An Investigation of Language Learning Strategies through ERG Theory

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates language learning strategies through the lens of ERG theory with the purpose of examining how learners' motivational needs influence learning strategies in second language acquisition. The theoretical framework is grounded in Alderfer's ERG model, which emphasizes existence, relatedness, and growth needs as learning motivations. The research investigates how these motivational needs shape learners' strategic behaviours, as most prior studies have focused on strategy usage without exploring the affecting and external factors. A quantitative survey design was employed with a convenient sample of 78 respondents drawn from different academic fields. The data was collected using a 42-item Likert-scale questionnaire adapted from Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) (Pintrich et. al, 1991). An analysis was conducted using reliability testing and descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that learners perceive existence needs through metacognitive regulation, while growth needs are viewed through cognitive strategies. On the other hand, relatedness needs are perceived through resource management. These findings suggest a strong association of motivation and strategy use. In conclusion, the study suggests that ERG theory provides a valuable framework for understanding language learning strategies and deepens the insights between motivation and strategy use.

Keywords: Erg Theory, Language, Learning Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

Examining how to learn a language involves more than just looking at the teaching methods used to learn a language. Many other factors including a learner's cognitive strategies, motivation and social behaviour affect how quickly and easily they can develop their language competence. Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) are defined by Oxford (1990) as: The conscious and unconscious cognitive processes and behavioural procedures that language learners engage in to help them learn languages. Wood (2020) states that there are several intentional strategies or techniques that learners implement in order to improve their overall learning experience. These strategies include cognitive strategies (e.g., rehearsal, memorisation, etc.), metacognitive strategies (i.e., planning), affective regulation and social interaction strategies to help learners better understand the meanings of words and phrases and to refine the skills needed to speak the target language adequately. LLSs have been studied extensively by researchers in the area of second language acquisition, but to date, few studies have explored the relationship between the motivation of language learners and an individual's use of LLSs to achieve their desired level of language competence (Shurovi et al., 2025). This study will help to fill that gap by

investigating LLSs through the lens of ERG Theory, which provides a more nuanced perspective regarding learners' needs and behaviours.

The ERG theory was originally proposed by Clayton P. Alderfer (1969) as a needs-based motivational model. The ERG theory is classified into three categories of human needs: Existence, Relatedness, and Growth (Alderfer, 1969, 1972). The ERG theory differs from Maslow's theory in that it allows individuals to satisfy multiple types of needs at one time. The ERG theory also recognises that the frustration of higher-level needs can be a motivation to shift attention to lower-level needs, which is referred to as the frustration-regression principle (Alderfer, 1972). Given the dynamic nature of ERG theory, it is most relevant to the learning environment since the motivation of students varies depending on the circumstances and type of learning. Existence needs are the essential needs that learners require to learn, relatedness needs are associated with the social support and feeling of belongingness in the learning environment and growth needs are associated with the development and improvement of the person (Robbins & Judge, 2020).

It is in this sense that the application of ERG theory in the study of language learning techniques is both relevant and timely. This paper aims to demonstrate the role of motivational needs in strategy deployment in actual contexts of language learning through an investigation of learners' perceptions of Existence, Relatedness and Growth needs in the language learning process. Not only will such an approach yield valuable practice implications in terms of curriculum development, instructional scaffolding and learners' support systems that address learners' needs in a holistic manner, but it will also enrich the theoretical understanding of motivation in language learning.

Statement of Problem

Language learning strategies are tools or techniques which learners use to facilitate their understanding, retention and use of a second language. Strategies such as planning, self-monitoring and utilising resources were found to be able to facilitate learners' performance. For example, a recent study found that language learners who are adept at managing resources/strategies tend to perform better at language tasks (Norliza Che Mustafa et al., 2025). Additionally, Domínguez and Juanías (2024) showed that it is important for learners to have self-regulatory and help-seeking type strategies to enhance their overall learning experience. However, many studies have focused solely on the language learning strategies without looking into the underlying reasons (i.e., learners' individual learning characteristics; learner's motivation) which might guide the learner's selection of the strategy.

While there are numerous studies demonstrating that motivation plays an important role in explaining the use of language learning strategies by learners, the ways in which the different motivational needs of various learners impact on their use of language learning strategies remains poorly understood. There is also evidence that learners' motivation can be influenced by the learning context or phase of the learning process (Hanis Najwa Shaharuddin et al., 2024). Therefore, there is a need for further research to explore the relationship between learners' motivations and their selected language learning strategies, and how these relate to the context in which language learners are learning a second language (Domínguez & Juanías, 2024) This current research aims to address the issue of learners' strategies in language learning, particularly the role of learners' Existence, Relatedness, and Growth needs in the regulation of language learning strategies, as informed by the ERG theory.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore language learning strategies through ERG theory. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- How do learners perceive existence in language learning?
- How do learners perceive growth in language learning?
- How do learners perceive relatedness in language learning?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework of the Study

- ERG Theory

This study utilizes the ERG Theory of Motivation proposed by Clayton P. Alderfer as a refinement of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The theory explains human motivation in which needs are categorized into three core groups: existence, relatedness, and growth (Alderfer, 1969). ERG theory diverges from Maslow by proposing that these needs may be pursued simultaneously, and that individuals can regress to lower-order needs when higher-order needs are thwarted in a process known as the frustration–regression principle (Dewey, 2024; Rasdi et al., 2024). This flexibility explains individuals' priorities shift in dynamic context where motivation changes in response to environmental and psychological factors.

