The Teaching and Learning Strategies Used In Classroom: A Case Study in National Religious Secondary Schools (SMKA) in Selangor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Issues of Arabic proficiency as a foreign language in Malaysia are never-ending and have always been the concern of policy makers and interested groups. This study aims to investigate students', teachers' and parents' (STP) perceptions towards Arabic teaching and learning strategies used in classroom at *Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama* (SMKA). The study employs a qualitative method, phenomenological and thematic in-perspectives. The informants of the study were three students, three teachers and three parents from three identified SMKAs in Selangor. The participants were chosen by purposive sampling procedures. An in-depth semi-structured interview questions were used to gather the data for the study. The data were analyzed and key important themes were identified. As shown in the findings, there was lack of teaching methods in the classroom, which was the main factor of failure in teaching and learning Arabic Language. The study revealed that applying a good strategy in teaching and smart learning was the key to success in acquiring Arabic Language. Suggestions were made to overcome these problems such as enhancing method approach with Qurʾānic verses, Information Computer Technology (ICT), and Arabic materials in games, songs, comics, cartoons, Arabic comedy, and social media. The change of policy in studying Arabic Language must be carried out and the information about the importance of Arabic Language must be emphasized by the Ministry of Education because it is strongly related to the understanding of Qurʾānic language and *hadith*.

Keywords: Teaching and Learning Strategies, Arabic Language, SMKA schools

INTRODUCTION

Although Arabic is important and steps have been taken to help students master the language, the issue of Arabic proficiency as a foreign language in Malaysia is never-ending and has always been the concern of policy makers and interested groups. Students' performance in Arabic Language at all levels of education in Malaysia is still poor and not satisfactory (Ahmad Hassan, 2000). In spite of the fact that students spend so many years learning Arabic as well as the contributions and efforts by the Ministry of Education after all these years, students are still generally weak at reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. Beside that, teachers face problems to motivate their students in learning Arabic (Arifin, 1998). "In this context, Muwāafaq (1998) states that teaching and learning of Arabic in Malaysian secondary school face a real problem. Although a lot of efforts have been put in, the performance of the students are still not satisfactory" (Ahmad Hassan, 2000).

Based on the research findings by Rofian et al. (2013) it showed that students' perceptions towards the teaching learning of Arabic Language at the Higher Education Institute in Malaysia were at a significant level. Nevertheless, students must be supported from time to time to ensure that it remains at that level. Therefore, students' achievement in Arabic Language could be heightened. This is based on research which showed the relation between the perception of students towards the Arabic Language through their achievement. The failure of students in practicing Arabic Language proficiently could hamper their ability to master this language.

Even though research findings discovered that many students were interested in learning the Arabic Language, many amongst them did not master the Arabic Language correctly. The interest needs to be nurtured by earnest preparation towards more effective learning. This approach coupled with a varied exposure can be important elements in efforts to attract students to be more interested and excited to learn this language. Authorities who are directly involved in this field must be more sensitive towards the change in the teaching learning approach of this language. Methodology and attractive teaching method must be created by lecturers to improve the teaching learning of the Arabic Language among students who have no mastery in the language. Weak students must be encouraged to attend additional classes and further to that, remedial classes incorporating different styles of teaching must be instituted (Rofian et al., 2013).

Language Learning Strategies in Foreign Language and Arabic Language

Rebecca L. Oxford (2003) quoted that there are six major groups of foreign language learning strategies: (i) cognitive, (ii) metacognitive, (iii) memory-related, (iv) compensatory, (v) affective, and (vi) social strategies. Alternative taxonomies have been offered by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and others.

Cognitive strategies enable the learner to manipulate the language material in direct ways, e.g., through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, reorganizing information to develop stronger schemas (knowledge structures), practicing in naturalistic settings, and practicing structures and sounds formally. Among cognitive strategies in learning Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) are reading for pleasure in Arabic, practicing the sounds in Arabic, starting conversation in Arabic, trying to talk like native Arabic speakers, writing notes, messages, letters or reports in Arabic, using the Arabic words they know in different ways, trying not to translate word –for – word, say or write new Arabic words several times, first skim in Arabic passage then go back and read carefully, watch Arabic Language TV shows spoken in Arabic or go to movies spoken in Arabic, and make summaries of information that hear or read in Arabic (Arifin Mamat, Ibrohem Sideh,2013).

