Language Learning Strategies and Motivation among Religious Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Studies have indicated that motivation is related to both a high frequency and an appropriate use of language learning strategies (Oxford & Nyikos 1989; Chamot et al. 1999; Macaro 2001). This study is designed to investigate the types and level of Arabic language learning motivation among Malaysian religious secondary school students. We also examine the relationship between the use of language learning strategies and language learning motivation. Data for the study were collected using self-report questionnaires, including the adaptation Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford 1990) version 7.0 and the Language Learning Motivation section of the Affective Survey (Ehrman & Oxford 1991). The sample was comprised of 457 Form 4 students from thirteen religious secondary schools in Terengganu, Malaysia. Descriptive statistics, including Pearson and Kruskal Wallis tests, were used to examine the relationship between language learning strategy use and the level of language learning motivation. The results indicate that the students were moderately motivated and tended to have stronger integrative motivation than instrumental motivation. The students' strategy use was strongly correlated with language learning motivation. Overall, language learners with higher levels of motivation possess a richer repertoire of strategies and employ these strategies more frequently than less motivated language learners.

Key words: *language learning strategy, language learning motivation, and Arabic language.*

Introduction

Since the early 1970s, there has been a growing interest in shifting the focus of the teacher-centred classroom to a more learner-centred environment. In foreign language courses, this entails favouring the process of language learning over the desired results. Learners have become the central figures in language classrooms as learning tasks have come to be conceptualized and approached from the students' own point of view (Rubin 1987). This has brought attention to the learning strategies individual learners apply during the process of acquiring a second language (Oxford 1990; Wenden 1991). 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 (MacIntyre 1994).

A language learning strategy (LLS) is a special way of processing information that enhance comprehension, learning, or retention of the information (O'Malley & Chamot 1990). LLS is a specific action taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more easily transferable to new situations (Oxford 1990). Investigation of strategy use shows that successful language learners use a variety of strategies to become more self-directed and to improve their performance (Wenden & Rubin 1987; Cohen 1990; O'Malley & Chamot 1990; Oxford 1990, 1999). In order to add to our understanding of these strategies, it is important to identify, classify, and describe these techniques.

In recent years, researchers have investigated differences in the use of language learning strategies based on demographic differences such as gender (Ehrman & Oxford 1989; Green & Oxford 1995) and ethnic origin (Chang 1990). They have also studied how learners' belief (Wenden 1986; Yang 1999), language proficiency (Green & Oxford 1995; Griffiths 2003) and motivation (Ehrman & Oxford 1989; Oxford & Nyikos 1989; Oxford & Shearin 1994) affect their choice of strategies. These variables

provide valuable information about the language learning process and raise issues for further research.

Research Background

Motivation, which helps students to maintain their language ability after living the classroom (Gardener et al. 1985) is one of the most crucial factors that affect language learners' strategy use. MacIntyre's (1994) model of strategy use indicates that motivation has an important effect on the combinations of learning strategies employed by learners. Motivation, along with one's attitude toward the learning situation, desire to learn the language, and previous success in language learning, triggers the use of language learning strategies.

According to Oxford and Nyikos (1989), the degree of expressed motivation to learn is the most powerful influence on the choice and frequency of language learning strategies. In their study, highly motivated learners used four general groups of strategies (formal rule-related practice, functional practice, general study, and conversational input elicitation strategies) significantly more often than did less motivated learners. Moreover, most students in the study were motivated to get better grades rather than to develop communication competence, as reflected by their low usage of strategies involving out of class communication practice and their high usage of formal analytic strategies helpful for discrete point testing. In a different study, Ehrman and Oxford (1989) found that adults learning foreign languages for job-related reasons were motivated to use many functional communicative practice strategies.