Existence needs refer to the material and physiological requirements necessary for survival and basic well-being (Alderfer, 1972). Existence needs encompass essential material and physiological requirements, such as compensation, safety, and physical resources. However, subsequent applications and discussions of ERG have emphasized its contextual adaptability across domains, including educational settings (Caulton, 2012). Within the context of education, existence needs refer to students' basic material and physiological requirements, including financial stability, access to learning resources, accommodation, and a secure learning environment. Research indicates that unmet existence needs such as financial stress or inadequate institutional support can negatively affect students' academic focus and psychological well-being (Yang & Que, 2023). Universities play a crucial role in addressing these needs through scholarships, learning infrastructure, and student support services. Therefore, in this study, existence needs are conceptualized as psychological security and learning readiness, defined as students' perceptions of emotional safety, clarity of expectations, structured guidance, and academic support.

Relatedness needs involve interpersonal relationships, social support, and belonging, which are foundational for social integration and collaboration in workplaces and learning environments (Rasdi et al., 2024). Within educational context, these needs emphasize the desire for sense of belonging, peer interaction, and relationships with lecturers which can significantly influence engagement and persistence. Positive academic and social integration has been shown to enhance motivation and reduce attrition among students, especially in blended and online learning environments (Rasdi et al., 2024). Supportive interactions with faculty and peers contribute to students' perception of being valued members of the academic community.

Growth needs reflects the intrinsic aspirations for competence, creativity, and self-development. They align closely with the core objectives of education, emphasizing intellectual development, autonomy, competence, and self-actualization. Opportunities for critical thinking, independent learning, research involvement, and career preparation are essential in satisfying students' growth needs (Alderfer, 1972). When these needs are met, consistent with ERG theory, the satisfaction of growth needs enhances intrinsic motivation and deep learning engagement.

A distinctive contribution of ERG theory in comparison to Maslow's hierarchy of need is the frustration–regression principle, which suggests that when higher-order growth needs are obstructed such as limited academic autonomy or unclear career pathways, students may shift their focus toward lower-order needs, including social support or financial security (Alderfer, 1969). This principle is particularly relevant in higher education settings marked by academic pressure, remote learning, or constrained institutional resources.

Recent empirical studies affirm the continued relevance of ERG constructs. For example, satisfaction of existence, relatedness, and growth needs has been shown to negatively predict job burnout among university teachers, with job satisfaction mediating these effects (Yang & Que, 2023). Similarly, applications of ERG theory in educational research demonstrate its capacity to frame student motivation in remote learning contexts by capturing how multiple motivational dimensions interact under changing conditions (Rasdi et al., 2024). Another study by Zarina et al. (2022) found that sustaining the classroom motivation of the students would

require continuous psychological, materials and academic support together with training in teaching pedagogy are vital to ensure their academic success.

Overall, ERG theory offers a more flexible and empirically grounded approach to understanding motivation compared to Maslow's hierarchy. In instructional contexts, ensuring psychological security and structural clarity (existence) creates the conditions necessary for collaborative engagement (relatedness), which in turn supports advanced intellectual exploration (growth). By acknowledging that multiple needs can operate concurrently and that unmet higher-order needs can intensify lower-order needs, the theory provides a practical framework for analysing motivation in organizational and educational settings (Robbins & Judge, 2017).

- Language Learning Strategies

Research in second and foreign language acquisition has consistently highlighted the central role of learner-driven strategies in facilitating effective language development. Language learning strategies (LLS), defined as the conscious processes learners use to enhance the acquisition, retention, and use of a target language, have been the focus of extensive empirical investigation over the past several decades (Oxford, as cited in Tassinari, 2018). Scholars such as O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Cohen (1998) have emphasized that LLS are multidimensional, incorporating cognitive, metacognitive, social, and affective components that help learners manage complex linguistic tasks and regulate their own learning processes. Research systematically reviewing these strategies shows that learners frequently employ metacognitive and cognitive approaches to improve communicative competence, particularly in EFL and ESL contexts (Marenco Domínguez & Marín Juanías, 2023; Khamis, Yunus, & Mansor, 2024).

