

Relationship between the Usage of Language Learning Strategies and the Level of Proficiency in Learning Arabic Ab Initio

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Received: October 8, 2013 Accepted: February 21, 2014 Online Published: April 29, 2014

doi:10.5539/ass.v10n9p262

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v10n9p262>

Abstract

This study was aimed to investigate the relationship between Language Learning Strategies (LLS) and the level of proficiency of students in Arabic Ab Initio language. There were also several studies done to investigate the achievement of students and their frequent usage of these Language Learning Strategies. Meanwhile, the level of student proficiency was measured by their results based on college-level exam results before they were registered in the Arabic Ab Initio classes. 162 year 1 students were selected randomly. These students were diverse in their courses ranging from Medicine, Engineering to Geology and Dentistry among others. This study used questionnaire as the main research tool to collect information on the use of language learning strategies. The questionnaire consisted of three parts, namely the demographic data, the Arabic Language Learning Strategies and motivation. The results showed that as a whole, the students had used language learning strategies at a moderate level. Metaphysics strategy was the most frequently used strategy. Also, it was found that high-achieving students used the language learning strategies more often and frequently as compared to other students of different proficiency. The Pearson test also showed that there was a significant positive correlation between Language Learning Strategies and the proficiency in the Arabic Ab Initio language.

Keywords: language learning strategies, Arabic Ab Initio, learning Arabic, Arabic language, Kolej MARA Banting

1. Introduction

Language learning strategies are closely related to language proficiency skills. A lot of research studies have shown that research in a second language or foreign language is closely focused on the product of the study (Rubin, 1987). The concept of centralizing students has received attention in second language classes (Bremner, 1999). The learning strategies and individual differences of students have started to become the main focus in the researching field of second foreign languages (Rubin, 1987). Consequently, one of the most active fields of language research is the research done in language learning strategies (Mac Intyre, 1994). This shift has occurred because the researching community has finally realized the benefits and importance of information relating to language learning strategies in the process of language teaching (Ellis, 1998; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Kolej MARA Banting (KMB) is one of MARA Education Institutes (IPMa) that has received the recognition from the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) which is located in Geneva, Switzerland to run its program called the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). Through this IBDP programme, Kolej MARA Banting, prepares students to continue their education in universities abroad at an international level.

The *Arabic Ab Initio* language subject was introduced in KMB in 2006. It is a *Group 2 (Language)* subject, alongside with English A2, English B, *Ab initio* Languages, French, Japanese, Spanish, and other languages around the world. The Arabic Ab Initio language is offered by the IBO to the students of KMB to ensure the strengthening and advancements in language proficiency of a second language, alongside their mothertongue, Malay and English as the main medium of learning and teaching. In KMB, students have two choices for their

second language: English B (available in HL and SL) or Arabic Ab Initio. Most students who come from Islamic religious schools would choose the Arab language subject. There are students whom are without any basic in Arab but are also very interested in taking this subject, and these students mostly come from Sabah and Sarawak, as well as Chinese students, Indian students and also students of other races. (*IBDP Student Guide MARA College Banting, 2009*)

1.1 Research Background

Currently, language teachers have realised the importance of increasing the achievement of students. A myriad of methods have been employed by the teachers during class session such as giving advice on how to tackle a question, offering proper studying strategies, conducting extra classes, discussing past year examination papers and many more. All of these are done to increase the performance amongst students. Ultimately, the teaching staff must realise that the choice of a suitable studying technique and strategy must be given to the students themselves. Teachers can aid students in learning languages by diversifying the teaching strategies used so that the language is learned in a fast and efficient manner (Oxford, 1989). This fact is validated and agreed by Graham in Lessard-Clouston (1997) where the results of a study concerning language learning strategies in French have found that teachers who have used language teaching strategies have aided students' understanding of that second language better. Thus, teachers should be trained to build and use language learning strategies that are suitable to their students.

Students who succeed tend to use language learning strategies effectively. Their 'success' is measured and seen in their excellent results in language learning. Besides that, language tests and exams that are conducted frequently can gauge their achievement and proficiency in that language. One of the factors include the usage of language strategies (Chamot, 1993; Dreyer & Oxford, 1996).

Hence, this study focuses on the usage of strategies in teaching the Arabic language in Kolej MARA Banting (KMB); a Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) Institute that is poor in terms of input environment of Arabic language as compared to English, or Malay. The opportunities for students to listen, speak, read, and write in Arabic language is very limited. The worst aspect of all is the fact that students do not have a chance to actually communicate with a true native speaker of the Arabic language. Thus, the scrutiny and thorough inspection involved in evaluating the strategies of learning in an environment of input-lacking is much hoped for. This is because the patterns and strategies might be different amongst students when learning English as their second language or Malay as their first where the environment is rich in language input. Furthermore, Kolej MARA Banting employs English as the teaching medium. Hence, this research is expected to give new information and different results from the previous studies conducted.