Given these findings, it is easy to understand that motivation is driven by the learners' desire to achieve a particular goal, the devotion of considerable effort to achieve this goal, and deriving a sense of satisfaction from the activities associated with achieving this goal (Gardner & MacIntyre 1993). As a matter of fact, Ellis (1994) postulates that motivation refers to the effort that learners put into learning a second language as a result of their need or desire to learn it. There are three major components in this definition: devoted effort, desire to learn, and satisfaction with the task. These three components are necessary to evaluate the degree and intensity of motivation in language learning (Gardner 1985).

In their socio-educational model of language learning, Gardner and Lambert's (1972) identify two major motivations for language learning: integrative and instrumental motivation. This model has influenced virtually all second language-related research in this area (Crookes & Schmidt 1991). Integrative motivation refers to the learners' positive attitudes toward the target language group and their intention to integrate with members of the group. Instrumental motivation implies functional reasons and utilitarian values in learning a target language, such as to pass a required examination or to get a career promotion.

A few studies show that integrative motivation sustains long term success in second language learning (Gardner 1985, 1988; Ellis 1998). However, the importance of instrumental motivation has also been acknowledged as a significant factor. For example, Lukmani (1972) found that instrumental motivation was more important than integrative motivation in a study of female learners of English in India. Kachru (1992) points out that instrumental purposes could help Indian learners of English to successfully acquire the language. As demonstrated in both Lukmani and Kachru, the social situation might determine the type of learners' motivation for second language learning.

Although several studies have reported a strong relationship between learners' language learning strategy use and language learning motivation, it is not clear which type of motivation (integrative or instrumental) has a greater impact on LLS choice or how motivation affects LLS use.

Methodology

Research Questions

This study was organized around the following research questions:

1. What types of language learning motivation do students of Arabic language have and to what degree are they motivated?

2. Does the use of language learning strategies correlate with language learning motivation as a whole as well as for each motivation category?

3. What are the differences in the use of language learning strategies with respect to the level of language learning motivation among the students?

Participants

The study was conducted at thirteen religious secondary schools in Terengganu. A total of 457 students were drawn from a population of Form 4 students (N=1691) who have been studying Arabic language. The sample is comprised of 229 females and 228 males who have been studying the Arabic language for more than three years.

Instrument

The instrument in this survey focused on three areas: background information, language learning strategy (LLS) and language learning motivation (LLM). The questionnaires were presented in the Malay language to ensure that possible failure to understand the instruction or questions would not affect the response. The language learning strategies questionnaire was adopted from version 7.0 of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (1990). In this study, the questionnaire consisted of 60 items, with the introduction of one construct and some changes to the original SILL version. In addition to the six strategy categories (memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, social, and affective), we introduce a new category: metaphysic strategy. The language learning motivation questionnaire used in this study is a modified version of items chosen from the motivation section of the Affective Survey developed by Ehrman and Oxford (1991). This questionnaire covered integrative and instrumental motivation as well as effort to learn and desire to use the language.

Table 1: Internal Consistency Reliability of LLS and LLM Questionnaire

Construct	Alpha Cronbach	Item
Memory Strategies	0.827	10
Cognitive Strategies	0.869	14
Compensation Strategies	0.808	06
Metacognitive Strategies	0.859	09
Affective Strategies	0.650	07
Social Strategies	0.769	06
Metaphysic Strategies	0.805	08
Overall LLS Items	**0.954**	**60**
Integrative Motivation	0.805	10
Instrumental Motivation	0.790	11
Effort to Learn and Use the Language	0.835	11
Overall Motivation Items	**0.895**	**32**

Table 1 summarizes the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of internal consistency for each category of the LLS and LLM questionnaires. The Cronbach's alpha for each category and for the entire questionnaire ranges from 0.65 to 0.954: this indicates a good degree of reliability (Mohd Majid 1990; Sekaran 1992; McMillan & Schumacher 2006).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to identify the types and level of language learning motivation that religious secondary school students have for studying Arabic language. We employed Ehrman and

Oxfords' (1991) key to report the frequency levels of LLM and calculate mean scores for the Motivation Questionnaire. A mean score between 3.5 and 5.0 was considered to reflect high level of Arabic language learning motivation, scores between 2.5 and 3.4 reflect a medium level of motivation, and scores between 1.0 and 2.4 indicate low motivation.

