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THE DIRECT LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES USED AMONG NON-NATIVE ARABIC SPEAKERS IN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The awareness of using a specific learning strategy is crucial in helping students to learn and improve learning a foreign language such as the Arabic language. However, the area and development of learning a certain foreign language especially Arabic at the university level have yet to receive much attention among researchers in Malaysia. Thus, this study aims to identify the direct learning language strategies used by 35 first-year diploma students of the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management (FHTM) who enrolled for an Arabic level one course for the Semester 2022/2023 at a public university in Malaysia. A Strategies Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire was developed to collect data for this study. Thus, results showed that the most preferred direct strategy is the memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies used by the students. The independent sample t-test indicates major differences in the direct learning strategies among male and female students. The overall result of this study showed that the majority of female students choose memory learning strategies in their learning process compared to male students who most commonly use compensation learning strategies when learning Arabic.

Keywords: Arabic language, direct learning, gender differences, language learning strategies, non-native speaker

1. Introduction

The Arabic Language is the most commonly used language by Muslims in their daily lives as they perform various religious rituals, particularly in prayer processions. It is also a tool for learning a variety of religious knowledge because many ancient books were written in Arabic (Kamalia et al., 2022). On the other hand, Arabic was once one of the official languages of the United Nations, giving it an equal role with other international languages such as English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, and French (Yahaya & Sani, 2022). In Malaysia, most public universities offer Arabic as a foreign language besides Japanese, Mandarin, and French (Ibrahim & Rahman, 2018). Therefore, students in Malaysia are required to learn at least one foreign language to fulfil the course requirement at tertiary education institutions (Gan et al., 2022). Learning Arabic as a foreign language is challenging for most students.

In addition, optimising the language skills learned requires a certain technique to facilitate student comprehension, as with other languages. Likewise, early exposure to some basic learning strategies in a simple approach will facilitate students' becoming interested in learning the Arabic language (Isyam, 2011). Moreover, it can be challenging for non-native speakers who need to learn a foreign language as they need ample opportunity to use the new language in real-life situations. Learning the Arabic language requires clear learning strategies so that everyone can interpret the target language independently. Interestingly, a study conducted in Malaysia, found that most Malaysian students perform poorly in Arabic due to a lack of adaptive learning strategies and awareness of using effective strategies (Zulkarnain et al., 2022).
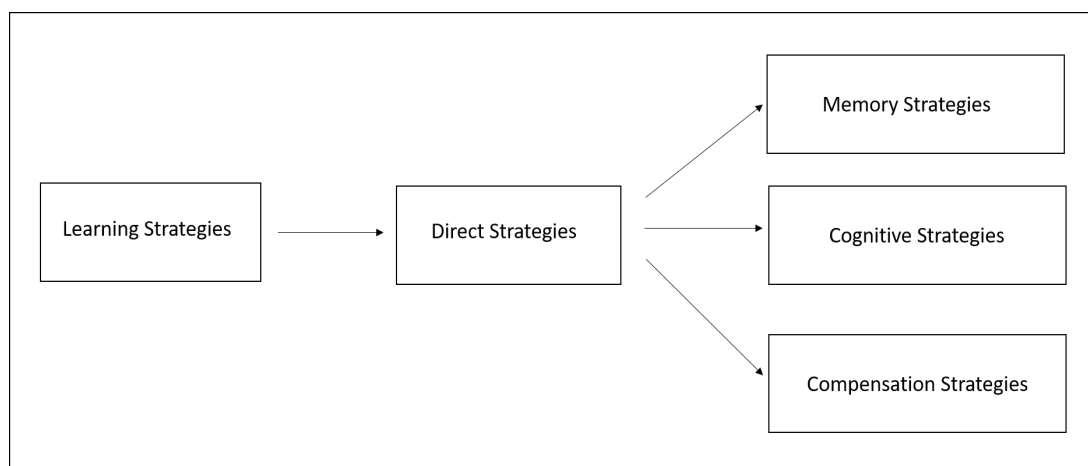
1.1. Language learning strategies

