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LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF ENGLISH SPECIALIZATION SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LIBYA

HASSUNA BASHIR ALI KRAYEM

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the use of language learning strategies of 578 Libyan successful and less successful secondary school students of English as a foreign language, based on four variables; students' geographical area, English language preference, gender and students' English background (living in an English-speaking country and/or having English courses out of the school discipline). The subjects (149 boys and 429 girls) were assessed through an Arabic translation of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990). The methodology adopted for this study is a mixed-method design (quantitative and qualitative). The instruments employed in data collection were survey questionnaires (SILL), focus group semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. The qualitative data was analyzed using a form of content analysis research techniques. The quantitative data was analyzed using the SPSS statistics software. The major findings were that the reported frequency of strategy use as whole by the students was moderate, with the students reporting most frequent use of Metacognitive Strategies and least use of Social Strategies. Successful students reported using strategies more often than the less successful students. The results of this study proved that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female students in the use of overall language learning strategies and strategy categories except for cognitive strategies. In general, the geographical area factor was not good predicator for language learning strategies as the results showed that there were no significant differences in the use of overall strategies with regard to the geographical area factor. However, geographical area factor was a significant predictor for ten individual strategies. Students' Language background has influenced the use of overall LLSs and four of the strategy categories in favor of group 1 students (who lived in an English-speaking country or/and having English courses out of the school discipline). English language background has no relation with the use of metacognitive and social strategies. The language preference factor was found to be a good predictor. Successful students of all the three groups used overall language learning strategies and all the six strategy categories more frequently than less successful students. The results also showed that the main problem faced by the students was that they still did not have explicit knowledge about the use of language learning strategies.

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STRATEGI PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA INGGERIS PENGKHUSUSAN PELAJAR SEKOLAH MENENGAH DI LIBYA

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyiasat penggunaan strategi pembelajaran bahasa oleh 578 pelajar sekolah menengah di Libya yang berjaya dan kurang berjaya dalam Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Asing, berdasarkan empat pembolehubah; iaitu 'kawasan geografi, keutamaan bahasa Inggeris, jantina dan latar belakang pelajar Bahasa Inggeris(yang tinggal di sebuah negara yang berbahasa Inggeris dan / atau mempunyai kursus Bahasa Inggeris di luar sekolah).Subjeknya (149 lelaki dan 429 perempuan) telah dinilai melalui terjemahan bahasa Arab oleh *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990)*. Metodologi yang digunakan untuk kajian ini adalah reka bentuk kaedah campuran (kuantitatif dan kualitatif). Instrumen yang digunakan dalam pengumpulan data adalah melalui soal selidik kajian lapangan berdasarkan*(SILL)*, temu bual berstruktur separa untuk kumpulan fokus dan pemerhatian bilik darjah. Data Kualitatif dianalisis menggunakan satu jenis teknik penyelidikan analisis kandungan dan data Kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan perisian statistik *SPSS*. Penemuan utama melaporkan penggunaan strategi yang kerap secara keseluruhannya oleh pelajar adalah sederhana, dengan pelajar melaporkan penggunaan yang paling kerap terhadap Strategi Metakognitif dan penggunaan Strategi Sosial yang paling kurang. Pelajar yang berjaya dilaporkan menggunakan strategi dengan lebih kerap daripada pelajar-pelajar yang kurang berjaya. Keputusan kajian ini membuktikan bahawa tiada perbezaan statistik yang signifikan antara pelajar lelaki dan perempuan dalam penggunaan strategi pembelajaran bahasa dan kategori strategi kecuali strategi kognitif. Secara umumnya, kawasan geografi merupakan faktor peramal yang tidak baik untuk strategi pembelajaran bahasa dimana keputusan menunjukkan bahawa tidak terdapat perbezaan yang signifikan dalam penggunaan strategi secara keseluruhanayo. Walau bagaimanapun, kawasan geografi merupakan faktor peramal yang signifikan untuk sepuluh strategi individu. Latar belakang bahasa Pelajar telah mempengaruhi keseluruhan penggunaan *LLSs* dan empat kategori strategi memihak pada kumpulan pelajar 1. Latar belakang Bahasa Inggeris tidak mempunyai kaitan dengan penggunaan strategi metakognitif dan sosial. Faktor bahasa keutamaan didapati menjadi peramal yang baik. dimana, Semua pelajar yang berjaya di dalam ketiga-tiga kumpulan itu secara keseluruhan, menggunakan strategi pembelajaran dan semua enam strategi kategori dengan lebih kerap daripada pelajar-pelajar yang kurang berjaya. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa masalah utama yang dihadapi oleh pelajar adalah mereka masih tidak mempunyai pengetahuan yang jelas tentang penggunaan strategi pembelajaran bahasa.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study.