The literature further suggests that the deployment of language learning strategies is closely linked to motivational and affective constructs. For example, a systematic literature review investigating LLS in Malaysian ESL learners found that social and compensatory strategies complement metacognitive processes, reflecting learners' attempts to address interpersonal and cognitive challenges concurrently (Khamis et al., 2024). This aligns with broader research indicating that motivation, including intrinsic and extrinsic drives, significantly influences the frequency and selection of strategies that learners adopt (Shurovi et al., 2025).

ERG Theory; Clayton Alderfer's refinement of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs into three core categories—provides a useful conceptual lens for understanding how motivational factors might underlie strategy use in language learning. ERG Theory holds that individuals pursue needs related to *existence* (basic material and security needs), *relatedness* (social and interpersonal needs), and *growth* (self-development and personal achievement), and can satisfy more than one category simultaneously depending on context and frustration/regression dynamics. While direct empirical applications of ERG Theory within LLS research are limited, several educational motivation studies demonstrate that classroom motivation fluctuates according to similar need constructs. For example, research applying ERG Theory in classroom settings found that fulfilling students' needs for belonging, connection, and growth significantly enhanced engagement and learning outcomes — implying that affective and social components of learning environments shape learners' willingness to deploy strategies that support language acquisition.

Motivational frameworks like ERG help illuminate why learners adopt particular strategy types. Social and metacognitive strategies, for instance, not only support task performance but also satisfy *relatedness* and *growth* needs by enabling interaction with peers and by facilitating autonomous mastery of language skills. Similarly, affective strategies—such as anxiety reduction and self-encouragement—can be interpreted as responding to *existence* and *relatedness* needs by helping learners maintain psychological comfort and social connectedness in communicative contexts. Research on LLS usage reflects this complexity; metacognitive and cognitive strategies consistently emerge as most frequently used, suggesting learners prioritize strategies that support autonomy and internal regulation, which directly relate to growth needs within the ERG framework.

Despite the strength of the empirical base on LLS, the integration of motivational need theories like ERG remains underdeveloped. Most LLS research to date focuses on classification, frequency, and correlational relationships with proficiency or demographic factors, with limited theorization of underlying psychological drivers (Marenco Domínguez & Marín Juanías, 2023). Integrating ERG Theory into LLS research offers a promising direction by

conceptualizing language learning strategy use not merely as a set of cognitive tools, but as behaviors deeply rooted in learners' existential, relational, and developmental needs. This theoretical expansion could enrich both motivation and language acquisition research, providing a more holistic account of why learners select, persist with, or abandon specific strategies across contexts and proficiency levels.

Past Studies

Numerous researchers have investigated how learners utilize language learning strategies within a variety of contexts, including motivation and outcomes of learning; specifically, English as a Second Language (ESL). Nurhuda Mohamad Nazri et al., (2023) examined the types and uses of language learning strategies used by successful ESL students in a Malaysian private university. The researchers tracked data patterns regarding students' strategies by surveying 10 successful ESL students. The researchers utilized the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) as a tool to evaluate patterns of language learning strategies used by survey respondents. Based on researchers' findings, metacognitive strategies were used most frequently by all respondents, with compensatory and cognitive strategies following closely behind. Conversely, affective strategies were the least commonly used strategy among survey participants. Thus, successful learners possess an awareness of their own learning and control/regulate their own progress within the learning process.

Another study was conducted by Ahmad Hamizan Lootfi Amir (2025) exploring the language learning strategies employed by 30 postgraduate ESL students at a university in Malaysia. The study aimed to find out the frequency of the good language learners using particular strategies such as memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. A questionnaire with 30 items was used to collect data from the participants. The results were analysed based on Oxford's SILL questionnaire. It was found that similar strategies were used frequently among the participants which were the metacognitive strategy and cognitive strategy. This also supports the connection between the use of specific strategies with the students' behaviour.

Other studies have similarly explored the role of language learning strategies in the context of online learning, particularly when the context of educational institutions changed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Yusoff & Said (2024) studied the strategies of 302 Form 5 students in the context of online English learning. The researchers distributed a self-administered online questionnaire to determine the learners' strategy preferences. The results of the study pointed to the learners' adaptation of their strategies in response to the context of online learning.

Another study conducted by Warouw and Neman (2024) examined language learning strategies used by 91 university students in Indonesia in their foreign language course. The study used the SILL questionnaire to identify the frequency of strategy use by learners in cognitive, metacognitive, affective, memory, and social strategies. The study found that learners used different types of language learning strategies and that there was gender influence in choosing the strategies that suited them.