There are numerous ways to characterize and define language learning strategies. The learning strategies proposed by Rubin (1975) featured a good language learner can guess, communicate, pursuing opportunities to practise about the language, not being afraid to make mistakes, concern for word structure and meanings, and constant observation of both and other abilities to speak. Meanwhile, according to Oxford (1990), using language learning strategies can make the learning process easier, faster, fun, independent, and effective. Learners can use one or more learning strategies when learning a second language. However, the difference lies in the way language learning strategies are used, such as the selection of strategy types and the frequency of their use. Multiple studies show that effective students employ a variety of appropriate strategies regularly with determination (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989).

In addition, language learning strategies according to Cohen (1998) are acquiring a second language, the learners will use several strategies in enhancing their performance. Furthermore, a proficient language learner will not only has a high level of linguistic aptitude and motivation, which leads some learners to excel, but also their own active and creative participation in the learning process using individual learning strategies. Cohen (1998) also argue that students can improve their storing, retention, recall and practice of knowledge through language learning strategies. Hence, language learners can learn the language successfully.

Furthermore, the direct strategies comprise of memory, cognitive, and compensation approaches (Oxford, 1990). Firstly, for memory strategies, at times called mnemonics, help learners process,

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procedure, and recall information to help with whole language learning process. Next, the cognitive strategies are used to understand the meaning and produce language in a variety of ways, such as through natural practice, repetition, translation, analysis, reasoning, and summarizing. Meanwhile, compensation strategies enable students to contribute in receptive and productive skills even with insufficient knowledge of the target language (Fithriyah et al., 2019). Hence, this study refers to Oxford's research model language learning strategies and their three direct strategies of classification (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Research Model: Direct Learning Strategies (Oxford, 1990)

1.2. Learning strategies used by non-native speakers in the higher education institutions

Learning Arabic has long been offered in the education system in Malaysia. Arabic language learning is carried out from elementary school to higher education in public universities that offer Arabic courses as the main medium of learning. However, it is not easy for learners to master the Arabic language, especially for non-native speakers. It requires some learning strategies that are specific and appropriate to facilitate the acquisition, repository, retrieval, and use of information to make the language learning process to be at ease, quick, fun, independent, effective, and making it easier in transferring it to a new environment (Jamaluddin & Baharudin, 2021). Learning strategies have a strong relationship to language excellence. This means that students must select and practice appropriate learning strategies to influence their performance, especially in Arabic language proficiency. For this reason, it is important for non-native Arabic speakers, especially learning Arabic as a second or foreign language, to identify their respective learning strategies (Datu Ali Nafiah, 2021). Research conducted by Sueraya et al. (2010) suggested that success in Arabic proficiency among non-native speakers in university is attributed to different strategies targeting different learners rather than just relying on the environment. But on the other hand, the effectiveness of the strategies is influenced by learners' perceptions of how Arabic language skills are learned.

From this point of view, language learning strategies play an important role in mastering Arabic as a foreign language in higher education institutions locally and abroad. Several learners prefer using a particular strategy, and some learners choose to use more than one learning strategy for learning a foreign language (Mokhtar & Khairol Anuar, 2021). Oxford (1990) suggested that language learning strategies are divided into two types; direct and indirect strategies as part of mastering a foreign language. However,

a study discovered that non-Malaysian students prefer to use memory strategies over direct strategies when learning Mandarin as a foreign language in UiTM Melaka compared to other learning strategies (Gan et al., 2022). In contrast, Haifa (2010) reported a high preference for cognitive strategies in terms of direct strategies employed by learners at Qatar University that help them plan and organise their language learning and no significant difference in proficiency when using the overall strategy. Meanwhile, according to Fithriyah et al. (2019) discovered that Indonesian Arabic Foreign Language learners applied the compensation strategy as the most preferred learning strategy while other direct strategies (memory and cognitive) were the least used in Banda Aceh.

