Strategies, Attitudes and Motivation of Students in Learning English in a Chinese Independent High School in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine the learning strategies, attitude and motivation of Chinese independent high school students in Negeri Sembilan in learning English. All the strategies (memory, cognitive, metacognitive, compensation, affective and social) were evaluated. Students' experiences and perceptions in learning English are also included. Mixed-method was used. Questionnaires were given to 178 students from a Chinese independent high school in Negeri Sembilan. Interviews were conducted for 18 students from the school.

Based on the results, the study showed that students have a good attitude towards English language learning. Overall, students were more instrumentally motivated. The mean score of instrumentality motivation (4.13) is higher than the mean score of the integrative motivation (mean score = 3.85). This suggests that the practical benefits (future career and further education) were the main motivators for the students. The most widely used strategy was compensation (guess and paraphrase for vocabulary gap). Cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies were also studied and used by the students.

Challenges faced by students included a limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and a

lack of practice. However, there are many students with a positive attitude towards learning English because they are interested in English, parents encouraged their children, and the language mastered was helpful for students in many ways. The survey data and interview data show that the need for educational intervention for language anxiety, improved retention of the vocabulary, and more practice. The results also showed that instrumental motivation, family, and friends as important factors in maintaining good attitude and motivation to learn English and improving language skills.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

English language plays a pivotal role in modern society given that it constitutes the main medium of international communication and business, academic, scientific, and technological development (Lane, 2021). Learning English still remains a challenging task for students in Chinese independent high schools (CIHS) despite numerous initiatives undertaken by educational facilities and policymakers.

In CIHS environments, English is taught only as a single subject, limiting meaningful exposure and dampening student motivation. Consequently, the students in CIHS have lower English language proficiency compared to their peers in national schools, where English is used more frequently (Mak, 2023). In Chinese-medium education contexts, English learning is typically limited to formal classroom periods (Hong & Ganapathy, 2017). Student motivation seems to be largely instrumental when there are limited possibilities for real-world English use outside of the classroom, especially when English is not seen as relevant in their everyday learning environment.

1.2 Explore Importance of the Problem

The proficiency gap among CIHS students may be shaped by a complex mix of learning strategies, attitudes, and motivations. Research indicates that effective language learning strategies significantly impact second language acquisition (Oxford, 1990). However, connections among different strategies are contingent upon the students' attitudes and motivation (Gardner, 1985). For Malaysia, students' attitudes towards English are contingent on their socio-cultural backgrounds and their perceptions of English as a mechanism for future job satisfaction (Thang, Ting & Mohd Jaafar, 2011). Motivation—be it integrative (desire to bond with English-speaking communities and culture) or instrumental (concrete advantages like future job prospects)—forms the basis of how students regard language learning (Brown, 2000). However, research suggests that many CIHS students exhibit lower motivation to learn English, largely due to the dominance of Chinese in both their social circles and academic environments (Keranjit Kaur & Yunus, 2021). This diminished motivation likely contributes significantly to the persistent proficiency gap.

Due to the Chinese-medium instruction and the absence of English-speaking environment, CIHS students have limited exposure to English, unlike their peers in national schools (Mak, 2023). As a result, they often rely on traditional teacher-centered approaches and may not be able to apply effective learning strategies. Yahaya et al. (2024) asserted that students' awareness and various learning strategies can influence their second language outcomes. Attitudes and motivation are crucial in determining how learners approach language study. In the CIHS context, as English is not used beyond classroom, students may not see the relevance of English and hence affecting their affective and cognitive engagement with the language (Kashinathan & Aziz, 2021). Due to their limited exposure to English-speaking populations, CIHS students frequently exhibit low levels of integrative motivation, or the desire to connect with English speakers and cultures. However, when students don't

immediately see personal benefits, instrumental motivation—like studying English for university admission or career opportunities—can be reduced (Muslim, Hamied & Sukyadi, 2020).

However, research on CIHS students' use of language learning strategies, attitudes and motivation toward learning English, especially in semi-urban states like Negeri Sembilan, remain scarce. Research on CIHS students' experiences with English learning also remains limited. Understanding these underlying issues is the key to improve English education in CIHS and ensure that students develop the necessary skills to compete in a globalized world. Therefore, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate the strategies used by Chinese independent high school students in Negeri Sembilan to learn the English language.