The results (as shown in Table 2) indicate that participants reported a medium level of motivation in learning Arabic. The overall mean of the LLM questionnaire was 3.37, which is close to the higher end of the medium level. The participants reported a high level of integrative motivation (M=3.73), followed by instrumental motivation (M=3.45), and motivation to learn and to use Arabic (M=2.95).

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Language Learning Motivation (N = 457)

Language Learning Motivation	Mean	S.D.	Interpretation
Integrative	3.73	0.66	High
Instrumental	3.45	0.63	Medium
Effort to Learn and Use the Language	2.95	0.66	Medium
Overall Motivation	3.37	0.55	Medium

In order to answer the second research question, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to investigate the correlation between language learning strategies and language learning motivation. Before performing a correlation test, preliminary analyses were conducted to fulfill the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity (Pallant 2001; Coakes 2005; Bryman & Cramer 2005). The Pearson analysis (see Table 3) indicates that the correlation between overall LLS and overall LLM is significant (r=0.581, p < 0.05), thus higher use of LLS is associated with higher levels of LLM. The value of the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.581 indicating that there is a strong correlation (Davies 1971; Cohen 1988) between LLS and LLM among the Arabic language students.

Table 3: Correlation Between Overall LLS and Overall LLM (N = 457)

Correlation Between Variables	r	r^2	Sig.
Overall LLM – Overall LLS	0.581	0.337	0.000

Sig. at the 0.05 level

Table 4 shows that the relationship between all seven categories of language learning strategies and the three types of language learning motivation is also significant. This confirms the results of the scatterplot (in assumptions analysis) by confirming that a significant positive correlation exists between LLS and LLM.

Table 4: Correlation Between Categories of LLS and Categories of LLM (N = 457)

	Integrative			Instrumental			Effort Use-Learn		
	r	r^2	Sig.	r	r^2	Sig.	r	r^2	Sig.
Memory	0.423	0.178	0.000	0.231	0.053	0.000	0.442	0.195	0.000
Cognitive	0.522	0.272	0.000	0.287	0.082	0.000	0.539	0.290	0.000
Compensation	0.366	0.133	0.000	0.252	0.063	0.000	0.319	0.101	0.000
Metacognitive	0.579	0.335	0.000	0.319	0.101	0.000	0.612	0.374	0.000
Affective	0.348	0.121	0.000	0.201	0.040	0.000	0.362	0.131	0.000
Social	0.419	0.175	0.000	0.238	0.175	0.000	0.477	0.227	0.000
Metaphysic	0.514	0.264	0.000	0.330	0.108	0.000	0.463	0.214	0.000
Overall	0.573	0.328	0.000	0.334	0.111	0.000	0.580	0.336	0.000

Sig. at the 0.05 level

The data provides strong evidence to reject the first null hypothesis which posits that there is no significant correlation between the use of language learning strategies and language learning motivation among of the students. Tables 3 and 4 indicate that the total LLS and seven categories of LLS signifi-

cantly correlate with the total LLM and all three types of LLM at the 0.05 level. This positive correlation indicates that the frequency of strategy use rises as the degree of motivation increases.

At the outset of our analyses, a MANOVA test was used to investigate differences in the use of each strategy category by participants with different levels of motivation. These data did not fulfill one of the assumptions concerning the cell size. The ratio of the smallest (low level motivation students, n=26) to the largest (medium level motivation students, n=236) size is greater than 1:1.5, which may cause problems if a MANOVA test is to be conducted (Pallant 2001; Coakes 2005). When there are violations of the assumption of parametric tests, then an alternative nonparametric technique can be used. Since the differences are between three levels of the LLM, the Kruskal Wallis test can be a useful alternative (Pallant 2001; Bryman & Cramer 2005; Coakes 2005; Field 2005).