Collectively, these previous studies demonstrate that there has been a consistent effort to determine what strategies learners employ and how often they are employed in various contexts. These studies also demonstrate that learners often employ metacognitive and cognitive strategies, that patterns of strategy use can change depending on the educational context of online learning and that individual differences such as level of proficiency or gender can also influence strategy preference. However, what these studies do not yet address is the underlying reason for why learners select certain strategies based on internal motivational needs of existence, relatedness and growth. This is the aim of this current study.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. This study explores learners' perception on language learning strategies. For language learners, the use of strategies has a positive influence on their learning motivation (Rahmat & Thasrabiab, 2024). This is because the use of strategies gives learners confidence in the learning journey. If the chosen strategy is not successful, learners may seek to use others. This study is anchored from Alderfer's (1964) ERG theory of motivation. The theory states for motivation, learners need existence,

growth and relatedness. The instrument of this study is adopted from Wenden and Rubin's (1987) variables and constructs for language learning strategies. In the context of this study, to stay motivated to learn a language, learners need existence. This is the beginning of the learning journey where learners need self-talk to push through their learning and this can be achieved through the use of metacognitive self-regulation. Next, in the learning journey, learners need to focus on their growth. This is done through cognitive components such as (i) rehearsal, (ii) organization, (iii) elaboration, and (iv) critical thinking. Lastly, motivation increases when learners feel a sense of relatedness. This is achieved through resource management such as (i) environment management, (ii) effort management and (iii) help-seeking. Additionally, this study also explores if there is a relationship between the variables.

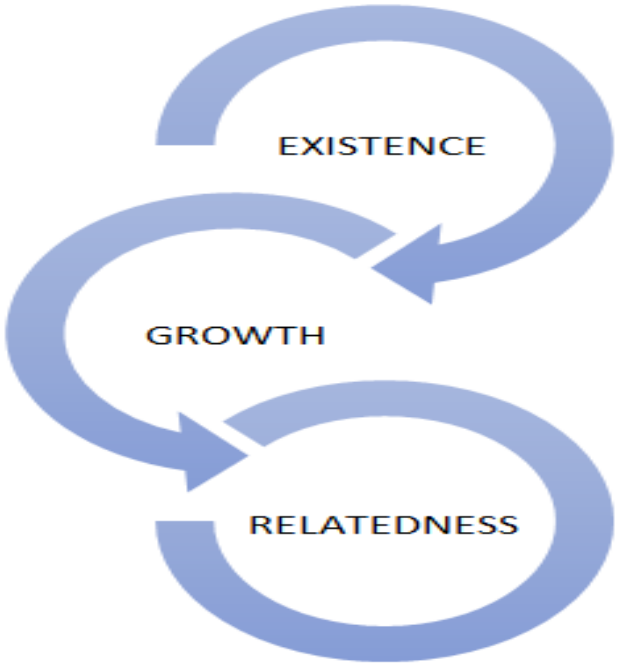

Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study

An Investigation of Language Learning Strategies through ERG theory

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study is done to explore language learning strategies through ERG theory. A convenient sample of 78 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Wenden &. Rubin (1987) to reveal the variables in table 3 below. Table 1 below shows the categories used for the Likert scale; 1 is for Strongly Disagree, 2 is for Disagree, 3 is for Undecided, 4 is for Agree and 5 is for Strongly Agree.

Table 1- Likert Scale Use

1	Never
2	Rarely
3	Sometimes
4	Very Often
5	Always

Table 2- Distribution of Items in the Survey

	VARIABLE	CATEGORY		CONSTRUCT	ITEM	TO ITEM	CRONBACH ALPHA
A	GROWTH	COGNITIVE COMPONENTS	(a)	Rehearsal	4	19	.941
			(b)	Organization	4		
			(c)	Elaboration	6		
			(d)	Critical Thinking	5		
B	EXISTENCE	METACOGNITIVE SELF-REGULATION				11	.886
C	RELATEDNESS	RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	(a)	Environment Management	4	12	.818
			(b)	Effort Management	4		
			(c)	Help-Seeking	4		
						42	.959

Table 2 shows the distribution of items in the survey. The survey intends to investigate the learners' language learning strategies on growth in Section A, existence in Section B, and relatedness in Section C. The survey has a total of 42 items which are adapted from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), which was developed by Pintrich et. al (1991) that has been grounded in social-cognitive, self-learning regulation theories and framework discussed in the literature review. In Section A, for growth, it has a total of 19 items which measure the learners' cognitive components. The constructs in this section are; (a) rehearsal with a total 4 items, (b) organization with a total of 4 items, (c) elaboration with a total of 6 items, and (d) critical thinking with a total of 5 items. For Section B in investigating the learners' existence, there are 11 items in measuring the learners' perception on the metacognitive self-regulation of learning strategies. Finally, the learners' perception in relatedness within Section C refers to the resource management category with a total of 12 items for (a) environment management, (b) effort management, and (c) help-seeking where each category has 4 items.