2. To determine the aspects of attitudes of the Chinese independent high school students in Negeri Sembilan in their English language learning.

3. To determine the motivational aspects (integrative/instrumental) that drive Chinese independent high school students in Negeri Sembilan to learn English.

4. To explore the experiences and perceptions of Chinese independent high school students in Negeri Sembilan regarding their English language learning.

Based on the research objectives, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the learning strategies of Chinese independent high school students in Negeri Sembilan in learning the English language?

2. What are the attitudes of Chinese independent high school students in Negeri Sembilan towards their English language learning?

3. What are the motivational aspects (integrative and instrumental) of the Chinese independent high school students in Negeri Sembilan towards their English language learning?

4. What are the experiences and perceptions of Chinese independent high school students in Negeri Sembilan regarding their English language learning?

By identifying these key drivers and barriers, this research intends to provide recommendations for educational interventions, helping to enhance English language learning outcomes for students in CIHS.

2. Literature Review

Some recent studies have highlighted the importance of individualized learning strategies for boosting language proficiency. Examples include studies by Baskın (2024) and Durán et al. (2022), which illustrate the importance of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in the language learner, thereby linking to Oxford (1990): structured strategy-based approaches

prove effective in language acquisition. In addition, in multilingual environment like Malaysia, compensation strategies are useful in bridging the gap between the understanding and communication (Sani & Ismail, 2021).

Motivation; particularly integrative is considered one of the main factors involved in successful language acquisition. Baharum, Ismail, and Shaukin (2024) researched that students with higher levels of motivation tend to employ a wider variety of learning strategies, improving their language competence. The findings correspond to the socio- educational model developed by Gardner (1985), which emphasizes the influential role of motivation in various language learning scenarios. Moreover, Tai and Zhao (2024) speculate that highly motivated learners resort to self-regulated learning behaviours, a critical component of successful second language acquisition. These studies suggest the importance of motivation.

Attitudes toward the target language are also crucial because they can significantly impact how teachers and students learn from the material and approach used. According to Dai and Pan (2024) and Piwoni (2024), when learners have positive attitudes toward the language and its speakers, they are more likely to adopt effective learning strategies. The above findings lie within the constructivist view since they discuss the impact of learners' beliefs and emotions on their educational affairs. Studies have also shown that learners influenced by positive attitudes on learning environments become more persistent and perform better when learning languages (Lestari & Wahyudin, 2020; Hariri et al., 2020).

Based on the evaluation of Chinese Independent High School (CIHS) from Negeri Sembilan, these findings will be important to know how these students acquired their linguistic and educational background during this time. Research claims that the students of CIHS live in a multilingual environment where the most dominant language of instruction is Mandarin (Bong, 2022). Consequently, it not only affects stimulation within motivational dynamics but, also the attitudinal dispositions toward learning languages. New researches (Baharum et al., 2024; Dai & Pan, 2024) discuss how motivation (Baharum et al., 2024) and good attitudes on the part of the learners become two factors strongly positioned toward helping student language learning.

Methodologically, Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and Gardner's (1985) Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) have been established established in several past studies. The studies by Lestari and Wahyudin (2020) and Choong and Tan (2023) reveal again how valid and dependable these instruments were in capturing the complexity of learning strategies, attitudes, and motivation in different types of schools. Within the Malaysia context, due to its multilingualism and cultural diversity, it is important to research specific patterns of motivation, attitude, and strategies among the CIHS students.

Even with the abundance of recent literature, there are still a number of issues that this study attempts to resolve. Numerous prior studies have concentrated on national or international educational settings, frequently neglecting the distinct problems encountered by students in Chinese Independent High Schools (CIHS) in Malaysia. These schools exhibit considerable variation in language policy, pedagogical approaches, and cultural orientation, with Mandarin serving as the primary medium of instruction and minimal formal or informal exposure to English. As a result, CIHS students may face unique motivational, attitudinal, and strategic

obstacles that current research does not sufficiently address. Furthermore, whereas numerous studies have utilized SILL and AMTB across various areas, limited research has investigated how these measures reflect the lived experiences, views, and coping methods of CIHS students particularly. This gap underscores the necessity for more sophisticated, contextually aware research that considers the socio-cultural and linguistic reality of learners in CIHS environments. This study aims to provide fresh insights into how these students manage their English language learning and identifies focused treatments that may effectively support them.

