

## **Social And Affective Strategies Use Among Arabic Language Students In Terengganu**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The use of social and affective strategies in learning a second or foreign language will help students master the language learned. Therefore, this study is conducted to observe the usage level of both strategies among Arabic language students. The sample consists of 460 Form 4 students chosen at random from 13 Religious Secondary Schools in Terengganu, Malaysia. Data was collected by using a self-questionnaire to gauge the use of social and affective strategies. The results of the study showed that the usage level of social and affective strategies among the respondents is low. Hence, a pedagogical implication suggests that students should be made aware of the importance of social and affective strategies by conducting training workshops and maximizing the use of both strategies.

**Keywords:** Language learning strategies, social strategy, affective strategy, Arabic language.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language Learning Strategy (LLS) is a specific step or action taken by students to make it easier to extract, keep, memorize, and use information so that learning is easier, faster, more interesting, more independent, and more effective and can be easily transferred to new learning environment. It involves mental and communicative procedure to learn and use language in a framework to upgrade the achievement and mastery of a target language. Therefore, it is not surprising when some studies have shown that learning strategies have resulted in positive effect on language performance. Excellent language students are found to have used different LLS more often compared to less excellent language learners (Wharton, 2000; Griffiths, 2003; Nakanoko, 2004; Holt, 2005; Gahungu, 2007; Kamarul Shukri, 2009) and these strategies can be taught to less excellent learners (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford 1990; Kamarul Shukri & Mohamed Amin, 2010).

### **RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

Among the main language learning strategies that play a big role in speeding up and improving the level of language mastery are the social and affective strategies (Oxford 1990). Both of these

strategies have often become main domains or elements in the LLS taxonomy. LLS researchers such as Rubin (1987), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990), and Macaro (2001) have turned the social and affective strategies into one of the constructs that formulate each of their LLS classification.

Social strategy is an action taken by students when interacting with others in various different situations (Oxford, 1990). This strategy include asking question for clarification or correction, cooperating with others, and developing cultural understanding. Since the language is a form of social behavior, the choice of appropriate social strategies is very important in the language learning process. Learners can use these strategies to establish the ability of self-directed learning. Therefore, having proper learning strategies can improve learners and their language competencies (Mina & Maliheh, 2013)

Whereas, affective strategy is a strategy that enables students to be in control of their emotion, motivated and have a positive attitude in learning a language. It makes language learning more consistent (Oxford, 1990). For instance, making a positive statement to oneself when faced with problems in using a language. Good language learners often use this strategy. They know that positive emotions and attitude can make language learning more effective and enjoyable. Besides that, affective strategies are one of the fertile area in educational research nowadays. Researchers and educators truly understand the value of emotions and affectivity with regards to language learning. Therefore, the factors that learners might consider before using or not using a certain strategy are the learning situation, attitude, motivation, anxiety, self confidence and other factors (MacIntyre, 1994).

More studies on the use of social and affective strategies are conducted in English language learning. Information on the use of both strategies by Arabic language students are seldom shared. Hence, studies on the use of social and affective strategies in the learning of Arabic language should be conducted to collect information and find out the ways these strategies are used. The difference among the types of language in linguistic and orthography aspects is one of the factors that influence the strategy used in the target language learning (Grabe, 1986; Douglas, 1992). Thus, the difference between Malay language and Arabic language in linguistic and orthography aspects is expected to affect the usage level and type of social and affective strategies among the students of Arabic language. The social and affective strategies often used by students in learning Malay language may not be appropriate to be used in learning Arabic language, and vice versa.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

Based on the problem statement above, the objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify the usage level of social and affective strategies among the students in religious secondary schools in Terengganu in learning the Arabic language.

2. Identify the type of social and affective strategies among the students in religious secondary schools in Terengganu in learning the Arabic language.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

This quantitative study was carried out in the religious secondary schools in Terengganu, Malaysia. It involved Form Four students from thirteen religious secondary schools. A total of 460 students were drawn from a population (N=1691) who have been studying Arabic language (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The sample is comprised of 230 females and 230 males who have been studying the Arabic language for more than three years.

### Instruments

A set of questionnaire was used to collect information on the level of the use of social and affective strategies among students in religious secondary schools during the learning of Arabic language. The items for the questionnaire were selected, adapted and added based on the social and affective constructs in the SILL (Oxford, 1990) version 7.0. It used the five point Likert rating scale. A rating scale of 1 (Never or almost never true about me) being the lowest level in the strategy usage measurement to 5 (Always or almost always true about me) being the highest level was used. The Cronbach's alpha for social category (0.769) and affective category (0.650) indicates a good degree of reliability (Sekaran, 1992; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