Table 5 shows the results of the Kruskal Wallis test. The results indicate that there were significant differences in the use of the overall LLS and each category of LLS among Arabic language learners with different levels of motivation: $H(2) = 106.450$, $p < 0.001$ in overall strategy; $H(2) = 62.258$, $p < 0.001$ in memory strategy, $H(2) = 84.693$, $p < 0.001$ in cognitive strategy; $H(2) = 36.532$, $p < 0.001$ in compensation strategy; $H(2) = 127.902$, $p < 0.001$ in metacognitive strategy; $H(2) = 31.295$, $p < 0.001$ in affective strategy; $H(2) = 56.165$, $p < 0.001$ in social strategy; and $H(2) = 73.475$ $p < 0.001$ in metaphysic strategy. Therefore, the second null hypothesis, which posits that there are no significant differences in the use of LLS among the Arabic language students with different level of motivation, is rejected.

Table 5: Kruskal Wallis Test Statistics for Use of LLS Based on Level of LLM (N=457)

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social	Metaphysic	Overall
Chi Sq	62.258	84.693	36.532	127.902	31.295	56.165	73.475	106.450
D.F.	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Sig. at the 0.05 level

The summary of the ranked data in each condition (see Table 6) indicates that highly motivated students used significantly more strategies than medium motivated and less motivated students in both the overall and individual strategy categories. Students with medium levels of motivation also employed significantly more strategies than less motivated students did in overall strategy used as well each of the seven categories of LLS.

Table 6: Kruskal Wallis Mean Rank for Use of LLS Based on Level of LLM (N=457)

Dependent Variable	Level of Motivation	N	Mean Rank
Memory	High (3.5 - 5.0)	195	278.07
	Medium (2.50-3.40)	236	203.00
	Low (1.0-2.40)	26	96.90
Cognitive	High (3.5 - 5.0)	195	288.98
	Medium (2.50-3.40)	236	194.64
	Low(1.0-2.40)	26	91.06
Compensation	High (3.5 - 5.0)	195	266.51
	Medium (2.50-3.40)	236	209.19
	Low (1.0-2.40)	26	127.46
Metacognitive	High (3.5 - 5.0)	195	305.91
	Medium (2.50-3.40)	236	181.20
	Low (1.0-2.40)	26	86.00

Affective	High (3.5 - 5.0)	195	264.85
	Medium (2.50-3.40)	236	209.01
	Low (1.0-2.40)	26	141.58
Social	High (3.5 - 5.0)	195	280.79
	Medium (2.50-3.40)	236	195.55
	Low (1.0-2.40)	26	144.19
Metaphysic	High (3.5 - 5.0)	195	285.25
	Medium (2.50-3.40)	236	196.33
	Low (1.0-2.40)	26	103.65
Overall Strategy	High (3.5 - 5.0)	195	296.78
	Medium (2.50-3.40)	236	189.66
	Low (1.0-2.40)	26	77.69

Discussion and Implications

These results show that the religious secondary school students have a medium level of motivation for learning the Arabic language. This finding is consistent with previous work by Park (2005), but differs from what was found in Chou's (2002) and al-Otaibi's (2004) studies, which indicated high level of language learning motivation among their respondents.

Furthermore, religious secondary school students exhibit a high level of integrative motivation than instrumental motivation or effort to learn and use the Arabic language. This finding is not consistent with other studies (Prokop 1989; Chou 2002; al-Otaibi 2004; Park 2005) that indicate that the mean of instrumental motivation is greater than that of integrative motivation. Religion could possibly be an explanatory factor here. As Muslims, the students in this study have been taught to respect the Quran, Hadith and the Arabic language, which was chosen as a medium of the last divine revelation. They have to read the Quran in Arabic with great emphasis on accuracy of recitation. From early on, parents expose their children to the language of the Quran or Hadith (e.g., surah al-Fatihah, supplication before sleep and before meals). The context of practicing the Islamic religion in Malaysia (e.g., azan, prayer, and Quran recitation) offered several learning opportunities for the Arabic language learners. These students know that they must gain competence in the Arabic language in order to better understand Islam and to further the study of the religion (especially in Arab countries). All of these factors increased the learners' positive attitudes toward the Arabic language and their intention to integrate with the Arabic community. This finding indicates that social-religious factors may influence learners' motivational orientations for foreign language learning.