3. Methodology

3.1 Demographic Information

The study included 178 students from a Chinese Independent High School in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The participants ranged in age from 16 to 18 years old, from Senior 1 to Senior 3. 20 students were selected for the pilot test. Of the participants, 50.63% were male and 49.37% were female. Most students had been learning English for 10 years, with varying levels of exposure outside the classroom.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents Based on Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	80	50.63
Female	78	49.37
Total	158	100.00

3.2 Sampling Procedures

A combination of convenience and random sampling was employed to select participants. Convenience sampling was used to ensure accessibility, as the researcher had prior contact with the school, while random sampling was applied within each grade level to minimize selection bias.

Data collection took place in a classroom setting under the supervision of English teachers to ensure compliance. Initially, surveys were distributed online via Google Forms, but due to low response rates, the researcher decided to administer them in person. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person over a three-week period, with assistance from English teachers in scheduling the sessions.

The research was conducted with due regard for ethical principles. Research was conducted subject to JKEUPM approval. The participants' informed consent was respected as the first and most crucial ethical criterion in this investigation. To ensure the safety of the participants, who range in age from 16 to 18, a Respondent's Information Sheet and a

Guardian's/permission Parent's form was made available prior to the distribution of the questionnaire and the conduct of the interviews. To participate in the research, participants must have their legal guardian or parent sign out a permission form that provides basic information about the study (its purpose, title, etc.). The researcher also gained participants' permission to record and transcribe interviews. To protect anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants.3.2.1 Population, Sample Size and Sampling

The sample consisted of only the higher secondary students (320 students) at the Chinese independent high school in Negeri Sembilan, as compared to the lower secondary students (Junior 1 to Junior 3), higher secondary students (Senior 1 to Senior 3) have more exposure to English language learning. Using Yamane's formula (1967) at a 95% confidence level, the final sample size was determined to be 178 students for the survey. Additionally, 18 students—representing 10% of the total sample—were selected for semi-structured interviews to provide qualitative insights into their learning experiences.

3.2.1 Sample Size & Sampling

The sample for this research involved the Chinese independent high school students (320 students) at the Chinese independent high school in Negeri Sembilan. Compared against the sample composed of lower secondary students (Junior 1 to Junior 3), higher secondary students (Senior 1 to Senior 3) have higher exposure to English language learning. Based on Yamane's formula calculation (1967) with 95% confidence level, the total sample size of 178 students was calculated for the survey. Besides, there were the 18 students forming 10% of the total set of sample students who were selected for the semi-structured interviews to provide the qualitative information on the learning experience of these students.

3.3 Research Instrument

Data were collected using two standardized questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The first instrument was a survey based on Gardner's Attitude and Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) survey and the research concerning the motivation and attitude of the secondary school students to English done by Syed Alias (2012). The scale used was 5-point Likert: 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). This instrument was used as a questionnaire with 44 items to measure the attitudes of English students about English learning and their motivation. The second instrument was Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The SILL serves for measuring six different categories of learning strategies including memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social learning strategies. Both instruments are verified through previous studies in language learning previously. Also, the reliability of the instruments was calculated as Cronbach's alpha values are 0.7 or higher.

In addition to these quantitative measures, interview was conducted with 18 random students. The way of the interviews were open-ended questions to capture students' views, motivations, and strategies toward English learning. These interviews were conducted in Chinese to ensure clarity, but then translated into English using back translation. This was done to ensure accuracy. For increased quality in measurement, a pilot study involving 20 students was

undertaken to ensure clarity as well as the reliability of the instruments. Two language education specialists also evaluated and verified the questions.

3.4 Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey design with a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The quantitative part had the form of structured questionnaires, and the qualitative part had semi-structured interviews. The quantitative part was used to provide broad analysis of trends and the qualitative part was used to get descriptive information on the students' experiences. The research design was guided by a framework called the Research Onion that provides a framework on how to develop a research methodology. This framework includes layers such as philosophies, approaches, strategies, choices, time horizons, and techniques and procedures. This study adopted the philosophical stance, which was primarily positivist for the quantitative analysis and interpretivist for the qualitative analysis. It was conducted as a survey-based, cross-sectional study, meaning that data were collected at a single point in time without any longitudinal follow-up.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to examine students' attitudes, motivation and their English language learning strategies.