Metacognitive strategies (e.g., identifying one's own learning style preferences and needs, planning for an FL task, gathering and organizing materials, arranging a study space and a schedule, monitoring mistakes, and evaluating task success, and evaluating the success of any type of learning strategy) are employed for managing the learning process overall. Among metacognitive strategies in learning AFL are paying attention when someone is speaking Arabic, trying to find as many ways as can to use Arabic, thinking about progress in learning Arabic, looking for people can talk to in Arabic, trying to find out how to be a better learner of Arabic, having clear goals for improving Arabic skills, looking for opportunities to read as much as possible in Arabic, planning schedule so will have enough time to study Arabic, noticing Arabic mistakes and using that information to help do better (Arifin Mamat, Ibrohem Sideh,2013).

Memory-related strategies help learner link one FL item or concept with another but do not necessarily involve deep understanding. Various memory-related strategies enable learners to learn

and retrieve information in an orderly string (e.g., acronyms), while other techniques create learning and retrieval via sounds (e.g., rhyming), images (e.g., a mental picture of the word itself or the meaning of the word), a combination of sounds and images (e.g., the keyword method), body movement (e.g., total physical response), mechanical means (e.g., flashcards), or location (e.g., on a page or blackboard) (see Oxford, 1990 for details and multiple examples). However, memory-related strategies do not always positively relate to L2 proficiency. In fact, the use of memory strategies in a test-taking situation had a significant negative relationship to learners' test performance in grammar and vocabulary (Purpura, 1997). The probable reason for this is that memory strategies are often used for memorizing vocabulary and structures in initial stages of language learning, but that learners need such strategies much less when their arsenal of vocabulary and structures has become larger. Among memory strategies in learning AFL review Arabic lessons often, use rhymes to remember Arabic words, use flashcards to remember new Arabic words, physically act out new Arabic words, think of relationship between what already know and new things learn in Arabic, use new Arabic words in a sentence so can remember them, remember a new Arabic word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used, remember new Arabic words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign, and connect the sound of a new Arabic word and image or picture of the word to help students remember the word (Arifin Mamat, Ibrohem Sideh,2013).

Compensatory strategies (e.g., guessing from the context in listening and reading; using synonyms and "talking around" the missing word to aid speaking and writing; and strictly for speaking, using gestures or pause words) help the learner make up for missing knowledge. Cohen (1998) asserted that compensatory strategies that are used for speaking and writing (often known as a form of communication strategies) are intended only for language use and must not be considered to be language learning strategies. Among compensatory strategies in learning AFL are reading Arabic without looking up every new words, trying to guess what other person will say next in Arabic, understanding unfamiliar Arabic words with making guesses, when cannot think of a word during a conversation in Arabic, trying to use gestures, if cannot think of an Arabic word, using a word or phrase that means the same thing, and making up new words if do not know the right ones in Arabic (Arifin Mamat, Ibrohem Sideh, 2013).

Affective strategies, such as identifying one's mood and anxiety level, talking about feelings, rewarding oneself for good performance, and using deep breathing or positive self- talk, had been shown to be significantly related to FL proficiency in research by Dreyer and Oxford (1996) among South African EFL learners and by Oxford and Ehrman (1995) among native English speakers learning foreign languages. However, in other studies, such as that of Mullins (1992) with EFL learners in Thailand, affective strategies showed a negative link with some measures of FL proficiency. One reason might be that as some students progress toward proficiency, they no longer need affective strategies as much as before. Perhaps because learners' use of cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies is related to greater FL proficiency and self-efficacy, over time there might be less need for affective strategies as learner's progress to higher proficiency. Among affective strategies in learning AFL are trying to relax whenever one is feeling afraid of using Arabic, giving themselves a reward or treat when do well in Arabic, writing down their feelings in a language learning diary, noticing if they are tense or nervous when they are studying or using Arabic, encouraging themselves to speak Arabic even when they are afraid of making a mistake, and talking to someone else about how they feel when they are learning Arabic (Arifin Mamat, Ibrohem Sideh,2013).

Social strategies (e.g., asking questions to get verification, asking for clarification of a confusing point, asking for help in doing a language task, talking with a native-speaking conversation partner, and exploring cultural and social norms) help the learner work with others and understand the target culture as well as the language. Social strategies were significantly associated with FL proficiency in studies by the South African EFL study by Dreyer and Oxford (1996) and the investigation of native-English-speaking foreign language learners by Oxford and Ehrman (1995). Among social strategies in learning AFL are asking questions in Arabic to other students or native Arabic speakers, practicing Arabic with other students, discussing Arabic lessons with their friends, asking for help from Arabic speakers, asking Arabic speakers to correct them when they talk, trying to learn about the culture of Arabic speakers, if they do not understand something in Arabic, they ask the other person to slow down or say it again (Arifin Mamat, Ibrohem Sideh, 2013).

