "Listening is stage one of the responding act of a communicating event. Listening is a sustained effort to receive sound and make meaning. It opens up possibilities for continuing interaction." Through these skills, language input is received, and meaning is

decoded to facilitate comprehension of the message. Additionally, engaging with listening and reading activities stimulates and expands imagination.

Extensive reading and listening practice occur when students have clearly defined objectives. Learners engage with lectures, seminars, and informational talks to expand their knowledge base and enhance their linguistic capabilities. Listening constitutes the foundation of all learning processes; a student unable to comprehend classroom instruction inevitably experiences learning impediments.

ESL learners employ various strategies to facilitate language acquisition, including methods, procedures, and actions (Rubin, 1987). Implementing these strategies substantially improves language learning (Adi et al., 2019). Enhanced teaching-learning methodologies and language skill development necessitate a thorough understanding of language learning strategies (Lestari & Fatimah, 2020). The present study focuses on strategies to improve receptive skills among Upper Primary Level ESL learners in Gujarat, India. In rural areas, exposure to English is limited, and there is a minimal environment for learning English. Traditional perspectives often categorise listening and reading as passive skills. For rural students, classroom instruction frequently represents the only opportunity for English language exposure through listening and reading activities. Unfortunately, even in language classrooms, pedagogical emphasis favours productive skills over receptive ones.

Numerous research studies have demonstrated that learners provided with substantial exposure to receptive skills exhibit marked improvement in both listening and reading comprehension. The relationship between comprehension and production is not just direct but also proportional: enhanced listening comprehension correlates with improved speaking ability, while reading comprehension advancement corresponds with writing proficiency development. This interconnectedness and interdependence of the four fundamental language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—highlight the holistic approach to language learning.

Language Learning Strategies

Language learning strategies encompass "the approaches, methods, gadgets, or activities that language learners employ to acquire language and accomplish predetermined learning goals" (Putri & Sari, 2020, p. 22). Rubin (1987, p. 23) defines them as "strategies that contribute to the advancement of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly." Similarly, Tarone (1983, p. 67) characterises them as "an attempt to improve linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language to integrate these into one's interlanguage competence."

Language learning strategies play a pivotal role in comprehending a new language. They are not just tools, but vital tools for enhancing the communicative competence of ESL learners. Extensive research has shifted pedagogical focus from productive to receptive skills in ESL classrooms, and these strategies have been a significant part of this shift. They are crucial in language acquisition and have been shown to significantly increase ESL learners' competence level, demonstrating their effectiveness.

Oxford (1990, p. 17) categorises learning strategies into two general types: direct and indirect. She defines learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations."

The taxonomy of language learning strategies can be outlined as follows:

- **Memory Strategies**
 - Facilitate the transfer of acquired information to long-term memory
 - Include techniques like semantic mapping, using imagery, and structured reviewing (Oxford, 1990)
- **Compensation Strategies**
 - Enable learners to comprehend input through logical assumptions and non-verbal cues.
 - Include strategies such as guessing meanings from context and using circumlocution (Cohen & Weaver, 2005)
- **Cognitive Strategies**
 - Help learners make inferences based on existing schema
 - Include practices such as analysing, reasoning, and creating a structure for input and output (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990)

Indirect Strategies

- **Metacognitive Strategies**
 - Enable self-directed learning through organisation, evaluation, and planning.
 - Include coordinating the learning process, setting goals, and self-monitoring (Wenden, 1998)
- **Social Strategies**
 - Assist learners in communicating effectively within social contexts

- Include asking questions, cooperating with others, and developing cultural understanding (Oxford, 1990)

- **Affective Strategies**

- Provide motivation and regulate emotions throughout the learning process
- Include techniques for anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, and emotional self-regulation (Dörnyei, 2005)

Contemporary research emphasises both the characteristics and processes of language learning strategies. Learners can develop diverse language skills through appropriate methods, approaches, techniques, and strategies. Students can select strategies that best facilitate their comprehension of specific language skills. Effective language learning strategies also foster peer support, facilitate language acquisition processes, and promote learner self-confidence. Consequently, they should be systematically integrated into language learning programs to achieve desired educational objectives.

Receptive Skills for Primary Level Learners

Receptive skills encompass the ability to comprehend spoken and written language through Listening and reading. Lakshminarayanan (2008, p. 57) describes listening as "stage one of the responding act of a communicating event. Listening is a sustained effort to receive sound and make meaning. It opens up possibilities for continuing interaction." These skills involve receiving language input and decoding meaning to facilitate message comprehension. Both listening and reading activities stimulate and expand imagination.