4.1.1 Attitudes towards English learning

Students from the Chinese Independent High School in Negeri Sembilan generally have a moderately positive attitude towards learning English (Mean = 2.99). While students enjoy learning English (Mean = 3.35) and have a strong desire for fluency (Mean = 4.35), engagement in reading English materials (Mean = 2.78) and classroom activities (Mean = 2.82) remains low. Anxiety when using English is a common issue, as reflected in their nervousness when speaking in class (Mean = 3.44) and when interacting with English-speaking tourists (Mean = 3.42). Additionally, students tend to prefer using Mandarin in school (Mean = 4.10), which limits their opportunities to practice English in a natural setting.

Table 2. Mean Values for Students' Attitude Towards English learning

Item	Questions	Mean
1	I enjoy learning English.	3.35
2	I have a strong desire to learn English.	3.23
3	I wish I were fluent in English.	4.35
4	I will read English materials to improve my proficiency in the language.	2.78
5	I enjoy the activities in English class much more than those of my other classes.	2.82
6	I will not feel nervous if my English teacher asks me to answer a question in class.	2.84
7	I will try my best to understand all the English I read and hear.	4.07
8	I am interested in English class because my English teacher has an interesting teaching style.	3.21
9	I think my English class is boring.	2.64
10	I tend to give up when I do not get high marks in English.	2.62
11	Learning English is a waste of time.	1.68
12	I learn English because I am forced to learn.	2.21
13	I think studying Chinese is more important than English.	2.96
14	I don't pay much attention in English class.	2.72
15	I will not check my homework when I get them back from my English teacher.	2.55
16	I get nervous when I have to speak in English class.	3.44
17	I am sometimes worried that the other students in class will laugh at me when I speak English.	3.20
18	I would get nervous If I had to speak English to a tourist.	3.42
19	I would feel uncomfortable speaking English anywhere outside the classroom.	3.08
20	I hate English class because my English teacher does not present teaching materials in an interesting way.	2.34
21	In school, I prefer speaking Mandarin over English.	4.10
22	If I hear someone speaking in English, I will think that person is bragging.	2.02
23	If I hear someone speaking in English, I will think that the person is just trying to learn the language.	3.53
24	When I leave school, I will give up learning English because I am not interested in it.	2.20
25	In Malaysia, English is more important than any other languages.	3.42
	Overall Mean	2.99

4.1.2 Motivation towards English learning

Students' motivation was assessed based on integrative and instrumental motivation. Instrumental motivation (practical benefits) (Mean = 4.13) is stronger than integrative motivation (social integration) (Mean = 3.85). The highest motivation factors include **wanting to further studies** (Mean = 4.46) and **securing good jobs** (Mean = 4.43). While some students express an interest in connecting with English-speaking communities, their motivation remains more focused on academic and career-related goals.

Table 3. Mean Values for Integrative Motivation and Instrumental Motivation

Motivation	Mean
Integrative	3.85
Instrumental	4.13
Overall Mean	3.99

Table 4. Mean Values for Items in Integrative Motivation

Integrative		
Item	**Questions**	**Mean**
1	Studying English is important because it allows me to be more at ease with people who speak English.	4.14
3	Studying English is important because it allows me to meet and talk to more people.	4.28
10	Studying English is important because I will be able to interact more easily with English speakers.	4.42
11	Studying English can help me meet new people from different parts of the world.	4.42
12	Studying English is important because it will help me better understand the life of the English-speaking communities.	4.09
13	I tend to make more friends when I speak English.	3.61
16	I would feel comfortable speaking English where both Chinese and English speakers were present.	2.78
17	I wish I had begun studying English at an early age.	3.88
18	I feel that I could have a better relationship with others if I speak in English.	3.04
	Overall Mean	3.85

Table 5. Mean Values for Items in Instrumental Motivation

Instrumental		
Item	**Questions**	**Mean**
2	Studying English is important because it helps me get a good job.	4.43
4	Studying English is important because other people will respect me more if I know English.	3.30
5	Studying English is important because it helps me to further my study.	4.46
6	Studying English is important because it allows me to search for more information in English from the internet.	4.27
7	Studying English is important because it helps me understand English songs, videos, movies and subtitles.	4.42
8	Studying English is important because it helps me understand English books, novels, magazines and newspapers.	4.32
9	Studying English is important because it will make me a more knowledgeable person.	4.20
14	In Malaysia, speaking fluent English can help get a job.	4.03
15	I study English to get good grades in the exam.	3.70
	Overall Mean	4.13

4.1.3 English Language Learning Strategies

Students employ various strategies to enhance their English learning experience. Compensation strategies appear to be the most commonly used strategy among these students (Mean = 3.55). For the findings on English language learning strategies, only the highest mean score item for each strategy will be presented, as there are too many items in the questionnaire to include them all.