As a result, language learning strategies now play a crucial role in language learning and this field has become one of the most fertile areas of research in second language acquisition. In Anida Abdul Rahim's study (2003) in learning strategy among Malay student in Arabic Language. She found that two types of students. Firstly, those who did not use strategy in learning and did not know how to learn effectively, not admired with the language, give up easily, having no clear objective and advantage of learning of Arabic Language. However, subject who concurrently used strategy of learning had higher confidence level to learn and use Arabic Language, brilliant in organizing learning, active in training and exercise, creative in choosing learning strategy to overcome the challenges in studies, and excellent in examination. In conclusion, using the right learning strategy can help students to empower Arabic Language effectively, fun, intergrated, interesting, easy and quick.

Meanwhile, Muhd. Rizuan (2002), listed three major aspects on strategies: (i) teachers' criteria and credibility in teaching Arabic Language, (ii) teaching and learning management, and (iii) existence of condusive Arabic learning environment in schools; as to upgrade the quality of Arabic Language performance in all national level examinations. He concluded that majority of the teachers did have the minimum qualification in teaching Arabic and were able to conduct lessons in classess well. And it was proven from the observations of their teaching learning planning, its implementation and assessment. The implication of the study, eventhough the respondents are capable and teaching is well-planned, majority of respondents are still doing less than what they need. And eventhough, many of respondents enhance the Arabic environment in school, lack of facility such as "School Radio" could harder teaching learning. It would be the challenge to achieve success in teaching learning of Arabic knowledge. Here are some of strategies of teaching Arabic: Motivation programme are scheduled continuously for the students, review difficult Arabic components, methodology of teaching, enrich the vocabulary of Arabic Language, familiarise with the format of examination. Add on, preparing of excellent teachers, class management, and the formation of good climate in Arabic Language.

Research Methodology

The study employs a qualitatitave method, phenomenological and thematic in-perspectives. The informants of the study were three students, three teachers and three parents from three identified SMKAs in Selangor. The participants were chosen by purposive sampling procedures. An in-depth semi-structured interview questions were used to gather the data for the study. The data were analyzed and key important themes were identified.

Main Interview Question

What are the teaching and learning strategies used in the classroom?

Descriptions of the Participants

The total number of participants involved in the present research was nine individuals: Three students, three teachers and three parents. All participants were selected from three schools of SMKAs in Selangor. The researcher has selected one student, one teacher, one parent from each school.

Students

The researcher has selected three students (S1, S2, and S3) for the face to face individual interview. One student was selected based on her *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (PMR) examination results year (2010) with straight A's in nine subjects taken. The second student was a male student with 8A's except a Grade C for Arabic Language. The third student was also a male student with moderate results, 3A, 5B and 1C in Arabic Language.

Teachers

The first teacher (T1) selected was an *ustaz*, who was also the head of Arabic Language at his school and has had the experience teaching Arabic for sixteen (16) years. He was awarded the excellent teacher in teaching Arabic Language by Ministry of Education, Malaysia. The second teacher (T2) was an *ustazah* with six years experienced in teaching Arabic. The third teacher (T3) was also an *ustazah* with nine years experienced in teaching Arabic.

Parents

The first parent (P1) selected by the researcher was a father of four children and he sent all his children to *SMKA Hamidiah Kajang*. He is a lawyer who has his own company in Ampang. He is the former President and Vice President of Teachers Parents Association in *SMKA Hamidiah Kajang* from year 2006 until year 2010. The second parent (P2) selected was a mother who was also an English teacher at the same school with her daughter in *SMKA Kuala Selangor*. Her daughter scored all A's for her PMR in 2010. And the last informant in the case study was a father (P3) whose daughter scored all A's for her PMR in 2010. This case study is different because her daughter previously took PMR at secondary school which offered Arabic subject as an optional subject, and she learned Arabic subject in the evening after the school ended. This class was known as *Kelas Aliran Agama* (KAA), specially designed by the *Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan* (SMK) schools.