Receptive skills are crucial for primary-level learners as they establish the foundation for productive skills and effective communication in the language learning process. They also enhance learners' capacity to acquire the English language (Nuraeningsih, 2022). Vandergrift and Goh (2012) emphasise that receptive skills development precedes productive skills acquisition in natural language learning sequences, suggesting that comprehension-based approaches may be particularly beneficial for young ESL learners.

Krashen's (2003) Input Hypothesis further supports the critical role of comprehensible input in language acquisition, proposing that learners progress when they receive language input slightly beyond their current proficiency level. This underscores the importance of strategically developing receptive skills among primary level ESL learners, particularly in contexts with limited target language exposure.

Research Questions

The present research study addresses the following research questions:

- What are the most preferred language learning strategies for listening skills among STD: VIII Upper Primary Level Learners of Gujarati medium schools of Gujarat?
- What are the most preferred language learning strategies for reading skills among STD: VIII Upper Primary Level Learners of Gujarati medium schools of Gujarat?
- Can language learning strategies help develop the receptive skills of STD: VIII Upper Primary Level Learners in Gujarati medium schools?

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research methodology with a survey-type research design. Quantitative research utilises statistical tools to analyse numerical data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A questionnaire based on listening and reading comprehension was developed to assess the receptive skills of STD: VIII Upper Primary Level Learners in Gujarati medium schools of Gujarat. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaire, after which the data were collected and systematically analysed.

Population

The population for this study comprised Gujarati medium upper primary school students of Savli Taluka enrolled in standard VIII who were studying English as a second language during the academic year 2024-2025.

Sample

The present study involves 40 students in Standard VIII. The sample group was selected using a purposive sampling method.

Research Tool

As previously mentioned, this research employed a survey methodology requiring a questionnaire for data collection. The Young Learners' Language Strategy Use Survey (YLLSUS) served as the foundation for the questionnaire design (Cohen & Oxford, 1995). This instrument categorises language acquisition processes into four classifications: affective, cognitive, metacognitive, and memory-related, emphasising learners' receptive skills.

For validation purposes, the tool was submitted to five subject-matter experts. Based on their feedback, appropriate modifications were implemented, and following approval, the finalised instrument was distributed to the sample group.

Collection of Data

The researcher personally distributed the questionnaire to the sample group. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, the investigator reviewed each questionnaire item with the participants, clarifying any potential ambiguities to maximise response validity.

Analysis of Data

The collected data were analysed using Microsoft 365 software. Descriptive statistical methods were employed to examine the research objectives. The findings are presented as frequency scores and percentages. The results are displayed in tabular format and elaborated upon in the findings and discussion section.

Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussion of the present study, "Strategies to Develop Receptive Skills of Upper Primary Level Learners (ESL) in the Context of Gujarat State," are presented comprehensively below. The data have been tabulated and analysed in two primary sections: Listening Strategies and Reading Strategies.

Table 1: Listening Strategies

Sr	Item	Scores		
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
1	I watch TV shows in English. (i.e. NEWS, Cricket, etc...)	29 / 40 (72.50%)	6 / 40 (15.00%)	5 / 40 (12.50%)
2	I watch videos/movies in English. (i.e. Animation, Cartoon, etc...)	29 / 40 (72.50%)	5 / 40 (12.50%)	6 / 40 (15.00%)
3	I listen to English songs.	33 / 40 (82.50%)	4 / 40 (10.00%)	3 / 40 (7.50%)
4	If I hear people speaking English, I listen to them Carefully.	27 / 40 (67.50%)	5 / 40 (12.50%)	8 / 40 (20.00%)
5	I try to find sounds in the Gujarati language that are like sounds in English.	13 / 40 (32.50%)	25 / 40 (62.50%)	2 / 40 (5.00%)
6	I try to remember unfamiliar sounds which I hear.	14 / 40 (35.00%)	23 / 40 (57.50%)	3 / 40 (7.50%)
7	I ask the person to repeat the new sound.	15 / 40 (37.50%)	22 / 40 (55.00%)	3 / 40 (7.50%)
8	I listen to the rise and fall of sounds. (i.e. Tone, Intonation, rhythm, etc...)	8 / 40 (20.00%)	30 / 40 (75.00%)	2 / 40 (5.00%)
9	I listen for the important words.	31 / 40 (77.50%)	7 / 40 (17.50%)	2 / 40 (5.00%)
10	I listen for what seems interesting.	30 / 40 (75.00%)	10 / 40 (25.00%)	0 / 40 (0.00%)
11	I listen for words that are repeated.	32 / 40 (80.00%)	8 / 40 (20.00%)	0 / 40 (0.00%)
12	I ask the person to repeat.	30 / 40 (75.00%)	6 / 40 (15.00%)	4 / 40 (10.00%)
13	I ask the person to slow down.	32 / 40 (80.00%)	8 / 40 (20.00%)	0 / 40 (0.00%)
14	I ask a question.	22 / 40 (55.00%)	8 / 40 (20.00%)	10 / 40 (25.00%)
15	I guess meaning from the person's tone. (i.e sad, angry, happy, etc...)	32 / 40 (80.00%)	7 / 40 (17.50%)	1 / 40 (2.50%)
16	I guess the meaning from how the person moves or stands. (gesture, posture, etc...)	30 / 40 (75.00%)	6 / 40 (15.00%)	4 / 40 (10.00%)
17	I guess the meaning from what I heard before. (i.e. Schema, Background Knowledge)	29 / 40 (72.50%)	9 / 40 (22.50%)	2 / 40 (5.00%)