Table 3- Reliability Levels, Cronbach's Alpha Ranges, and Their Interpretations

Reliability Level	Cronbach's Alpha range	Interpretation
Excellent	0.9 and above	Indicates very high internal consistency
Good	0.80-0.89	Reflects strong internal consistency
Acceptable	0.70-0.79	Indicates acceptable internal consistency
Questionable	0.60-0.69	Reflects questionable internal consistency
Poor	Below 0.6	Indicates poor internal consistency

In order to determine the internal reliability of the instrument, reliability analysis is one. Table 3 above shows the distribution and interpretation of Cronbach Alpha range. According to Ahmad,et.al. (2024), Cronbach Alpha scores from 0.7 to 0.9 indicate acceptable to very high internal consistency.

Based on the reliability analysis in Table 2, the Cronbach Alpha for Growth (19 items) is .941 with high internal consistency, .886 for Existence (11 items) with strong internal consistency, and .818 for Relatedness (12 items) with strong internal consistency. The overall Cronbach Alpha for 42 items from all constructs is .959 with high internal consistency. Thus, the analysis indicates a strong reliability of the items within the selected instrument.

FINDINGS

Demographic Analysis

According to Zienefuss, et.al (2021), researchers report demographic data in percentages to establish sample representatives, and allow for generalizability to a larger population. The reporting also provides an overview of participants' characteristics. Percentages offer a clear and understandable picture of the sample makeup.

Table 4- Percentage for Demographic Profile

Question	Demographic Profile	Categories	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	19%
		Female	81%
2	Academic Field	Science & Technology	30%
		Social Sciences & Business	61%

Table 4 shows the demographic profile of the study. The majority of the respondents were females (81%) with the males only representing the other 19%. The sample consists of two groups of students from two different academic fields. Science & Technology field make up 30% of the total respondent while the other 61% comes from the Social Sciences & Business field.

Descriptive Statistics

Why is there a need to report the mean and standard deviation? According to Vetter (2017), Mean (M) represents the average, or centre of a data set. Standard deviation (SD) indicates the typical distance of individual observations from the mean which shows the data's variability or spread. A low SD means the data points are clustered close to the mean whole a high. SD indicates they are more spread out. It is good to have a high SD.

Findings for Existence

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive existence in language learning? In the context of this study, this is measured by metacognitive strategies.

Table 5- Mean for Metacognitive Self-Regulation (11 items)

ITEM	Mean	SD
MSSRQ1During class time, I often miss important points because I am thinking of other things.	3.15	1.05
MSSRQ 2When reading for the courses, I make up questions to help focus my reading.	3.53	0.92

MSSRQ 3When I become confused about something I am reading for the classes, I go back and try to figure it out.	4.05	0.78
MSSRQ 4If course readings are difficult to understand, I change the way I read the material.	3.89	0.87
MSSRQ 5Before I study new course material thoroughly, I often skim it to see how it is organized	3.81	0.93
MSSRQ 6I ask myself questions to make sure I understand the material I have been studying in this program.	3.76	0.98
MSSRQ7I try to change the way I study in order to fit any course requirements and the instructors' teaching style.	3.61	1.05
MSSRQ8I try to think through a topic and decide what I am supposed to learn from it rather than just reading it over when studying for the courses in this program.	3.78	0.82
MSSRQ 9When studying for the courses in this program I try to determine which concepts I do not understand well.	3.86	0.77
MSSRQ 10When I study for the courses, I set goals for myself in order to direct my activities in each study period.	3.98	0.77
MSSRQ 11If I get confused taking notes in classes, I make sure I sort it out afterwards.	3.92	0.83

The dataset shows that learners demonstrate a generally **moderate to high use of metacognitive strategies**, indicating a positive perception of existence in language learning as defined in this study. Mean scores range from **3.15 to 4.05**, suggesting consistent engagement in self-regulation practices. Learners most strongly agreed that they revisit confusing material to improve understanding (MSSRQ3, *M* = 4.05), set goals when studying (MSSRQ10, *M* = 3.98), and clarify confusing notes after class (MSSRQ11, *M* = 3.92), reflecting strong self-monitoring behaviors. They also reported regularly adapting their reading and study approaches when facing difficulties. The lowest mean score relates to losing focus during class time (MSSRQ1, *M* = 3.15), indicating that attention in class remains a challenge for some learners. Overall, the findings suggest that learners actively regulate their learning and use metacognitive strategies to manage their language learning effectively.