1.3. Gender and language learning strategies

Gender is an issue of critical, theoretical and scholar assumption in foreign language learning. A significant number of research found that gender can have a significant impact on how learners learn a language (Namaziandost et al., 2018). A study examining the learners' learning strategies used and the gender differences on the English language teaching process directed that male learner's majority prefer the compensation appproach (Murni & Sahril, 2018). Similarly, a study found that compensation strategies are the most commonly used in second language learning among male students in the university compared to female students. Compensation strategies are most frequently used among male student, (Sumarni & Rachmawaty, 2019).

Nevertheless, there are no gender effects and variations in strategy use of English as a second language in Polytechnic except memory strategies, as females are reported of using those strategies significantly more often than males (Aziz & Shah, 2020). This is supported by AlSohbani (2018) in the study of language learning strategy (LLS) used by an international school students in Yemen that indicates no significant difference among the application of direct language learning by male and female students. Despite that, Montero-SaizAja (2021) in his findings revealed that females used LLS significantly more than males in learning a foreign language in the second year of Spanish non-compulsory secondary education. Besides, Al-Khresheh and Al-Ruwaili (2020) found that there were no significant statistical differences in the use of vocabulary learning strategies between genders overall. The only category that showed a significant difference was in memory strategies, where female subjects showed the highest mean.

2. Research Questions

This study hopes to answer these three research questions:

i. What is the total mean score of direct language learning strategies (Memory, Cognitive and Compensation) used by the learners?

ii. What is the pattern of direct learning strategies used by male and female learners in their learning process?

iii. Is there any significant difference in the direct learning strategies (memory, cognitive and compensation) used by male and female learners?

iv. Based on the RQ3, three hypotheses were suggested

v.   H1: There is no significant difference in memory learning strategy used by the male and female FHTM students in UiTM Melaka.

vi.   H2: There is no significant difference in cognitive learning strategy used by the male and female FHTM students in UiTM Melaka.

vii.   H3: There is no significant difference in compensation learning strategy used by the male and female FHTM students in UiTM Melaka.

3.   Research Methods

3.1.   Research design and instrument

The study employed quantitative design. This study aims to identify the direct learning strategies used by non-native Arabic students at UiTM Melaka. The questionnaire consists of two sections. First section consists of students' demographic. The second section consist of direct learning strategies. The direct learning strategies questionnaire was adapted from SILL Worksheet Version 7.0 by Oxford and Nyikos (1989). The items consist of 29 items. Likert scale ranging from 1 (never or almost never do this) to 5 (always do this) were used.

3.2.   Sample of the study and data collection procedure

The sampling technique used in selecting the sample is purposive sampling. The respondents of the study are 35 first-year diploma students of the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management (FHTM) who have enrolled for the foundation Arabic level one for Semester 2022/2023. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents using a google form. The collected data were analysed using SPSS. Descriptive and t-test analyses were used to answer the research questions of the study.

4.   Findings

4.1.   Demographic characteristics of respondents

The demographic profile of the students such as family background, experience in learning Arabic and schools' level where students learn Arabic language is presented and shown in Table 1, Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4.

Table 1.   Family background of respondents

		Frequency	Percent (%)
Valid	Yes	4	11.4
	No	31	88.6
	Total	35	100.0

Table 1 shows the frequencies of the student's family background that speak the Arabic language. The findings show that 88.6% of the student's family members do not speak Arabic at home. Only 11.4% of the family members speak Arabic at home. This shows that students have no experience or family background that learn Arabic previously.

Table 2. Experience in learning Arabic

		Frequency	Percent (%)
Valid	Yes	28	80.0
	No	7	20.0
	Total	35	100.0

Table 2 shows the students' backgrounds in learning Arabic were collected. The findings indicate that 80% of the students have learned the Arabic language before entering UiTM. In contrast, the remaining students have no background knowledge of learning Arabic before enrolling on the course.