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution and percentage of responses regarding listening strategies. Among the 17 statements presented to 40 students, Statement 3 received the highest endorsement with 33/40 (82.50%) participants strongly agreeing and 4/40 (10.00%) agreeing that listening to English songs improves their listening comprehension. This finding aligns with research by Albaladejo et al. (2018), who demonstrated that music and songs significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition and listening skills among young ESL learners.

Statements 11, 13, and 15 received the second-highest endorsement with 32/40 (80.00%) participants strongly agreeing that they pay particular attention to repeated words, request speakers to reduce speech rate, and attempt to comprehend meaning from speakers' tone and mood. These findings correspond with Graham's (2017) research on metacognitive listening strategies, which demonstrates the effectiveness of these approaches for ESL learners.

Regarding phonological awareness, only 8/40 (20.00%) participants strongly agreed with Statement 8 concerning attention to prosodic features like tone, intonation, and rhythm, while 30/40 (75.00%) agreed and 2/40 (5.00%) disagreed. This result suggests that while most students recognise the importance of prosodic features, fewer actively prioritise this listening strategy.

Furthermore, 13/40 (32.50%) participants strongly agreed with Statement 5 regarding cross-linguistic phonological comparisons between Gujarati and English sounds. Notably, Statements 10, 11, and 13 received no disagreement (0/40, 0.00%), indicating unanimous acknowledgement of these strategies' value, which reflects Vandergrift and Baker's (2015) findings on metacognitive awareness in L2 listening development.

Table 2: Reading Strategies

Sr	Item	Scores		
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree
1	I read for fun in English. (i.e. Comic Book, Story Books, etc...)	36 / 40 (90.00%)	2 / 40 (5.00%)	2 / 40 (5.00%)
2	I use to read a thing that is interesting.	36 / 40 (90.00%)	2 / 40 (5.00%)	2 / 40 (5.00%)
3	I look for things to read that are not too hard.	30 / 40 (75.00%)	5 / 40 (12.50%)	5 / 40 (12.50%)
4	I skim over a reading to get the main idea of the text.	8 / 40 (20.00%)	26 / 40 (65.00%)	6 / 40 (15.00%)
5	I look for important facts.	15 / 40 (37.50%)	22 / 40 (55.00%)	3 / 40 (7.50%)
6	I read things more than once.	30 / 40 (75.00%)	7 / 40 (17.50%)	3 / 40 (7.50%)
7	I look at the pictures and what is written under the pictures.	33 / 40 (82.50%)	5 / 40 (12.50%)	2 / 40 (5.00%)
8	I look at the title of the text/book.	33 / 40 (82.50%)	5 / 40 (12.50%)	2 / 40 (5.00%)
9	I think about what will come next in the reading.	17 / 40 (42.50%)	15 / 40 (37.50%)	8 / 40 (20.00%)
10	I stop to think about what I just read.	15 / 40 (37.50%)	16 / 40 (40.00%)	9 / 40 (22.50%)
11	I underline important parts.	26 / 40 (65.00%)	7 / 40 (17.50%)	7 / 40 (17.50%)
12	I mark the reading in different colours to help me understand.	26 / 40 (65.00%)	7 / 40 (17.50%)	7 / 40 (17.50%)
13	I use a dictionary to find the meaning.	26 / 40 (65.00%)	7 / 40 (17.50%)	7 / 40 (17.50%)
14	I guess the meaning by using clues from other parts of the passage.	17 / 40 (42.50%)	15 / 40 (37.50%)	8 / 40 (20.00%)
15	I check to see how much I understood.	22 / 40 (55.00%)	8 / 40 (20.00%)	10 / 40 (25.00%)