Findings for Growth

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners perceive growth in language learning? In the context of this study, this is measured by (i) rehearsal, (ii) organization, (iii) elaboration, and (iv) critical thinking,

Table 6- Mean for Rehearsal (4 items)

ITEM	Mean	SD
LSCCRQ1When I study for the classes, I practice saying the material to myself over and over.	3.86	0.88
LSCCRQ 2When studying for the courses, I read my class notes and the course readings over and over again.	3.87	0.811
LSCCRQ 3I memorize key words to remind me of important concepts in this class.	4.19	0.82
LSCCRQ 4I make lists of important items for the courses and memorize the lists.	4.21	0.89

Table 6 displays the mean for the rehearsal strategies used by learners as Item 4 has the highest mean score (M = 4.21, SD = 0.89), which is followed by Item 3 (M = 4.19, SD = 0.82). The results suggest that memorising keywords or lists of important items for learning concepts and courses are the most preferred strategies. These are followed by repetition techniques in revising course materials and notes as the learning strategies for rehearsal in Item 2 (M = 3.87, SD = 0.811) and Item 1 (M = 3.86, SD = 0.88).

Table 7- Mean for Organization (4 items)

ITEM	Mean	SD
LSCCOQ1 When I study the readings for the courses in the program, I outline the material to help me organize my thoughts.	4.13	0.83
LSCCOQ 2When I study for the courses, I go through the readings and my class notes and try to find the most important ideas.	4.23	0.92
LSCCOQ 3I make simple charts, diagrams, or tables to help me organize course materials in this program.	3.64	1.00
LSCCOQ 4When I study for the courses, I go over my class notes and make an outline of important concepts.	4.00	0.82

Table 7 presents the mean for organisation. Item 1 (mean = 4.13, SD = 0.83) indicates that learners outline their reading materials to organise their thoughts. Next, item 2 (mean = 4.23, SD = 0.92) shows that learners try to identify the most important ideas from readings and class notes when they are studying. Item 3 (mean = 3.64, SD = 1.00) indicates that learners use charts, diagrams or tables to organise course materials, although this strategy is used less frequently compared to the others. Lastly, item 4 (mean = 4.00, SD = 0.82) shows that learners review their class notes and outline important concepts when preparing for courses.

Table 8- Mean for Elaboration (6 items)

ITEM	Mean	SD
LSCCEQ1When I study for the courses in this program, I pull together information from different sources, such as lectures, readings, and discussions.	3.82	0.91
LSCCEQ 2I try to relate ideas in one subject to those in other courses whenever possible	3.79	0.87
LSCCEQ 3When reading for the courses, I try to relate the material to what I already know.	4.18	0.72
LSCCEQ 4When I study for the courses in this program, I write brief summaries of the main ideas from the readings and my class notes.3.72	3.72	0.98
LSCCEQ 5I try to understand the material in the classes by making connections between the readings and the concepts from the lectures.	4.01	0.69
LSCCEQ 6I try to apply ideas from course readings in other class activities such as lecture and discussion.	4.01	0.80

Table 8 displays the mean scores on cognitive elaboration strategies involving the learner's perception of growth in language learning. The highest mean score was recorded for Item 3 (mean = 4.18, SD = 0.72). This suggests that the learner perceives growth as developing new knowledge on what is already known. The lowest mean score was recorded for Item 4 (mean = 3.72, SD = 0.98). Although this item recorded the lowest mean, it is still

a relatively moderate score. It would appear that the learner associates growth in language learning with meaningful connections between what is learnt and what is already known.

Table 9- Mean for Critical Thinking (5 items)

ITEM	Mean	SD
LSCCCTQ1I often find myself questioning things I hear or read in the courses to decide if I find them convincing.	3.95	0.87
LSCCCTQ 2When a theory, interpretation, or conclusion is presented in classes or in the readings, I try to decide if there is good supporting evidence.	3.86	0.82
LSCCCTQ 3I treat the course materials as a starting point and try to develop my own ideas about it.	3.82	0.83
LSCCCTQ 4I try to play around with ideas of my own related to what I am learning in the courses.	3.87	0.78
LSCCCTQ 5 Whenever I read or hear an assertion or conclusion in the classes, I think about possible alternatives.	3.65	0.96

Table 9 shows the mean score for the Cognitive Component of Critical Thinking strategies under the Growth variable. The highest mean score was recorded for Item LSCCCTQ1 (M = 3.95, SD = 0.87), suggesting that respondents frequently questioned information encountered in their courses to evaluate its convincingness. This was followed closely by Item LSCCCTQ4 (M = 3.87, SD = 0.78) and Item LSCCCTQ2 (M = 3.86, SD = 0.82), reflecting students' tendency to engage with ideas creatively and to evaluate the adequacy of supporting evidence. Item LSCCCTQ3 also demonstrated a relatively high mean (M = 3.82, SD = 0.83), indicating that respondents viewed course materials as a foundation for developing their own ideas. Although Item LSCCCTQ5 obtained the lowest mean score (M = 3.65, SD = 0.96), it still suggests a moderate inclination among students to consider alternative perspectives when encountering assertions or conclusions. The descriptive analysis of students' critical thinking dispositions indicates generally high levels of agreement across all items. Overall, the findings reflect a positive tendency toward critical and reflective thinking among the respondents.