Table 3. Primary and secondary Arabic learning experience

		Frequency	Percent (%)
Valid	Arabic Primary School	20	57.1
	Secondary School	13	37.1
	Total	35	100.0

Meanwhile, table 3 shows the findings of the survey on the students' Arabic learning experience during primary and secondary school. The findings show that 57.1% of the students learnt the Arabic language at in primary level. Meanwhile, 37.1% of students learnt the Arabic language at secondary school.

Table 4. Total years of learning Arabic language

		Frequency	Percent (%)
Valid	< 1 year	7	20.0
	1-5 years	23	65.7
	> 5 years	5	14.3
	Total	35	100.0

Students' experiences in learning the Arabic Language were gathered. As shown in Table 4, 65.7% of students have learnt Arabic language between 1 to 5 years. About 20% of students have less than 1-

year of experience in learning Arabic Language and only 14.3% of students have more than 5-year experience in learning the Arabic Language.

4.2. Learning strategies used by FHTM students

This section illustrates the analysis and findings of the participants. It includes in terms of memory, cognitive and compensation learning strategies used by FHTM students in UiTM Melaka. The results are presented according to the research questions.

4.3. Research Question 1. What is the total mean score of direct language learning strategies used by FHTM students in UiTM Melaka?

Table 5. Descriptive analysis of the direct learning strategies

Direct Strategies	Mean	Std. Deviation
Memory Strategies	2.918	0.537
Cognitive Strategies	2.616	0.568
Compensation Strategies	2.848	0.586

Table 5 shows the descriptive analysis of the direct learning strategies in accordance of three categories, such as Memory, Cognitive and Compensation used by FHTM students. The findings show that Memory Strategies (M=2.918, SD=0.537) are the most preferred direct learning strategies used among the FHTM students. This was followed by Cognitive Strategies (M=2.616, SD=0.568) and Compensation Strategies (M=2.848, SD=0.586) by the FHTM students.

These findings are in line with Solak and Cakir (2015) study that focuses on Turkish language learners and Gan et al. (2022) on Mandarin language learners. This is also supported by Ho and Ng (2016) on English language learners in the language learning low achievers. Thus, it is shown that low language learning achievers are normally beginners. They often used memory strategies as part of their learning strategies before becoming a high achiever.

Based on the findings mentioned above, memory strategies were the most widely used for language learning low achievers, especially FHTM students who are all in these categories. Even though 80% of the students have learned Arabic language before entering UiTM but 88.6% of the student's family members do not speak Arabic language and Arabic language was not the common language in Malaysia as well. In addition, according to Ramli and Aladdin (2021) in their study that using memory strategies, students can save words and later recall them for conversation. This strategy is commonly used for beginner's language learning students in which they learn, store, and retrieve information gathered.

4.3.1. Research Question 2. What is the pattern of direct learning strategies preferred by male and female FHTM students in UiTM Melaka?

Table 6. Mean score between male and female: Memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Memory Strategies	Male	4	3.028	.4095	.2048
	Female	31	2.903	.5546	.0996
Cognitive Strategies	Male	4	2.821	.5000	.2500
	Female	31	2.590	.5776	.1038
Compensation Strategies	Male	4	3.083	.0962	.0481
	Female	31	2.817	.6167	.1108

Table 6 shows that male students prefer Compensation Strategies (M=3.083, SD=0.0962), followed by Memory Strategies (M=3.028, SD=0.4095) and Cognitive Strategies (M=2.821, SD=0.5000). Besides that, the findings also indicated that female students prefer Memory Strategies (M=2.903, SD=0.5546), followed by Compensation Strategies (M=2.817, SD=0.6167) and Cognitive Strategies (M=2.590, SD=0.5776).