Strategies employed in teaching and learning languages can be classified into three forms, namely teacher centralizing strategies, student centralizing strategies, and study material centralizing strategies. In fact, in the newest curriculum, it is highly encouraged that student centralizing strategies are employed- where the emphasis is put on the role of students and how they are encouraged to actively participate themselves in the learning process (Kamarudin, 1998). Samad Buang (1998) has stated that the effectiveness in teaching depends on the usage of techniques and materials as well as study aids that can stimulate the students to think, communicate, and interact.

Meanwhile, due to the lack of studies available concerning language learning strategies in learning the Arabic language, it is found to be difficult to compare and view the results obtained. The usage of language learning strategies in learning languages in Kolej MARA Banting is severely limited. In addition, studies done by Alish (1997) have focused on adult students working as teachers in the United States, while Khaldeih (2000) and Nurazan (2004) have done research on language learning strategies but only on Arabic speaking students in a university. Given the level of learning at the college level is very important to enhance a strong language foundation for subsequent learning processes, this research is highly desirable.

As one of the sponsors of the students in Kolej MARA Banting, the Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA) has suggested students who are sponsored by them to continue their studies in Medicine in the Middle East as well as Egypt and Jordan. With the availability of the Arabic language classes, it is hoped that it would give sufficient input and output to students when they finally reach there. Meanwhile, the core of this research would be used as a gauge for MARA, besides KMB that wants to offer the Arabic Ab Initio language subject in the nearest future.

In conclusion, the usage of suitable and effective language learning strategies will aid the students to be proficient and well-versed in both academics as well as in exams. Many studies have been conducted that prove the fact that students who employ many language learning strategies have obtained excellent results in each and every subject. The researcher believes that effective language learning strategies can give many benefits to

students, teachers, and the college.

1.2 Aim of Study

In general, this study aims to explore the extent to which the use of language learning strategies by students of Kolej MARA Banting studying Arabic *ab initio*, the type and level of Arabic language learning strategies and design strategies used by students who are successful in learning the language. It also tries to explore the form of the relationship between the levels of proficiency in the use of language learning strategies.

Based on the statement of the problems being discussed, the purpose of this study includes:

- 1) Identifying the type and frequency of language learning strategy used by students when learning Arabic
- 2) Exploring patterns of language learning strategies by students of Kolej MARA Banting.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a survey and descriptive approach to explore the phenomenon of learning strategies used by students of Kolej MARA Banting. The study was quantitative in nature and design of the study was a procedure based on the collected data, which involved a specific and systematic planning of the network formation of the relationship between the variables involved in a study (Kerlinger, 1970).

The types of survey used in this study were current or cross-sectional surveys that collected data from a sample at only once at a time (Creswell, 2005).

This study also involved students in an academic session of 2010/2012 following Arabic *ab initio* class in Kolej MARA Banting, as shown in table 1. Year 1 students were selected for their achievements and language proficiency, whilst their Arabic performance was evaluated through two types of examinations, namely the Lower Secondary Assessment Examination or Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) and the Arabic Ab Initio Enrollment Qualification Exam or Kelayakan Memasuki Pengajian Bahasa Arab Ab Initio (KMPBAI). This helped determine the very best in Arabic proficiency. Furthermore, the students have been learning Arabic for more than three years before enrolling in Kolej MARA Banting (KMB). In addition, this group of students was not in the main exam classes that might affect the accuracy of the data regarding the use of Arabic language learning strategies (Park 2005) or make it difficult to get a suitable time for the administration of the questionnaire.

Table 1. Distribution of first year students by field

Field	Males	Females	Total
Medicine	53	76	129
Engineering	17	0	17
Assorted	5	11	16
Total	75	87	162

Sample size is determined by referring to the Schedule Krejcie Sample Size Determination and Morgan (1970). This table lists the sample size corresponding to the size of the population. Based on Sample Size Determination Table Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and supported by the view by Gay (2003), the number of samples needed for this research was 162 people from a total population of 280 students.

2.2 The Research Instrument

The questionnaire was used to collect data and information about the users of language learning strategies amongst students of Kolej MARA Banting. This questionnaire was built on the idea that there was in the inventory of learning strategies (Sill) version 7.0 (Oxford 1990) and Kamarul Syukri (2009). Data was collected quantitatively. Quantitative data collection amongst the students was conducted using a questionnaire that was divided into three parts:

- 1) Background Information of the student consisting of 5 items
- 2) Questions on the Arabic Language Learning Strategies comprising 60 items
- 3) Motivation questionnaire consisting of 32 items

Survey instruments were also used to gather information on the use of Arabic language learning strategies amongst students of Kolej MARA Banting. The data collection method through questionnaire was based on the rationale that this study would involve the analysis of data involving descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Thus, this study enabled the researcher to make inference and generalization on the population and thus provided information and recommendations to the parties responsible for remedial actions.

The questionnaire was designed to collect personal information and background of the respondents. In this case, researchers had modified the background questionnaire to be customized with Kolej MARA Banting students. It involved courses and grades regarding the Arabic Ab Initio Enrollment Qualification Exam or Kelayakan Memasuki Pengajian Bahasa Arab Ab Initio (KMPBAI).