Findings for Relatedness

This section presents data to answer research question 3- How do learners perceive relatedness in language learning?

In the context of this study, this is measured by (i) environment management, (ii) effort management and (iii) help-seeking.

Table 10 -Mean for Environment Management (5 items)

ITEM	Mean	SD
RMCEMQ1I usually study in a place where I can concentrate on my course work.	4.31	0.76
RMCEMQ 2I make good use of my study time for the courses in this program.	4.06	0.81
RMCEMQ3I have a regular place set aside for studying	3.99	0.85
RMCEMQ 4Imake sure that I keep up with the weekly readings and assignments for the courses.	4.12	0.81
RMCEMQ 5I attend the classes regularly in this program.	4.15	0.75

Table 10 displays the mean for environment management used by learners as Item 1 has the highest mean score (M = 4.31, SD = 0.76), which is followed by Item 4 (M = 4.12, SD = 0.81). The results suggest that learners prefer to study in an environment that allows them to concentrate and regularly revise weekly materials. Item 2 (M = 4.06, SD = 0.81) and Item 5 (M = 4.15, SD = 0.75) suggest that learners prefer to make good use of study time to learn while attending classes regularly. Finally, Item 3 has the lowest mean score (M = 3.99, SD = 0.85) where learners have a regular place for studying.

Table 11- Mean for Effort Management (4 items)

ITEM	Mean	SD
RMCEMQ1I have a regular place set aside for studying	4.13	0.81
RMCEMQ 2I work hard to do well in the classes in this program even if I do not like what we are doing.	4.15	0.76
RMCEMQ 3When course work is difficult, I either give up or only study the easy parts.	2.92	1.18
RMCEMQ 4Even when course materials are dull and uninteresting, I manage to keep working until I finish.	4.11	0.76

The data show that learners demonstrate **strong environment management behaviours**, indicating a positive perception of *relatedness* in language learning through structured and supportive learning conditions. Mean scores for all five items are high, ranging from **3.99 to 4.31**, suggesting that most learners actively create learning environments that support concentration and consistency. The highest mean is for studying in a place where they can concentrate (RMCEMQ1, *M* = 4.31), followed by regular class attendance (RMCEMQ5, *M* = 4.15) and keeping up with weekly readings and assignments (RMCEMQ4, *M* = 4.12). These results indicate that learners value organized study spaces, consistent routines, and engagement with course requirements. Overall, the findings suggest that learners intentionally manage their learning environments in ways that support sustained participation and connection to their learning context. The results indicate that learners show **generally high levels of effort management**, reflecting strong persistence and commitment in their learning. Mean scores range from **2.92 to 4.15**, with most items showing high agreement. Learners report working hard to do well even when they dislike the content (RMCEMQ2, *M* = 4.15) and continuing to work even when materials are dull or uninteresting (RMCEMQ4, *M* = 4.11), suggesting strong perseverance. Having a regular place for studying also scores highly (RMCEMQ1, *M* = 4.13), supporting consistent study habits. However, the lower mean for giving up or focusing only on easy parts when work is difficult (RMCEMQ3, *M* = 2.92) indicates that some learners still struggle with task difficulty. Overall, the pattern shows that learners are generally resilient and effort-driven, though challenges remain when tasks become demanding.

Table 12- Mean for Help-Seeking (2 items)

ITEM	Mean	SD
RMCHSQ1When I cannot understand the material in a course, I ask another student in the class for help.	3.60	1.05
RMCHSQ 2I try to identify students in the classes whom I can ask for help if necessary.	4.24	0.81
RMCHSQ 3 When I cannot understand the material in a course, I ask my friends from other class for help.	3.99	0.96
RMCHSQ 4 When I cannot understand the material in a course, I ask my seniors who have taken the course previously for help.	3.29	1.30

Table 12 shows the mean scores of help-seeking strategies. The highest mean score was observed for Item 2, with a mean of 4.24 and a standard deviation of 0.81. This implies that learners are able to recognise their classmates they can turn to for help when they need it. This also implies that learners value good people as part of their learning process. On the other hand, the lowest mean score was observed for Item 4, with a mean of 3.29 and a standard deviation of 1.30. This implies that learners are less likely to seek help from seniors who have taken the course before. This shows that learners are more likely to seek help from people around them as part of their learning process.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings and Discussions

The findings for the first research question investigate the learners' perception of existence in language learning strategies. It can be implied that the most actively used strategies in metacognitive self-regulation used by the learners are goal setting, comprehension monitoring and the adjustment of study methods. These findings correlate with Domínguez and Juanías (2024), who highlighted that enhancing learning experiences require learners to utilise help-seeking and self-regulatory strategies. This view is further supported by Yang and Que (2023), who emphasized that learners would adopt metacognitive strategies to overcome confusion and maintain comprehension when unfulfilled needs of existence such as lack of resources can impede focus. Thus, the findings are correlated with ERG theory which underlines the influence of basic needs in learning persistence in validating that learners' regulation of their study processes are closely related to existence needs.