Findings and Discussion

S1 described the strategies she used in learning Arabic in class by asking the students to read a passage line by line and at the same time, find new vocabulary as they went along. Then, they would write down the meanings of the new words in their exercise books. The meaning of the word was either given by the teacher, or by themselves. The tools of learning were textbooks and examples sought outside textbook. In learning grammar, the teacher would give example that was not included in the textbook. Later, the teacher would ask the students to make sentences using the grammar taught in class. S1 always used the dictionary or asked a teacher when she did not

understand an Arabic word. The teacher would also ask the students to finish all the exercises provided in the textbooks.

While S2 said he read a passage, memorized meanings and antonyms of words. The teacher would teach for about 20 minutes and then later the class would do exercises. Meanwhile S3 said his teacher made notes for the students, asked the students to memorize, gave them the meanings, guided the students to answer the PMR examination, provide extra class and seminars for students, search new Arabic words in dictionary guided by the teacher. The student would independently find unfamiliar words, brought students to the Arabic room, showed Arabic movies and later asked the students what they had learnt from the movies. Students were asked to read stories from textbook, search the meaning of new words and presented the findings to the class. The teacher would always check their exercise books, correct their essays and guide them with correct pronunciation of reading Arabic text of story.

There are several learning and teaching strategies used by teachers in class. T1 felt that teachers must be sensitive with the levels of his students before teaching. He loved to ask his students the questions and review previous lessons before starting a new one. He also gave his own example while teaching Arabic to make his students at ease. But his strategy in teaching is depended on the syllabus where it emphasized Arabic grammar than the four Arabic skills required in learning Arabic Language. Therefore, students noticed that the teacher would deduct marks every time they made mistake in Arabic grammar.

The strategies used by T2 were among others by giving some new words to the students to memorize after school. Students tried to retain the Arabic vocabulary such as one day, one *kalimah* (ODOK) of Arabic word.

T3 said her school appointed one main trainer in teaching students about technique in answering questions in examination. She also said that her school organized motivation talks where parents came to school to participate. Teachers challenged their students to excel in examinations, organize extra classes or intensive classes in Arabic subjects and other programs such as "Love Arabic Week". In the classes, both teachers and students looked up for the meaning of the words together. The students would be asked by the teacher to make preparation before they come to class such as reading and searching meanings of new words before they come to class and present it in front of the class. From this activity, it would encourage students to be prepared before they enter the class. Students were made compulsory to use a dictionary in class such as *al-Marbawi* dictionary.

P1 viewed that strategies used in class must attract students to love Arabic. Teacher must be creative in teaching Arabic. P2 had the same opinion with P1 that Arabic teacher must possess good knowledge. However, they were not using suitable methodology, thus impairing the understanding of their students. Another strategy used in teaching and learning Arabic is by providing extra classes at night to train students with extra exercise. There are three types of classes: (i) General, (ii) Elite; who got result 'A' and 'B', and (iii) Poor achievers. She concluded that she was satisfied with the way Arabic was taught in this school. Teacher should replace the class when it was cancelled. P3 said the strategy of teaching and learning Arabic should come naturally. In other words, student and teacher should feel happy during the teaching and learning process.

The Teaching and Learning Strategies Used In Classroom

Language learning strategies (LLS) play a significant role in second language acquisition (SLA) as they assist learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situation. Therefore, one-way to be successful in the target language is that students must be conscious of using certain LLS. The more strategies learners use, the more successful will be. Therefore, for those who tend to be successful in second or foreign language learning generally and Arabic specifically, they should be familiar with all six categories of LLS and utilize them more consciously (Arifin Mamat, Ibrohem Sideh, 2013).

Memory Strategies. S2 said teacher asked students to memorize. The strategies were used by T2 after school by giving some new word to the student to memorize, know as many as vocabulary; one day, one Arabic word or conversation or paper. T1 perceived that it's important to acquire all four skills in learning Arabic as a language, practice hard, ask and answer questions, review lessons before the start of a new one.

Cognitive Strategies. S1 describes the strategies she used in learning Arabic in class, as she finds new vocabulary in passage and write down the meaning in exercise book. The meaning of the words given by the teacher or students themselves find the word, while tools of learning includes using textbook and use examples outside textbook. P2 also said Arabic teacher must possess good knowledge, but at same time if he fails to use a suitable methodology, the knowledge could not be understood.