Background information on the achievement of the Arabic Language in this study was based on the grades obtained by the respondents during their Lower Secondary Assessment examination (PMR) where the grades were namely A, B, C, D, and E. Information on students' achievement in examinations, the Arabic Ab Initio Enrollment Qualification Exam or Kelayakan Memasuki Pengajian Bahasa Arab Ab Initio (KMPBAI) on the other hand, was based on the decree by *Mumtaz* (Excellent), *Jayyid Jiddan* (Very Good), *Jayyid* (Good), *Maqbul* (Pass), and *Raasib* (Fail).

2.3 Data Analysis

This questionnaire was a structured self-report instrument that uses a five-point Likert scale. The Likert scale is suitable for measuring the views or statements given by respondents in a particular continuous space (continuum) of a practice, perceptions, and attitudes (Wiersma 2000). Likert-type questions are very popular in questionnaires because they are easily administered, they have a format that facilitates data analysis, and represent a range of strategies used by students for different tasks. Data collected through Likert scale has higher reliability compared to other scales such as Thurstone and Guttman. Level scales from 1 (never true about me) as the measurements of the lowest degree variable, to 5 (always true of me) as the highest degree were used. The interpretation levels of language learning strategies in the questionnaire was in accordance with the evaluation criteria set forth by Oxford (1990) as shown in the Table 2.

This investigation was based on the judgment criterion set up by Oxford (1990), which is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Average score level interpretation of the usage language

Interpretation	Statement	Average Score
High	Always be truthful about myself	4.5 until 5.0
	Often be truthful about myself	3.5 until 4.4
Average	Usually be truthful about myself	2.5 until 3.4
Low	Seldom be truthful about myself	1.5 until 2.4
	Never be truthful about myself	1.0 until 1.4

Source: Oxford 1990

3. Findings

Based on table 3, table of Main Usage Strategy Level used by students of Kolej MARA Banting in learning Arabic *Ab initio* language on average of every main strategy category was evaluated and it was found that the strategy category that was often used was the metaphysic strategy ($M = 3.9$, $SP = 0.958$) which was at the High level. This was followed by the cached strategy ($M = 3.9$, $SP = 1.078$) which was also at the High level. Next, it was followed by the memory strategy ($M = 3.5$, $SP = 1.115$) that was also in the High level.

Table 3. Mean and variance of language usage strategy according to main strategy category (N = 162)

Main Strategy	Mean	Variance	Interpretation
Metaphysic	4.2	0.958	High
Cached	3.9	1.078	High
Memory	3.5	1.115	High
Cognitive	3.4	1.098	Average
Metacognitive	3.4	1.156	Average
Social	3.4	1.046	Average
Affective	3.4	1.068	Average
Total Strategy	3.1	0.697	Average

The cognitive strategy level of usage, (M = 3.4, V = 1.098), metacognitive strategy (M = 3.4, V = 1.156), social strategy (M = 3.4, V = 1.046), affective strategy (M = 3.4, V = 1.068) were all at the usage level of average. Hence, the research obtained a result whereby the main strategy category used by students was at the level of above average. The mean, variance, and the interpretation of usage level for each main language learning strategy are as shown in Table 3.

The research findings also showed that there were six strategies – which was 10% of the total item of language usage strategies – the most often used strategy was “asking for teachers blessing before sitting for exam” SMF 60 (M=4.24 , V=0.958) where 77.78% of repondents usually and always use was, “guessing the meaning of an unknown words based on the text sentence or any conversation” ST25(M=3.90 , V=1.078) and 66.05% of respondents usually and often do was “recite verse from al-Quran or prayers to keep calm and to avoid from getting stressed during the learning process of Arabic language” SMF58 (M = 3.88 , V=1.044), other 66.67% of respondents will and often do was “ doing prayers or recite prayers to Allah so that he would succeed in the learning of Arabic language”SMF59 (M = 3.86, V = 1.101) and in which the 67.29% respondents will and always use was “ work hard to understand or feel the meaning in each words in prayers,doa and verse from al-Quran or al-Hadith”SMF56 (M = 3.72 , V = 1.100) ,and the other 60.5% respondents will and always use was “recite al-Quran daily to correct or to improve their pronountuation in Arabic language.”SMF57 (M = 3.69 , V = 1.042) and lastly , 58.03% of the respondents regularly and always use. Table 4 shows all six often used strategies by students of Kolej MARA Banting during their learning process of Arabic language were at the High level of usage.

Table 4. Mean and variance of 6 most often used strategies (N =162)

No Item	Strategy	Mean	V	Strategy Category	Interpretation
SMF60	I seek blessings from the teacher before taking the examination.	4.24	0.958	Metaphysic	High
ST25	I guess the meaning of words I do not understand the context in which sentences or conversations.	3.90	1.078	Cached	High
SMF58	I read the verses of the Qur'an or prayers to relieve nervous or stressed when learning Arabic.	3.88	1.044	Metaphysic	High
SMF59	I pray, wish or pray to God that I succeed in learning Arabic.	3.86	1.101	Metaphysic	High
SMF56	I'm trying to understand or appreciate the significance of the readings in worship, prayer, verse of the Quran or al-Hadith.	3.72	1.100	Metaphysic	High
SMF57	I read the Koran every day to correct or launch my Arabic pronunciation.	3.69	1.042	Metaphysic	High

Based on the pattern of usage of language learning strategy by Kolej MARA Banting students, researcher had divided it into three categories namely for the excellent students, average and weak in learning the Arabic language. Table 5 shows the number of students based on their grade achievement in the subject of Arabic Language Communication (PMR), achievement in overall decree examination, and the Entering Qualifications For Arabic *Ab Initio* Studies or Kelayakan Memasuki Pengajian Bahasa Arab *Ab Initio* (KMPBAI).