The results for the second research question found that learners have a strong reliance on rehearsal, organization, elaboration and critical thinking within the cognitive constructs of learning strategy. Previous findings by Nurhuda et al. (2023) that discovered the dominance of metacognitive and cognitive strategies among successful learners in ESL can be confirmed by the findings that indicated the learners' preference for memorization, outlining, and connecting ideas across subjects. Correspondingly, Ahmad (2025) reported that memorization and cognitive strategies reinforce the relationship between intellectual development and growth needs, which are frequently used by postgraduate learners. This is also stated in the ERG theory (Alderfer, 1972) which stresses intrinsic motivation for creativity and competence within growth needs. These explain why learners in this study favor learning strategies that prioritize autonomy and mastery.

On the other hand, the findings in the third research question discovered that resource management strategies such as help-seeking, effort regulation, and environment control are the preferred learning strategies in relatedness among learners. The findings are aligned with Rasdi et al. (2024) who mentioned that faculty support and peer interaction are the relatedness needs that strengthens persistence and motivation in learning. Warouw and Neman (2024) also have a similar view in interpersonal differences for learning preferences as their findings suggested the influence of gender in social strategies for learning. The literature review in this study highlights how the learners' engagement is directly influenced by supportive interactions between lecturers and peers that create belongingness. Therefore, the findings confirm the relationship of the needs in growth, existence and relatedness needs in learning can be enhanced through strategies that promote social integration, collaboration and effective resource use.

Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should expand on these findings by refining methodological, practical, and theoretical approaches. Methodologically, larger and more diverse samples across institutions would strengthen generalizability, while mixed-method designs combining surveys with interviews could capture deeper insights into learners' motivational shifts (Yusoff & Said, 2024). Practically, future studies should examine how learners adapt strategies in different contexts, such as online or blended learning, where motivational needs fluctuate more rapidly. Theoretically, researchers should investigate the frustration-regression principle within ERG theory to understand how learners shift between needs when higher-order growth strategies are blocked, as suggested by Alderfer (1972). Additionally, demographic variables such as gender or academic discipline could be explored, building on Warouw & Neman (2024), who found gender differences in strategy choice. By

addressing these areas, future research can deepen the integration of motivational theories with language learning strategies, offering richer insights for both theory and practice.

Theoretical and Conceptual Implications

The findings of this study can affirm ERG learning theory (Alderfer, 1972) as the vital framework for exploring language learning strategies. Domínguez & Juanías (2024), who stressed self-regulatory strategies as vital for enhancing learning outcomes, explains the learners' reliance on metacognitive self-regulation for existence needs. Similarly, the evident practice of cognitive strategies such as rehearsal, organization, and elaboration signify growth needs. This correlates with Nurhuda et al. (2023), in underlining the influence of metacognitive and cognitive strategies among successful ESL learners. Finally, the learners' preference in the strategies of resource management strategies to meet relatedness needs aligns with the study by Rasdi et al. (2024), who highlighted that sustaining motivation requires social support and belonging. Conceptually, this study broadens the framework by showing that strategy use is not limited to cognitive but also motivational drive. This can further elaborate the theoretical integration of ERG into language learning research.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest that learners' motivational needs and instructional strategies should be the basis for developing and reviewing teaching practices. For requirements in existence, teachers can encourage goal-setting, monitoring comprehension, and study method adaptations which reflect self-regulation by scaffolding metacognitive regulation (Yang & Que, 2023). For growth, rehearsal, elaboration, and critical thinking activities should be prioritised frequently as cognitive strategies among postgraduate learners. For relatedness**,** educators should utilize collaborative learning, peer support, and help-seeking opportunities since social integration enhances persistence (Rasdi et al., 2024). Thus, pedagogy must shift from teaching strategies in isolation to embedding them within motivationally responsive learning environments, ensuring learners' holistic engagement and continuous achievement.

Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study carry important theoretical implications as they extend ERG theory into the field of language learning strategies. These show that existence, relatedness, and growth needs can be directly linked to learners' cognitive and metacognitive behaviors. This integration highlights that motivation is not a separate construct but is embedded within the strategies learners choose to employ. On a practical level, the results suggest that educators should design curricula that balance rehearsal, organization, elaboration, and critical thinking. These learning strategies are important in fostering supportive environments that meet learners' social and psychological needs. However, the findings can be improved by including the proficiency level, year of study, institution type, and prior language learning experience for an in-depth analysis or inferential analyses. Future research could explore longitudinal designs to examine how these strategies evolve over time and across different learning contexts. Ultimately, these insights emphasize that language learning is a dynamic process shaped by both motivational needs and strategic choices (Nurhuda et al., 2023; Rasdi et al., 2024).

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