## DATA ANALYSIS

In order to determine the participants' frequency of social and affective strategies use, data was analysed by using the descriptive statistics. The mean value obtained was interpreted by using the interpretation method suggested by Oxford (1990). She has placed the evaluation criteria of language learning strategy usage level as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Interpretation of Language Learning Strategy Usage Level Mean Score

|          |                             |            |
|----------|-----------------------------|------------|
| High     | Always true (always)        | 4.5 to 5.0 |
|          | Normally true (often)       | 3.5 to 4.4 |
| Moderate | Frequently true (sometimes) | 2.5 to 3.4 |
| Low      | Normally not true (seldom)  | 1.5 to 2.4 |
|          | Never true (never)          | 1.0 to 1.4 |

Descriptive statistics showed that the usage level of social ( $M = 2.09$ ,  $SP = 0.73$ ) and affective ( $M = 2.39$ ,  $SP = 0.67$ ) strategies among the religious secondary school students during the learning process of Arabic language is low.

Table 2 shows the use of different types of social strategy in the learning of Arabic language. For the sub strategy “asking questions”, the use of “asking for explanation or verification” (B1) is at moderate level (M=2.80). 44.4% of students have never and normally do not use this strategy. While the use of “asking to make corrections” (B2) is at a low level (M=1.99). 72.4% of students have never and normally do not use this strategy. The usage level of “asking in target language” (B5) was also at a low level (M=1.53) where 86.3% of students have never and normally do use this strategy.

**Table 2** Frequency (In Percentage), Mean, and Standard Deviation of Social Strategy (N=460)

| Item No | Strategy   | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | Mean | S.D. |
|---------|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| B1      | If I do not understand something in Arabic, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again. | 18.3 | 26.1 | 25.0 | 18.7 | 12.0 | 2.80 | 1.27 |
| B2      | I ask the Arabic language speakers or teachers to correct me when I talk.                        | 44.8 | 27.6 | 14.8 | 8.9  | 3.9  | 1.99 | 1.14 |
| B3      | I practice, revise and share information on Arabic language with other students.                 | 25.9 | 34.8 | 22.4 | 10.7 | 6.3  | 2.36 | 1.15 |
| B4      | I've ask for help from the Arabic language speaker or teacher.                                   | 30.9 | 31.5 | 19.8 | 11.3 | 6.5  | 2.31 | 1.20 |
| B5      | I've ask question in Arabic language.  | 63.9 | 22.4 | 10.4 | 2.6  | 0.7  | 1.53 | 0.83 |
| B6      | I try to learn about the culture of Arabic speaker.  | 64.1 | 21.3 | 10.9 | 3.0  | 0.7  | 1.54 | 0.85 |

For the “cooperating with others” sub strategy, the use of “working together with peers” strategy (B3) is at a low level (M=2.36) where 60.7% of students have never and normally do not use this strategy. The usage level of “working together with proficient language speakers/ individuals” strategy (B4) is also at a low level (M=2.31) where 62.4% of students have never and normally do not use this strategy.

The use of “expanding the understanding of the culture of the language learned” strategy (B6) which represents the “empathizing with others” sub strategy is at a low level (M=1.54). 85.4% of students have never and normally do not use this strategy.

Table 3 shows the types of affective strategy used in Arabic language learning by students in the religious secondary schools in Terengganu, Malaysia. The use of “self-calming” (B7) representing the “lowering your anxiety” strategy is at a moderate level (M=2.91). 38.7% of students have never and normally do not use this strategy.

For the sub strategy “encouraging yourself”, the use of “taking risks intelligently” strategy (B8) was at a moderate level (M=2.61). 51.3% of students have never and normally do not use this strategy. The use of “making positive statements” strategy (B13) was also at a moderate level (M=2.71) with 47.6% of students have never and normally do not use this strategy. While the

use of “self rewarding” strategy (B9) was at a low level (M=1.64). 82.1% of students stated that they have never and normally do not use this strategy.

**Table 3** Frequency (In Percentage), Mean, and Standard Deviation of Affective Strategy (N=460)

| Item No | Strategy  | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | Mean | S.D. |
|---------|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| B7      | I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using Arabic language.   | 13.9 | 24.8 | 28.5 | 22.0 | 10.9 | 2.91 | 1.20 |
| B8      | I encourage myself to speak Arabic even when I am afraid of making a mistake..  | 19.6 | 31.7 | 24.8 | 15.9 | 8.0  | 2.61 | 1.19 |
| B9      | I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in Arabic.   | 62.8 | 19.3 | 11.1 | 4.3  | 2.4  | 1.64 | 1.00 |
| B10     | I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using Arabic.   | .18  | 24.6 | 25.9 | 17.0 | 13.7 | 2.81 | 1.30 |
| B11     | I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.  | 83.3 | 9.6  | 3.0  | 2.2  | 2.0  | 1.30 | 0.79 |
| B12     | I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning Arabic.  | 25.2 | 19.1 | 23.5 | 19.6 | 12.6 | 2.75 | 1.35 |
| B13     | I often utter motivating statements that would fire me up to keep on striving and do my best in learning the Arabic language. | 19.8 | 27.8 | 24.6 | 17.0 | 10.9 | 2.71 | 1.26 |

For the sub strategy “taking your emotional temperature”, the use of “listening to your body” (B10) was at a moderate level (M=2.81). 43.5% of students have never and normally do not use this strategy. The usage level of “discussing my feelings with someone else” strategy (B12) was also moderate (M=2.75). 44.3% of students have never and normally do not use this strategy. While the “writing in a language learning diary” strategy (B11) was used at a low level (M=1.30) and up to 92.9% of students stated that they have never or normally do not use this strategy.