Descriptive analysis was used to further answer the research question. The Arabic language grades of students were then divided again into three new categories based on their achievement level in Arabic language, which is as below;

- 1) Outstanding-language students (PCBs) were those who obtained grade A in the subject Arabic Communication PMR and *Mumtaz* in qualifying examination Entering Arabic Studies *ab initio* (KMPBAI).
- 2) Mediocre-language students (PSB) were the people who obtained grades B and C in Arabic Communication PMR and *Jayyid Jiddan* and *Jayyid* in the qualification examination Entering Studies Arabic *ab initio* (KMPBAI).
- 3) Weak-language students (PLB) were those who obtained grades D and E in Arabic Communication PMR and *Maqbul* and *Raasib* in qualifying exam Entering Studies Arabic *Ab Initio* (KMPBAI).

Table 5. Percentage of grade scheduling the Arabic language and Arabic studies entry requirements *Ab Initio* (N = 162)

Category	KMPAI grade	PMR grade	KMPBAI		PMR	
PCB (Excellent)	<i>Mumtaz</i>	A	68	42.0 %	93	57.4 %
PSB(Average)	<i>Jayyid Jiddan & jayyid</i>	B & C	83	51.2%	59	36.4%
PLB(Weak)	<i>Maqbul & Raasib</i>	D&E	11	6.8%	10	6.2%
			162	100%	162	100%

Based on Table 5 it can be stated that the outstanding-language students (PCB) who were promoted *Mumtaz* in Qualifying examination Entering Arabic Studies *ab initio* was as much as 42%. The mediocre-language students who were promoted *Jayyid Jiddan* is was 51.2% and for weak-language students who were promoted *Raasib* and *Maqbul* was 6.8%. Meanwhile for PMR examinations, 57.4% of language students (PCB) were promoted to A, followed by the percentage of mediocre-language learners (PSB) which obtained ranks B & C, was 36.4%. The weak-language students (PLB) who obtained ranks D & E was only 6.2%. Even so, the use of language learning strategies as a whole was (M = 3.19; SD = 0.697) and therefore, it was a modest level of consumption.

According to Table 6 it can be stated that the outstanding-language students (PCBs) and mediocre-language students (PSB) followed by weak-language learners (PLB) were the most common use of language learning strategies (DPS) as a whole. Despite of this, all three were in the moderate consumption levels (M = 3.20, V = 0.602). This was followed by the mediocre-language students (PSB) of (M = 3.16, V = 0.695) and then the weak-language learners (PLB) of (M = 2.55, V = 1.036). In terms of key strategic categories of language learning strategies, the strategy of metaphysics was to be ranked high, the remaining strategies cached were at the intermediate level. Therefore, students of language (PCBs) often used metaphysical strategy (M = 3.79, V = 0.705), then carrying capacity (M = 3.63, V = 0.740), social (M = 3.35, V = 0.795) memory (M = 3.20, V = 0.602) cognitive (M = 3.16, V = 0.716), metacognitive (M = 3.16, V = 0.855), affective (M = 2.99, V = 0.828).

Whereas the mediocre-language students (PSB) levels of language learning strategies which was at high level was also metaphysics strategy and the rest was average. Metaphysical strategy (M = 3.58, SD = 0.751) cached (M = 3.28, SD = 0.814), social (M = 3.25, SD = 0.919) memory (M = 2.95, SD = 0.760) cognitive M = 3.00, SD = 0.748), metacognitive (M = 3.02, SD = 0.836), affective (M = 3.02, SD = 0.807).

Levels of language learning strategies of weak-language students (PLB) are as follows; metaphysical strategy (M = 2.83, SD = 0.927) carrying capacity (M = 2.86, SD = 0.963), social (M = 2.61, SD = 1.088) memory (M = 2.31, SD = 1.182), cognitive (M = 2.47, SD = 1.203), metacognition is (M = 2.25, SD = 1.266), affective (M = 2.55, SD = 1.036).

However, the three main strategies used by weak-language students (PLB) were at the medium level. In anticipation that affective strategies were a class of language learning strategies that were used by at least three groups of proficiency.