For Memory strategies, the highest mean score among the memory strategies is 3.54, associated with the statement, *"I remember a new word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used."* This indicates that students prefer using visualization techniques to help them recall new words and phrases.

Table 6. Mean Values for Items in Memory Strategies

	A: MEMORY STRATEGIES	
1	I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in English.	3.48
2	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember.	3.05
3	I connect the sound of a new English word and an image of the word to help me remember the word.	3.25
4	I remember a new word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	3.54
5	I use rhymes to remember new English words.	2.87
6	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	2.68
7	I physically act out new English words.	2.74
8	I review English lessons often.	2.59
9	I remember new words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign.	3.17
	Overall Mean	3.04

The highest mean score in Cognitive Strategies is 3.53 for the statement, *"I watch English-language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English,"* indicating that multimedia resources are a popular and effective tool for language learning.

Table 7. Mean Values for Items in Cognitive Strategies

	B: COGNITIVE STRATEGIES	
10	I say or write new English words several times.	3.43
11	try to talk like native English speakers	3.18
12	I practise the sounds of English.	3.03
13	I use the English words I know differently.	3.16
14	I start conversations in English.	3.51
15	I watch English-language TV shows or go to movies spoken in English.	3.53
16	I read for pleasure in English.	2.77
17	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	2.54
18	I first skim an English passage (read it quickly) then go back and read carefully.	3.22
19	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	3.46
20	I try to find patterns in English.	3.00
21	I find the meaning of an English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	3.08
22	I try not to translate word-for-word	2.94
23	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	3.11
	Overall Mean	3.14

Compensation strategies, which help learners cope with gaps in their language knowledge, show varied usage among students. The highest mean score in this category is 3.87 for the statement *"To understand unfamiliar English words, I guess."* This shows that students often guess meanings from the context when they encounter unfamiliar words.

Table 8. Mean Values for Items in Compensation Strategies

	C: COMPENSATION STRATEGIES	
24	To understand unfamiliar English words, I guess.	3.87
25	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	3.65
26	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English	3.53
27	I read English without looking up every new word.	3.06
28	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	3.32
29	If I can't think of an English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	3.85
	Overall Mean	3.55

Metacognitive strategies, which involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's learning, show varying degrees of usage. The highest mean score in this category is 3.63 for the statement *"I am trying to find out how to be a better learner of English."* This reflects that these students are actively seeking ways to improve their English skills.

Table 9. Mean Values for Items in Metacognitive Strategies

	D: METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES	
30	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	3.13
31	I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better.	3.42
32	I pay attention when someone is speaking English.	3.33
33	I am trying to find out how to be a better learner of English.	3.63
34	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	2.46
35	I look for people I can talk to in English.	2.87
36	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	2.90
37	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	2.90
38	I think about my progress in learning English.	3.12
	Overall Mean	3.08

Affective strategies, which involve managing emotions and attitudes towards learning, also show varied usage. The highest mean score in this category is 3.48 for the statement *"I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake."* This high score indicates that self-encouragement is a key strategy for overcoming anxiety and building confidence in using English (Horwitz, 1986).

Table 10. Mean Values for Items in Affective Strategies

	E: AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES	
39	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	3.32
40	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	3.48
41	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	3.09
42	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	3.10
43	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	2.09
44	I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	2.43
	Overall Mean	2.92

Social strategies, which involve interacting with others to facilitate learning, show significant variation in use. The highest mean score in this category is 3.75 for the statement *"If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again."* This indicates that seeking clarification is a common and effective strategy for comprehension (Long, 1996).