The strong positive correlation between language learning strategy and language learning motivation among secondary school students in this study was found to be a linear relationship. This is consistent with results reported in other studies (e.g., Okada et al. 1999; Chou 2002; Chang 2003; al-Otaibi 2004). Thus, we can conclude that motivation is related to the high frequency and the appropriate use of language learning strategies (Oxford & Nyikos 1989; Macaro 2001).

Although the positive correlation data could not prove a causal relationship MacIntyre and Noels (1996) offer two possible causal paths in the explanation of this correlation.

1. In MacIntyre's social psychological model of strategy use, motivation is an essential impetus that encourages learners to apply a variety of strategies. Thus, students with high motivation will be more likely to invest time and to make the effort needed to engage in strategy use since the employment of learning strategies requires effort.

2. Students who are aware of different learning strategies and use them with less difficulty might learn language more effectively and become more motivated to learn the language. This idea suggests that the students' initial reason for engaging in learning foreign languages stimulates the progress of language learning.

Finally, the findings suggest that highly motivated students generally employ all seven categories of language learning strategies more frequently than less motivated students. This result supports a number of previous studies demonstrating that the level of expressed motivation to learn a language has a significant effect on strategy use (Ehrman & Oxford 1989; Oxford & Nyikos 1989; Chou 2002; Chang 2003; al-Otaibi 2004; Park 2005). From a social psychology perspective, motivation has been found as one of the most important factors in language learning and is a key determinant of frequency and type of strategy use (Nyikos & Oxford 1993). Thus, it would seem that more highly motivated students are likely to put in the time and effort required of consistent strategy application. On the contrary, students who are not motivated refuse to use a range of effective strategies or they become demotivated when their lack of strategy use obstructs the language learning progress.

The study findings suggest a number of implications for Arabic language teaching and learning at religious secondary schools.

1. Teachers should be aware of the effect they have on their students' motivation and strategy use.

2. Teacher should raise students' awareness about language learning strategies and their usefulness.

3. Teachers must recognize those factors that influence student motivation. This is supported by Oxford and Shearin's (1994) work, which strongly suggests that motivation is extremely important for second language learning.

4. Since motivation influences how hard students are willing to work on a task, and how much they will persevere when they are challenged, it is important for the teacher to develop students' motivation to use the strategies. In return, the use of language learning strategies can increase student motivation for language learning tasks.

5. It is crucial to maximize language learning by employing activities that engage and enhance the students' motivation.

Each of these points contribute greatly to further understanding of the relationship between language learning strategies use and the level of the language learning motivation.

Conclusion

In summary, we can conclude that the participants in this study were moderately motivated and tended to have stronger integrative motivation than instrumental motivation or effort to learn and use the Arabic language. This study also supports the evidence for the strong relationship between language learning motivation and the use of language learning strategies. Language learners with higher motivation level possess a richer repertoire of strategies and employ strategies more frequently than less motivated language learners. This proved the fact that motivation is one of the most important factors in language learning and is a key determinant of frequency and type of strategy use. So, motivation affects how hard learners are willing to work on a language activities, and how much they will persevere when they are challenged.

The learning strategies and motivation have a major role in language learning process in which they can influence the outcome of language learning. Unlike factors such as gender, age and ethnic, these two learner characteristics can be modified by the teacher through improved pedagogical practices to facilitate the learning. Therefore, it is important in language learning strategies instruction to develop learners' motivation to use the strategies. In return, the use of learning strategies can increase learner motivation for language learning activities.

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