Table 6. Mean and standard deviation based language learning strategy use achievement level language (N = 162)

Key Strategy	PCB		PSB		PLB	
	Mean	V	Mean	V	Mean	V
Metaphysic	3.79	0.705	3.58	0.751	2.83	0.927
Cached	3.63	0.740	3.28	0.814	2.86	0.963
Social	3.35	0.795	3.25	0.919	2.61	1.088
Memory	3.20	0.602	2.95	0.760	2.31	1.182
Cognitive	3.16	0.716	3.00	0.748	2.47	1.203
Metacognitive	3.16	0.855	3.02	0.836	2.25	1.266
Affective	2.99	0.828	3.02	0.807	2.51	1.037
Total	3.32	0.573	3.16	0.695	2.55	1.036

In order to know the effectiveness of different types and levels of language learning motivation among students while learning the Arabic language, the descriptive analysis was applied.

4. Discussion

4.1 Implementation of the Holistic Approach to Language Learning

This research has shown that the implementation of the holistic approach in learning language in Kolej MARA Banting was moderate. The frequency of the holistic approach to language was (Min=3.1). This moderate level is in coherence with other findings and researches done in Malaysia (Lim, 2008; Nurazan, 2004; Tan, 2008). The findings of Nurazan (2004) have shown that the levels of this particular approach to be (M=2.56, SP 0.45). The same case goes to studies done overseas (Bremner, 1999; Chang, 2003c; Lai, 2005; Lalonde, 1998; Lee, 2001; Metoki, 2003; Nisbet, 2002; Osanai, 2000; Wu, 2003).

Among the factors that influence these finding is the level of necessity for students to use the Arabic language in a day-to-day basis. The impression that one needs not be proficient in the language nor converses with it causes the level of usage of the Arabic language to be fairly mediocre. This notion is further consolidated according to a research done by Abdul Ghani (1993), Nik Mohd Rahimi (1999), and Nasimah (2006), which resulted in students lacking when it comes to the holistic approach. (Bremner, 1999; Chou, 2002; Lan & Oxford, 2005; Lee 1998; Lee 2001; Oh 1992; Park 1997; Park 2005; Wharton 2000) have discovered that the target language that is rarely used for communication and daily chores will eventually lead to a mediocre learning atmosphere compared to language that is used widely in the community (Philips, 1991; Rossi-Le, 1989).

The position that the Arabic Language holds in the Malaysian education scene is facing a dilemma due to two key limiting factors; source of language input and the perception of students towards the targeted language. Learners of the Arabic language can be said to be in poor condition when it comes to source input compared to other dominant languages like Malay and English. Most of the input for the Arabic language comes from the classrooms. For proactive students, most of the input comes from searching for alternate references and self-stimulated research. Findings by Nik Rahimi (1999) and Nasimah (2006) show that the usage of Arabic language is not at a satisfying level and contributes to the deterioration of the language itself, whilst Mohd Ali's findings (1988) have stated that although many students complete their secondary education in the Arabic language, many of them still find difficulties in using the language proficiently.

Malaysia's education system is one that is wholly exam-oriented. Subject teachers focus mainly on completing the learning syllabus and then shift their attention towards results of public examination rather than the whole educating process itself. Due to this, the foundation of good language skills is discarded in terms of priority as it affects the learning approaches that students choose to practice. One such example is the PMR examinations which includes Communicative Arabic Lingual Studies. These research findings are further supported by the Park research (2005) which was conducted among 209 high school students in South Korea who were in preparation for their university entrance exams. In the midst of their pursuit to achieve excellent results in more than ten different subjects, it caused a distinct drop in terms of mastery of the English language. In whole, their learning approach towards the English language is comparatively low to those in other researches. (Philips, 1991; Rossi-Le, 1989). They do not have enough time or resource to think of new learning strategies or processes in

learning a language.

4.2 Implementing Language Learning Strategy that Incorporates the Main Categories

Students of Kolej MARA Banting have been noted to incorporate three of the main seven categories of language learning strategies. The highest being the Metaphysical Approach, followed by the Conjectural Strategy and finally Memory. These three strategies are emphasized at a higher level compared to the other four (Cognitive, Metacognitive, Social and Affective). This is probably due to the fact that the students of Kolej MARA Banting are 'selected' students who have been chosen to undergo the International Baccalaureate programme in which all the students are given full government scholarships until the end of their undergraduate studies overseas.

4.2.1 Metaphysical Strategy

The metaphysical strategy is one that utilizes actions with positive moral values in learning which is related to religious factors in language achievement. This particular strategy is frequently practised by Kolej MARA Banting students. In this strategy, there are five sub-items that have become common practices of the highest priority to Kolej MARA Banting students. One of them is "Asking for the blessing of their teachers before major examinations". This shows that 77.78 % of students truly adhere to this strategy, simultaneously emphasizing the importance of this strategy amongst the language learning strategies. The next sub-item is "Reading the Qur'an or prayers to disperse anxious feelings or stress during the learning process of the Arabic language". This sub-item is the second most popular with a percentage of 66.67% of the student population putting this strategy to practice.

Most Muslim students would always start their Arabic learning language by reciting the prayers and this practice is prevalent in other subjects as well. The use of this strategy stimulates students' activities to be in a more blessed environment when studying in their respective classrooms. Other activities include "Solat Hajat", a type of prayer that specifically prays for something. "Solat Hajat" is done to ask for success in examinations and at the same time, they learn to fully appreciate and comprehend the Holy words read aloud in the prayer. This is done to consolidate their faith in Allah during the prayers. This is what Islam implores you to do as Muslim students. Hence, this opportunity opens up space for the students to use the metaphysical strategy that can enhance vocabulary, increase comprehension and improve fluency through constant involvement in religious occasions.