Table 2 presents the frequency distribution and percentage of responses regarding reading strategies. Among the 15 statements presented to 40 students, Statements 1 and 2 received the highest endorsement with 36/40 (90.00%) participants strongly agreeing, 2/40 (5.00%) agreeing, and 2/40 (5.00%) disagreeing regarding reading for enjoyment and interest-driven reading. These findings align with Day and Bamford's (2002) extensive reading approach, emphasising that reading materials should be enjoyable and intrinsically motivating for learners.

Statements 7 and 8 received the second-highest endorsement with 33/40 (82.50%) participants strongly agreeing, 5/40 (12.50%) agreeing, and 2/40 (5.00%) disagreeing regarding the use of visual cues and attention to titles during reading. This result reflects Anderson's (2012) research on top-down processing strategies that facilitate reading comprehension.

When asked about textual annotation strategies (Statements 11 and 12) and dictionary use (Statement 13), 26/40 (65.00%) participants strongly agreed, 7/40 (17.50%) agreed, and 7/40 (17.50%) disagreed. These findings support Grabe and Stoller's (2019) research on strategic reading behaviours among L2 learners.

The skimming strategy (Statement 4) received the lowest endorsement with only 8/40 (20.00%) participants strongly agreeing, 26/40 (65.00%) agreeing, and 6/40 (15.00%) disagreeing. This result suggests that while many students acknowledge the utility of skimming, fewer actively prioritise this strategy, which could reflect limited explicit instruction in higher-order reading strategies, as noted by Hudson (2007).

Implications

The present study yields significant implications for developing receptive skills among Upper Primary Level ESL Learners in Gujarat State. The identified strategies positively impact learners' receptive skills, enhancing comprehension and confidence in English communication.

The strong preference for English songs as a listening strategy aligns with research by Nawawi and Osman (2021), who demonstrated that music in ESL classrooms enhances vocabulary acquisition through exposure

to new vocabulary and phrases, strengthening retention capabilities. In rural Gujarat, where English language exposure is limited, these language learning strategies enable students to engage effectively in language classrooms while maintaining connections with the broader world. Musical elements create more enjoyable classroom environments, facilitating language learning and motivating ESL learners, as corroborated by Albaladejo et al. (2018).

The "reading for fun" strategy offers a cognitive approach that positively impacts students' motivation for reading skill acquisition. This approach exposes diverse sentence structures, vocabulary, and phraseology, supporting reading comprehension development. Additionally, it transitions learners from teacher-centred to self-directed, learner-centred language acquisition processes, reflecting principles that Grabe and Stoller (2019) advocate regarding autonomous reading development.

The findings regarding visual support (pictures, titles) and metacognitive strategies (monitoring comprehension, re-reading) support Hudson's (2007) research on scaffolded reading experiences, which emphasises the importance of providing appropriate support structures for developing L2 reading proficiency. Furthermore, the data concerning compensatory strategies like contextual guessing align with Oxford's (1990) framework of direct learning strategies that facilitate comprehension despite knowledge gaps.

Implementing these empirically supported strategies in ESL classrooms throughout Gujarat could significantly enhance receptive skills development among upper primary learners, particularly in rural areas with limited target language exposure. As Zhang (2016) demonstrated, systematic strategy training can significantly improve listening and reading comprehension outcomes for young ESL learners.

Conclusion

Language learning strategies significantly enhance receptive skills through improved comprehension and vocabulary enrichment. These strategies provide crucial language exposure and motivate learners in environments with limited target language access. They transform ESL classroom atmospheres into more engaging and enjoyable learning spaces, connecting learners to broader language communities.

This study demonstrates that upper primary ESL learners in Gujarat utilise various strategies to develop their listening and reading skills, with extreme preferences for enjoyment-based approaches like listening to English songs and reading interesting materials. The findings align with contemporary second language acquisition theories, which emphasise the importance of comprehensible input (Krashen, 2003), strategic learning behaviours (Oxford, 1990), and metacognitive awareness (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012) in language development.

Future research should explore the implementation of strategy-based instruction specifically tailored to the sociolinguistic context of Gujarat's rural areas, potentially incorporating digital tools to expand exposure opportunities beyond the classroom setting. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining the correlation between strategy use and language proficiency development provide valuable insights for curriculum development and teacher training programs in this region.

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