Table 11. Mean Values for Items in Social Strategies

	F: SOCIAL STRATEGIES	
45	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	3.75
46	I ask English speakers to correct me when I speak.	3.42
47	I practise English with other students	2.84
48	I seek help from English speakers.	3.42
49	I ask questions in English.	2.71
50	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	3.15
	Overall Mean	3.22

4.2 Qualitative Analysis

The interview data shows that the students have mixed attitudes towards learning English. Some students enjoy learning English due to its global relevance and career benefits, while others feel anxious and struggle with motivation. However, students face various challenges, including limited vocabulary, anxiety about making mistakes, and lack of practice opportunities. Effective learning strategies and support from parents, teachers, and peers play crucial roles in overcoming these challenges and enhancing language proficiency. These insights highlight the importance of a supportive learning environment and tailored educational strategies to address the diverse needs of students and foster successful English language acquisition.

The students also reported several challenges in learning English. One of the barriers is the fear of making mistakes, which leads to a reluctance to speak English. Their progress in learning English is further hindered by the limited opportunities they have to use English outside of the classroom. Furthermore, students also stated that they are discouraged from writing because of their grammar difficulties. This reluctance prevents them from refining their writing skills as well as affecting their overall language development.

Some students mentioned that English-speaking environments, digital resources, and supportive teachers are the key factors in their learning success. Others suggested that more interactive learning methods, such as debates, games, and group discussions, would improve their engagement with English.

5. Discussion

The findings from this study on Chinese Independent High School students in Negeri Sembilan provide valuable insight into their English language learning process. It explores the strategies they use, their attitudes, motivation and their experience towards learning English.

5.1 Learning Strategies of Chinese Independent High School Students

The research revealed that students employ a range of learning strategies (cognitive,

metacognitive, compensation, memory, affective, and social strategies). Compensation strategies were applied most frequently, and students had to guess and paraphrased to study to overcome the language barrier (mean = 3.55). Cognitive strategies such as working with multimedia resources also took upper positions, which suggests that watching English media can help students to pronounce and understand better. although memory techniques like flashcards and summarization were mentioned in student responses, they did not attain the same frequency rating or perceived utility as compensation and cognitive strategies. This indicates that students depend more on adaptive, rapid problem-solving methods to manage unexpected English material rather than on long-term memorization or emotional control strategies.

Qualitatively, learners shared personal experiences and preferences as well as their thoughts on the fact that interactive and practical activities play a crucial role in their language learning process. However, there is a range of problems due to anxiety about speaking and a low frequency of English use outside of school, which limits the application of strategies. According to Izaddin and Ismail (2025), Malaysian ESL learners frequently encounter difficulties in practicing English outside of academic settings, hence constraining their speech proficiency. In order to mitigate these problems, it was suggested allowing educators to imbue engaging classroom activities into the instructional process, as well as raise the practical use of language outside of school.

5.2 Attitudes Towards English Language Learning

Students exhibited a moderately positive attitude towards learning English, with an overall mean score of 3.42. Enjoyment of learning English was reported, though engagement with extensive reading was lower (mean = 2.78). This gap may be ascribed to various variables, including screen fatigue from extended digital learning and an increasing inclination towards visual or audio content rather than text-based materials. This illustrates Krashen's (2004) study that reading is an important input. According to Hassan et al. (2021), many Malaysian secondary ESL learners have poor reading habits and low success despite official teaching. There is limited secondary research in Malaysia linking pandemic-related screen weariness to decreased English reading habits. However, the existing data indicated that low reading engagement was already low and likely decreased during COVID-19 pandemic.

Cultural and educational biases influenced attitudes, as some students viewed learning Chinese as more important than English. Although there is limited of recent research (2020–2025) that specifically addresses how cultural identity preservation contributes to a decline in the emphasis on English in Chinese Independent High Schools, the literature that is currently available on the historical goals of CIHS (Tan, 2011) and ESL difficulties in Malaysian contexts (Kashinathan & Aziz, 2021) provides relevant insights. CIHS focuses Mandarin and Chinese cultural education. This institutional focus may help create an atmosphere where English is seen as operationally significant but not culturally central, which could diminish the emphasis on English even when it is not explicitly exclusionary. Further investigation is required to examine this relationship empirically.