Effective language students would take the proactive approach in using all language resources to rehearse and practise their learning strategies. The continuous usage of the prayer strategy, reading the Qur'an and Zikir (Remembrance of Allah) to alleviate doubts and to be at a peace of mind when it comes to language is also what Islam embraces. Students are educated to ask for Allah's guidance and assistance through prayers and the Qur'an. The faith they have for Allah is what gives them strength to overcome all the trials and tribulations in the learning processes. Therefore it isn't uncommon for this method to be practised among students of the Malay Language in Malaysia (Supian 2003; Zamri 2004). They are found to have incorporated the "Inductive Reasoning" strategy from the "Using All Lingual Information" at a low level. This is probably due to the fact that students are not encouraged to synthesize lingual information and analyze materials when opportunity arises. In addition, a lack of solid mastery of grammar and the Arabic writing system might also be one of the limiting factors of the students not practising using the *nahu*, *sarf* and *imla'* as the usage of it promotes effective recitations of the Qur'an and the Hadiths.

4.2.2 Conjectural Strategy

The conjectural strategy acts as a simplifier to the students of Kolej MARA Banting in enhancing comprehension in the targeted language. It simply fills in the gap for certain words of vague meaning due to lack of knowledge. This method makes up for the lack of information and weaknesses in practising the language. This strategy is the second most used strategy amongst Kolej MARA Banting students while learning the Arabic Language. A study has shown that the Conjectural Strategy is one that is widely used amongst students in Asia for English learning purposes.

However, one of the most commonly used sub-items in the Conjectural Strategy is the one that involves improvising with the words that one least understands. In laymen's terms one simply guesses the meaning of the word. Studies from Kim (1991), Lee (1998), and Hong (2006) on university students as well as Lee (2001) and Park (2005) on Korean High School Students have shown that the Conjectural Strategy is a strategy that is constantly practised and has the highest rating compared to other strategies. Al-Wahibee (2000) and Al-Otaibi (2004) in Saudi Arabia have also reached the same conclusion. Findings by Mullins (1992), Bremner (1999), Lan and Oxford (2003) and Lan (2005) have reported that Asian students frequently use the conjectural strategy more

than the other mainstream strategies.

According to a report based on the findings by Nurazan (2004) on diploma students who are studying the Arabic language, the Conjectural Strategy is one of the frequent learning tools used by them. "Guessing the meaning of words not understood based on the context and the atmosphere of the conversation" holds the highest rating in frequency of items and this shows the significance of the Conjectural Strategy in the context of learning a foreign language. Students have been found to use repeatedly the sub-strategy "Smart Guess" through the "Usage of non-linguistic indicators", "linguistics" sub-strategy and "overcoming the limitations of speech and writing" sub-strategy by using the "building new words" and "using synonyms or description to explain" strategy. The frequency of the application of these strategies shows how the Conjectural Strategy is able to help expand and improve students' lingual skills in a low lingual input environment. Grammatical and lexical mistakes will not impede on the students' ability to continue communicating and increase the interaction in targeted languages. This strategy is seen to be able to help students overcome limitations in producing a continuous learning process.

However the usage of the "using facial expressions, hand gestures and head movements" strategy from the "overcoming limitations of speech and writing" sub-strategy, which is used at a moderate level is probably due to the fact that these actions are considered inappropriate and impolite in the Malay culture. Giving responses using one's body language and facial expression is deemed unfitting in the society as compared to the other giving responses orally, which would be considered the polite and proper thing to do in terms of mannerism. This understanding is the etiquette of the Malaysian society and will always be preserved and practised. Therefore, studies have found that the choice and usage of strategies for lingual studies used by students are also governed by the native society (Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Reid, 1987).

Other than that, the problem with language competency that students of Kolej MARA Banting currently face encourages them to use a lot of Conjectural Strategies frequently in producing and understanding the targeted language. From another perspective, the high frequency of the Conjectural Strategy shows a lack of exposure for the students towards the practical and natural function of language. Hence, students will continuously use conjectural strategies like Smart Guess, Building New Words and Using Alternative Words to overcome the poor quality of language resources they currently have.

4.2.3 Memory Strategy

Memory strategies are techniques that are used to store information and are withdrawn when needed to be used in various forms. They also put forward that the theory of memory is divided into two main characteristics; short-term memory that stores information for only a short-term and, long-term memory that stores information for long-term period, and convert facts and information into skills.