Compensation Strategies. S3 searched for new Arabic word in dictionary –guided by teacher and student independently find the familiar word, bring student to Arabic room and show Arabic movies, and students reflect. He also said teacher guided the students to answer the PMR examination. T1 described that more attention to Arabic grammar than four skills should be given due to the assessment criteria; teacher uses his own examples to describe to his students without the help of the textbook. P2 organized extra classes at night, doing more exercise; 3 types of classes; general, elite (who get result 'A' & 'B') and poor achievement, but she concluded she was satisfied with the way of teaching Arabic in her school.

Metacognitive Strategies. While S2 said he read the passage, its meanings and antonyms of words, teacher starts 20 minutes with teaching and students do the exercise for the remaining 15 minutes. Meanwhile S3 said his teacher makes notes to the students and gives the meaning.

Affective Strategies. T1 said teacher must be sensitive about students' level while delivering knowledge. P1 felt that using strategies by attracting student to love Arabic first before jumping to other steps. Teacher must be a creative to deliver Arabic Language content. P3 said the strategies are among others; using Arabic in a natural way, not being under pressure. In other words, student and teacher feel happy during teaching learning.

Social Strategies. In SMKA schools where T3 was teaching, she described that her school appointed one main trainer in teaching students about technique in answering the examination questions. Teachers also challenged the students to give the best results in examination, extra class or incentive class for Arabic subject, and organize "Love Arabic Week". T3 in her school organized motivational talk where parents come to school to boost intrinsic motivation to their children.

The learning and teaching strategies in Arabic Language consists of types of language learning styles (LLS) according to Richard and Eunice (1995). The most popular style used in the process teaching learning is memorization. Students must memorize a new word every day because it is foreign language. Secondly, the style of visualization was used in learning and teaching.

Normally they are used in listening skills, by watching movies, listening to the programs on radio and watching TV program. Verbal styles applied in the teaching of speaking skills, reading skills and writing skills. Mostly teachers give students the option of cooperating in groups, so they interact with others. This strategy is called the active style. Active learners learn well in situations that enable them to do something physical.

The other strategy is sequential style which means to absorb information and acquire understanding of material in small connected chunks. In teaching learning Arabic Language, being comfortable with structured teaching approaches that stress grammatical analysis, is important. Teaching methods also focus on examples, before the rules. Teacher prefers to use inductive methods than deductive methods in intro topics of grammar.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings have revealed the importance of employing the right methodology in teaching learning. The study has recommended some approaches in teaching learning Arabic. The study has shown the importance of student centered learning because of its efficacy. Unlike the learning English language, students must struggle to succeed in Arabic subject followed by good strategies employed in teaching. Methods used in teaching shall be accepted by all levels of society. In other words, students can respond to the knowledge given. Teaching time can be divided to stimulate using Arabic Language in real situations. This will enable and encourage students to immerse themselves in real-life situations. Teachers will encourage the students to communicate using Arabic Language and increase their confidence level. Teaching using Malay medium should be minimized. This will allow students to immerse themselves in the language. Make students love to Arabic before starting to teach them using Arabic textbooks. Teachers will have to devise and employ different strategies to teach unmotivated students.

To make the process of teaching learning successful rapport between teacher and students must be established. Teachers should allocate once a week for Arabic conversational classes with students. Arabic teachers must be more creative in transferring knowledge and strike a balance between the four skills of teaching Arabic. They have to be innovative in teaching so that they can sustain and maintain students' interest. Classes have to be brighter and stimulating; Arabic Language should prevail throughout the classroom setting, so that students could immerse themselves in the language. Lessons should be fun especially when it comes to introduce a new concept or a list of new words. New methodologies must be employed to motivate students to use Arabic, especially through performing songs like *nasyeed*.

Efforts must be intensified to make students more inclined towards the language. Practical teachers need assistance from expert teachers, learning and teaching Arabic process as a native language or spoken language. Teachers should nurture the love of this language amongst their students to get them close to Arabic. Arabic should be taught without translation so teachers must depend on their own ingenuity to do this without reverting to their native language. Arabic teachers must possess good personality which radiates inward and outwardly so that students could be enthralled into learning the langue. Teachers are recommended to use multi-style approach in teaching Arabic Language. Use Qurʾānic verses alongside textbooks in learning Arabic Language in class. Teachers are also recommended to identify the motivational factor of learning Arabic Language among their students. Add-on *do'a* to make students understand Arabic clearly whenever they attend knowledge discourses.

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