The findings indicated that most female students use memory strategies. The use of memory strategies is very common in language learning. Memory strategies were preferred and thought was effective for students in remembering the words. On the other hand, the findings indicate that male students prefer to use the compensation strategy. According to Zulkarnain et al. (2022), language games activities can be considered as a compensation strategy. In Connolly's et al. (2007) study, the challenge was also rated as significantly more important than the next highest-rated reason for playing games is a pleasure. Males seem to find that games satisfy the need to a greater extent than females do. Thus, the learners can develop their speaking skills more with the educator's guidance after identifying the language learning strategies used by them (Zulkarnain et al., 2022).

In the next section, further investigations were conducted to see whether the mean value is significant, independent sample t-test was conducted. The findings are presented in Table 7.

4.3.2. Research Question 3. Is there any significant difference in direct learning strategies (memory, cognitive and compensation) used by male and female FHTM students in UiTM Melaka?

Table 7. Independent sample T-test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
							Lower	Upper

Memory Strategies	Equal variances assumed	.432	33	.669	.12455	.28850	-.46241	.71152
	Equal variances not assumed	.547	4.563	.610	.12455	.22770	-.47805	.72716
Cognitive Strategies	Equal variances assumed	.763	33	.451	.23157	.30337	-.38564	.84877
	Equal variances not assumed	.856	4.110	.439	.23157	.27067	-.51207	.97520
Compensation Strategies	Equal variances assumed	.851	33	.401	.26613	.31276	-.37018	.90244
	Equal variances not assumed	2.204	31.260	.035	.26613	.12076	.01993	.51233

Table 7, the findings indicates that no significant difference in the scores for Memory Learning Strategies used by male and female FHTM learners, t(33)=0.432, p= 0.669. The findings supported the hypothesis (H1) in which there is no significant difference in Memory Learning Strategies used between male and female FHTM learners as the value in the sig.(2-tailed) is > p=0.05. The results suggest memory Learning Strategies are the most used strategy by female FHTM students while learning Arabic Language.

The same findings confirmed that there was no significant difference in the scores for Cognitive Learning Strategies used among the two genders, t(33)=0.763, p= 0.451. The findings also supported that the hypothesis (H2) there is no significant difference in Cognitive Learning Strategies used by both genders of the FHTM students as the value in the sig.(2-tailed) is > p=0.05. Thus, the finding suggests that Cognitive Learning Strategies are likewise used by both male and female FHTM students in learning the Arabic Language.

The same findings also showed that there was no significant difference in the scores for Compensation Learning Strategies used by male and female FHTM students, t(33)=0.851, p= 0. 401. The findings also supported that the hypothesis (H3) there is no significant difference in Cognitive Learning Strategies used by the male and female FHTM students as the value in the sig.(2-tailed) is > p=0.05. The finding suggests that Compensation Learning Strategies are equally used by both male and female FHTM students in learning Arabic Language.

In conclusion, there is no significant difference in direct learning strategies (memory, cognitive and compensation) used by both genders of the FHTM students in UiTM Melaka. The students should be aware of their learning strategies to improve their Arabic Language in their learning language progress.

5. Conclusion

The finding of this study indicated FHTM female students prefer to use Memory Learning Strategies when learning the Arabic Language. The reason to this might be in terms of the features of memory strategies itself. The nature of this strategy is that is uses a technique especially when a learner is learning a new language by remembering the fundamental building blocks of language, particularly vocabulary (Gan et al., 2022). However, the findings of this study showed that the male FHTM students use Compensation Learning Strategies most frequently when learning Arabic Language compared to the female students. This could be because males are generally satisfied with greater games as to compared to the females such as guessing the meaning of new words or phrases to assist them in language learning (Zulkarnain et al., 2022). It is crucial to adapt all the mentioned learning strategies in this study especially learning Arabic Language. Hence, the teachers play an important role in guiding the students in the learning strategies by giving students opportunities to practise and apply to language learning tasks.

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