## DISCUSSION

Social strategy is an action taken by students while interacting with others in various different situations (Oxford, 1990). Only the “asking for explanation or verification” strategy from the “asking question” sub strategy is used by students in the religious secondary schools at a moderate level. This is a popular strategy which is frequently used by language students where the language proficiency is still low and the source of language input is insufficient. It is often used to overcome the weakness in listening skills.

Other strategies such as “asking to make corrections” and “asking in target language” from the “asking question” sub strategy, “working together with peers” and “working together with speakers/individuals who are proficient” from the “cooperating with others” sub strategy, and “expanding the understanding of the culture of the language learned” from the “empathizing

with others” sub strategy are used at a low frequency level. The status of overall usage of social strategy and most of the items of the strategy which is low, supports Politzer and McGroarty (1985) who reported that Asian students are quite reluctant to use social strategy that entails asking questions or asking for verification. The Asian culture still looks at the attitude of asking questions while learning or speaking is still going on as disturbance, impolite, and disrespectful towards the speaker (Bremner, 1999). In fact, Asian students in the Western countries are still having this stereotype attitude like being quiet, reserved and seldom ask questions (Lin & Yi, 1997). This shows that the cultural factor plays a significant role on the selection and usage of the types of LLS.

On the other hand, affective strategy is a strategy that enables students to be in control of their emotion, motivated and have a positive attitude in learning a language. Generally, the usage level among students from religious secondary schools while learning the Arabic language is low. The “self calming when feeling scared or nervous while learning or using Arabic language” strategy is the most frequently used affective strategy by students. They are found to be frequently using the “self calming” strategy from the “lowering your anxiety” sub strategy; “listening to your body” and “discussing my feelings with someone else” from the “taking your emotional temperature” sub strategy; and “making positive statements” and “taking risks intelligently” from the “encouraging yourself” sub strategy at a low level. All of these strategies are expected to help students handle and manage their affective aspects during language learning.

They also use “self rewarding” strategy from the “encouraging yourself” sub strategy and “writing a language learning diary” from the “taking your emotional temperature” sub strategy, but at a low level. This is probably because the practice of self-rewarding when they succeed in achieving something has not become a habit among students yet. The same goes with the habit of writing diaries, which is not that popular among students that lead to a low usage level of language learning diary-writing strategy. The language learning diary writing needs to be encouraged because it is an effective strategy in managing affective aspects - especially the language anxiety - in language learning (Brown, 1989)

This scenario indicates that students may have the experienced in facing the problem of high level language anxiety (Oxford 2011). However, they refuse to deal with their emotional reaction towards language learning. This can be interpreted from the low usage level of the strategy. This usage level might also indicate the insufficient opportunity for students to practice using the language in conversations, making presentations, or language activities in and out of class.

## **RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS**

The findings of this research indicate that students might be facing a high level of language anxiety problem and insufficient use of target language. This is caused by the poor source of language input. Hence, the affective and social strategies should be given attention. It deserves because it can help students to manage emotion, attitude and keep them motivated while learning, using the language and interacting with others in various different situations.

Teachers need to polish the methods of using the strategy which are proven effective and assist students in language learning. Strategies such as self calming, taking risks intelligently, making positive statements, knowing emotional situation, discussing feelings with someone, and asking for explanation should be taught systematically because they can help students to manage the internal and external issues while learning the language. Strategies that are less used but proven effective such as asking to make correction, asking in the target language and working together with others should be emphasized. Teachers should encourage students to try using new strategies like self rewarding, writing in the language learning diaries, and expanding their understanding of the culture of language learned. All teaching and learning activities of the strategy can be carried out by conducting LLS awareness sessions and learning how to learn a language workshops.

Students need to change their attitude and perceptions towards Arabic language so that they do not see it as just a subject that they have to pass. Students need to develop a positive attitude by striving to master the Arabic language. Besides that, schools should also provide opportunities for students to use the language naturally and access language materials in abundance easily. This way, students have more opportunities to put various different social and affective strategies into practice frequently. At the same time, it would increase the level of achievement and mastery of the language among students.

Research in the use of social and affective strategies should go on. Furthermore, there have not been many researches of this kind conducted in the context of Arabic language learning. Researches using various different methods should also be conducted to obtain consistent and accountable results.

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