Qualitative insights provided a deeper understanding of these attitudes. Some students felt

anxious and thought English was hard while others saw the value in it to access more English content and enhance opportunities in the future. With respect to the Gardner's Socio-Educational Model, a combination of integrative and instrumental motivations is considered central to the students' attitudes. The findings from this study show that personal interest and perceived utility drive students to develop positive attitudes about English. Consequently, there is a need to identify strategies that enhance enjoyment and hands-on learning in the classroom.

5.3 Motivational Aspects (Integrative and Instrumental)

Integrative and instrumental motivations were observed to both be pertinent with instrumental (mean score 4.13) being more important than integrative (mean score 3.85). Students saw English as being useful for future job roles and studies. The mean score in each statement was on the top responses for English language, being vital for future job and studies. Parental expectations had an impact on instrumental motivation. These findings align with Akhir and Mokhtar (2024) who found out that Malaysian ESL students mostly use English for academic and economic progression.

Integrative motivation was reflected in students' interest in global interactions and cultural connections. The social and cultural influences on language learning were highlighted by several students responded positively to the option of travel opportunities and to see the interaction of English language speakers. The results demonstrate that educational approaches are needed that address both motivation: combining practical advantages with cultural appreciation, and interpersonal interaction. Although there are limited studies specifically looking at Chinese independent high schools in Malaysia after 2020, Hong & Ganapathy's (2017) study, which is backed by more general motivational theory (Suliman et al., 2024), shows that Malaysian students frequently exhibit both integrative and instrumental motivation, particularly in multicultural educational settings.

5.4 Experiences and Perceptions of English Language Learning

Different challenges were experienced by the students such as the difficulties with grammar and vocabulary, which affected both understanding and confidence; lack of exposure to English outside school and the feeling that English classes are boring minimized motivation. This corroborates the findings of Razawi and Mohamad (2024), who argue that traditional ESL instruction frequently does not engage digital-native learners. The widespread adoption of gamified and interactive digital tools during COVID pandemic may alleviate this issue. Several students mentioned practical obstacles to the use of English in everyday life, with some of them saying that the majority of people they known in their social circles spoke Chinese. This lack of exposure to English means they are limited in practicing English. This is consistent with Kashinathan and Aziz (2021) and is aligned with the recent research from Ahmad et al. (2022), which observed that numerous Malaysian ESL students experience a deficiency of authentic communication opportunities, resulting in diminished confidence and speaking skills.

Support systems played a crucial role in shaping students' experiences. Parental

encouragement, teacher support, and peer collaboration were identified as essential motivators. Family involvement, such as practicing English at home and providing additional learning materials, was particularly beneficial. Attending tuition classes also helped students improve their proficiency and confidence. The findings suggest that fostering a supportive learning environment, both at home and in school, can enhance students' engagement and overall language learning experience. Masalin and Saibeh (2025) noticed similar patterns, highlighting the increasing significance of family-centered learning and extra tutoring in Malaysian private schools.

The findings highlight that while there are notable challenges, having strong support systems in place—particularly those that are tailored and emotionally sensitive—can alleviate these difficulties. This aligns with recent studies that emphasize the importance of whole-child and socio-emotional learning strategies in ESL classrooms, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic (Ganasan et al., 2022).

6. Conclusion

This study on English language learning strategies, attitudes, and motivations among Chinese Independent High School (CIHS) students in Negeri Sembilan has revealed complex layers of influence that define the educational experiences of these students.

The quantitative findings show that students use different strategies, with a significant reliance on compensatory strategies like guessing and paraphrasing. The mean scores on various items suggested that while there is a general positivity towards learning English, specific areas such as extensive reading and prioritization of English over Chinese showed lower enthusiasm.

The qualitative data enriched these findings by adding depth and context to the numbers. This shows that there is a need for a media approach to increase in language engagement, but at the same time being full of anxiety and lacking confidence hinder real-world use. English education cannot be based only on grammar and vocabulary, but it requires a learning environment in which confidence can develop and minimize anxiety to help create motivation.

To better English learning in CIHS, it suggests the schools must utilize strategies to concentrate on cognitive and affective aspects of learning. Future studies could expand the scope to include multiple CIHS across Malaysia or conduct longitudinal research to track changes over time. Integrating technology and innovative teaching methods may also enhance engagement and proficiency.

In conclusion, this study contributes to understanding English language acquisition in multicultural settings, providing insights for future educators to enhance English language education in similar context globally.

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