The Memory Strategy is a powerful and influential strategy according to (Oxford, 1990). But this study has found that Memory Strategy is one of the main categories with the most moderate level of usage. This finding is consistent with the findings of several studies in Asia (al-Otaibi, 2004; al-Wahibee, 2000; Chou, 2002; Hong, 2006; Huang, 1997; Klassen, 1994; Lai, 2005; Lan, 2005; Lee, 1998; Oh, 1992; Riazi, 2007). This view is supported by the findings of the study of language learning strategies by al Wahibee (2000) and al-Otaibi (2004) on the students of Saudi Arabia, and Riazi (2007) on the students of Qatar with the usage of SILL. Although Arabs are known for their ability and frequency of using memory strategies such as in memorising the Quran and al-Hadith (al-Swelem, 1997), al-Wahibee (2000), al-Otaibi (2004), and Riazi (2007) found that memory strategy is the category of the least used strategies.

Among the many problems is in the aspect of vocabulary, which has also become a serious problem for college students since many words are poorly understood. Techniques to memorize and recall a word are used at a lesser degree. Therefore, memory techniques are not utilized optimally by college students. Osman study (1993) shows that the number of Arabic vocabulary that was possessed by new students admitted to the Faculty of Islamic Studies, UKM was around between 500 to 1000 words. But according to the Arabic language curriculum, the students should have been able to master a vocabulary of 2,000 in lower secondary education and 3000 during upper secondary education. Therefore, students should have passed SPM with an Arabic vocabulary of 3000-5000 words. The large gap indicates that the technique to memorize using the traditional memory strategy was not utilized to the maximum and to a frequent basis in order to increase student vocabulary. Studies on the use of dictionaries (Isaac, 1994; Syakirah, 2004) found that students rarely used the Arabic dictionary. The findings also reflected that the technique among students memorizing the Arabic language was not used with respect to the use of a dictionary is very closely related to the memorization that uses strategies which are sophisticated, new and sequential. The traditional method was also not used to the very maximum of capabilities.

Politzer and McGroarty study (1990) as well as Huang reported that Asian students use memory strategies more

often. However, it is more focused on the traditional memory strategies such as techniques to memorize and remember sentences or grammar rules. In other words, when the study involves only language learning strategies, it would generally lead to only memorising hence an increase of usage among Asian students. However, when it involves the latest strategies and advanced memory strategies as found in SILL, it is found that Asian students rarely use this method.

4.2.4 Cognitive Strategy

The cognitive learning strategy is a vital strategy in the learning process. The cognitive learning strategy stresses on the cognitive process in shaping a student's attitude towards learning. Furthermore, it is a learning method which utilises the students experience when it comes to problem solving. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), and Oxford (1990), the cognitive learning strategy is a very popular and effective strategy when it comes to studying language. Despite this understanding, it is found that, based on the research that this learning strategy is much underused among the students of Kolej MARA Banting. It is usually practised on average in aspects involving main tier aspects and in strategic decision-making. These findings are consistent with other researches, namely, Chou (2002) Taiwan, al-Otaibi (2004) Saudi Arabia, and Park (2005) Korea. However reports from Hong (2006) indicated that the cognitive learning strategy is used frequently.

Based on these studies, it can be concluded that the cognitive learning strategy is being practised at an average rate, and the few aspects of the strategy which are explored are "answering quickly" which is a derivative from the sub-strategy "receiving and responding", "contrastive analysis" which is a derivative of the sub-strategy "analysis and deduction", and "summarising", a derivative from the sub-strategy of "structuring input and output". These aspects of the cognitive learning strategy are still being practised at a moderate rate and are largely underdeveloped.

The average use of the cognitive learning strategy can be attributed to the student's inability or reluctance in practising or analysing the Arab language. These findings further strengthen the notion that the studied population have a lack of understanding on how to learn a second language. They might be underexposed to methods of transforming language, direct analysis or language synthesis. As a result, the study of languages in this community still have not achieved the expected standards. As has been said earlier, cognitive learning is very important when it comes to learning a second/foreign language. This is further supported by Nor Adibah Ghazali (1999). Most students still underuse cognitive and metacognitive learning in their studies. This is proven based on a public opinion vote regarding immature levels of thinking, and the dissatisfactory quality of academic achievements.

4.2.5 Metacognitive Strategy

Metacognitive learning is the ability to regulate the learning process, through structuring, planning, controlling and analysing responses. This encourages a student to identify and focus on new information during the learning process. It is also found that students in Kolej MARA Banting underutilise this strategy, and is practised at an average rate. The few aspects of the strategy which are explored are "self-monitoring one's achievements" which is a derivative of "assessing learning", "understanding the functions of language" and "setting goals and objectives", which are derivatives of the sub-strategies of "structuring the learning process".

The metacognitive strategy consists of three cornerstones, which are

- 1) students' ability to develop or plan actions in order to finish given tasks
- 2) students ability to oversee the plan to success
- 3) students ability to evaluate the plan

To regulate the learning process while practising these rules requires the students to reassess their assignments and develop a self-reflection.

The practice of metacognitive learning is average in Kolej MARA Banting, which indicates that the students may suffer from a disability to provide sound mental structuration in their learning, and a disability to properly evaluate and judge their own performance. Students experience difficulties in recognising the objective of learning a language, which thus leads to a breakdown in planning, structuring and assessing their learning in a systematic way. The dearth of effort in proactive search for additional information gives a connotation that students do not apply a system or strategy when it comes to learning the Arabic language. This conclusion is supported by Osbourne (1999) which suggests that metacognitive learning requires constant vigilance and a conscious effort. Metacognitive learning contains two aspects which occur simultaneously; tracking progress during the learning process and continuously inventing and reinventing strategies to develop and effective one.

4.2.6 Social Strategy

Social strategy is a learning process which focuses on indirect learning. The strategy creates opportunities for students to practise the target language. Conversations with friends, teachers, and native speakers of the target language are the aim of this strategy. Check and balance, assessments and practice are the results of interactions conducted in the target language. There are other variations as well, which include spending spare time watching movies, shows, listening to songs or reading in the target language. The strategy is very popular amongst students who do not have a strong grasp of the language and low exposure. It is also a key solution to overcoming listening difficulties.

The social strategy utilises the actions taken by students during interaction with other individuals in different situations. However, in Kolej MARA Banting, only a few aspects are explored at a very low level, which are “questioning to seek clarification” a derivative of the sub-strategy “questioning”, “teamwork among peers” and “understanding the culture of native speakers of the language” which are derivatives of the sub strategy of “empathy”.

The level of social strategy learning practiced at Kolej MARA Banting supports the study conducted by Poltzer and McGroarty (1985) which reports that Asian learners do not usually practise the social strategy especially if it involves questioning or assessments. This is attributed to the Asian culture where questioning during the learning process, or during social interactions is considered as rude, disrespectful or flippant (Bremner, 1999).

4.2.7 Affective Strategy

The affective strategy consists of several strategies which aid in developing and controlling emotion, attitude, motivation and values. Affective learning has a large influence towards learning a language because it empowers a student towards his/her learning. Simple examples include laughing to reduce stress, or rewarding oneself for stimulating progress or achievement. It is found that this strategy is the least practised amongst the students of Kolej MARA Banting. The only explored aspect of the strategy is “providing motivational verbal stimulations towards learning the Arabic language”. There are seven sub-strategies which are practised at an average level whilst one sub-strategy is practised at a mediocre level, which is “expressing oneself in a diary”, with 67.28% students who are completely alien to the concept of confiding in a diary.

Furthermore, the sub items of “braving oneself to speak the language”, “being calm during speech and “expressing oneself to a trusted confidant” are potential strategies which are expected to further stimulate a student’s ability to control and manage their studies while dealing with the Arabic language. Based on studies conducted by Nurazan (2004), it is stated that affective learning empowers a student over their emotions, attitude, and morale during learning. This is a globally underdeveloped strategy and is practised at an average rate (mean=2.60). This information is supported by studies conducted by Lai (2005) which states that affective learning is the least practised strategy of his respondents. In addition, keeping a journal should be encouraged because it is a main strategy of affective learning, especially in overcoming fear and insecurities towards learning a new language (Brown, 1989).

4.3 *A Research Investigating the Relationship between the Use of Learning Strategies and Performance in Learning Language*

The overall use (mean) of learning strategies in language studies amongst students of Kolej MARA Banting can be analysed at three separate stages, firstly, high achieving students, (PCB) at 3.32, average students (PSB) at 3.16 and weak students (PLB) at 2.55. Based on this, it is estimated that the overall use of learning strategies among students of Kolej MARA Banting is at an average level. One of the reasons why students have not yet met expected standards is due to students being “exam-oriented”. Students strive to achieve better grades, neglecting their pursuit for knowledge. As a result, it weakens the use of varying learning strategies in their studies. This results in a very slow rate of improvement when it comes to their competency of the language, because their focus is more towards grades instead of fluency. Despite having a lot of students passing the SPM paper for Arabic language and furthering their studies to a tertiary level, many SPM graduates still find it extremely difficult to master the language. The same can be observed in students passing the PMR exam for Arabic communication and high scoring students in Kolej MARA Banting.

Nevertheless, studies show that even high scoring students apply learning strategies in their studies at an average rate. These findings are consistent with Bremner (1999), Goh and Kwah (1997), Wharton (2000) and several other Malaysian studies, (Amin et al., 2000; Noorhayati, 2008; Rosyati, 2003) and a few foreign studies (al-Otaibi, 2004; Chang, 2003c; Lai, 2005) that also state how high scoring students tend to utilize learning strategies more in their studies.

The research also brings about a clear distinction between high scoring students and students of lower tiers which come in the form of how frequently they utilize varying learning strategies in their studies which are consistent with findings from (Green & Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2003; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975).

5. Conclusion

Based on these findings, the pedagogical implications that can be posed are as follows:

- 1) Learning strategies should be taught to students according to the model planned by the instructors, thus will lead to success in language learning.
- 2) Guidance in effective language learning strategies towards students to help the students in mastering the language.
- 3) Language enrichment learning strategies from many sources that provide opportunities for students to practise the language, in addition to adopting the language outside the classroom to enhance language learning.
- 4) The existence of language learning strategies provides opportunities for students to learn independently or collectively.
- 5) Institutions of higher education require commitment at a higher level. Strong physical and emotional preparation should be made so as to meet current standards and requirements. This should be given serious attention from all parties, be it the institutions, teachers or students.

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