Over the last 20 years, research on language learning strategies (LLSs) has grown and expanded because of a significant shift within the field of language learning and teaching. Greater emphasis has been placed on learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching (Hismanoglu, 2000). One consequence of this shift is the increasing awareness and interest in resources for learning styles and LLSs in foreign and second language teaching and learning.

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One focus of research in the EFL area is to identify how learners process new information and which strategies they use to understand, learn, or remember the information. Factors related to LLS use range from cultural and educational contexts to individual learner variables, such as gender, motivation, achievement, proficiency, and years of learning.

Oxford (1990a) and O'Malley and Chamot (1990) proved the remarkable and positive role of LLSs for effective and successful language learning. Moreover, they stress that effective learners use a variety of different strategies and techniques to solve problems they encounter while they acquire or produce the language. Rubin (1975, as cited in Rubin 1982) found that good language learners use strategies, such as making reasoned guesses when uncertain, making an effort to communicate and to learn through communication, finding strategies to overcome inhibitions in target language interaction, practicing the language whenever possible, monitoring their speech and that of others, attending to form (i.e., grammar) and paying attention to meaning.

According to Lessard-Clouston (1997), the language learner who is capable of using a wide variety of LLSs appropriately can improve his/her language skills in a better way. Developing skills in using LLSs can help the language learner develop learner independence and autonomy. In Libya, English has become the most popular foreign language among students. However, studies on the use of LLSs by secondary school and university students learning English are scarce. In general, the Libyan education system remains focused on teaching strategies. By contrast, the development policy is to review the current curriculum, taking into consideration the global changes in the learning process

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toward student and learning. The reviewers recommended that the curriculum has to include strategies of learning and education (National Report of Libya, 2008). Published studies on LLSs in the Libyan context are scarce, but a similar LLS study in the Jordanian context has been conducted. Many factors vary the use of strategies. Al-Masri (2009) included a sample of 85 students in his study and concluded that student achievement influences LLSs use. He also found no significant difference in the use of LLSs between genders. With regard to gender differences, females may use a wider or at least a very different range of strategies than males. More highly motivated learners use a significantly greater range of appropriate strategies than do less motivated learners (MacIntyre & Noels, 1996; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). Similar to gender, academic majors generally affect the use of learning strategies by students. Generally, students who major in humanities use more and a wider range of strategies than those who major in science or engineering (e.g., Lee, 1994; Park, 1999). Sy (1994, 1995) investigated the relationship between the gender of Taiwanese university students and the use of LLSs, and found that female students used all six categories of LLSs more frequently than did male students.

English language competence has become a hot topic in Libya not just in the field of education but also in society. Many parents are very interested in ensuring that their children have proper English education. Parents approved of the introduction of English to primary schools in 2005 (Alhmali, 2007). The present study appears to be the first to investigate the LLSs of secondary school students in Libya.

Education in Libya is free for everyone from primary school to university levels. Pre-university education has three levels, namely, primary, preparatory, and secondary. The first nine years of education are compulsory and known as basic education, which consists

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of six years of primary school and the first three years of preparatory school (National Report of Libya, Zarrough et al., 2001). The English education system in Libya begins in the fourth grade primary school. This compulsory English program begins at the age of six upon entering primary school, which lasts for six years, and then continues for three more years in preparatory school (Otman & Karlberg, 2007).

In secondary school, students who select English as a specialization continue to learn English using the Libyan series module published by Garnet Education (1995). Garnet Education is a specialist ELT publisher that produces general English materials. It has more than 35 years of experience in the development of English-language teaching materials. The publisher also develops materials in English for academic or specific purposes. The company develops ELT materials that meet the needs of schools and universities, and has extensive experience working with state education ministries worldwide to develop their respective national English language curricula. Secondary school has a three-year stage. The syllabus is designed to consolidate and further develop the understanding of the grammatical system, to increase the range of active vocabulary of students, and to extend their abilities in language skills in reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

The materials for third-year English specialization have been designed with the specific needs of Libyan students who have chosen English as their future studies. The course components of this syllabus are composed of Subject Books A & B, Skills Books A & B, a workbook, Teacher's Books A & B, and a class cassette. These materials are designed to cover the entire school year, with more than 200 periods (period = 45 minutes). These materials are also organized into 24 units and are composed of 24 lessons per unit.

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The lessons are divided among the three student books; the Skills Book has 12 lessons per unit, the Subject Book has four lessons per unit, and the workbook has four lessons per unit. Each unit has sections dedicated to reading, vocabulary and grammar, functional use of language, listening, speaking, and writing. This curriculum is organized around activities based on communicative principles (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Reading work involves pre-reading, reading, and post-reading activities. A discovery approach to grammar is recommended. The course book includes activities that promote meaningful and purposeful language use (i.e., receptive and productive) in oral and written contexts. The curriculum recommends the teacher and students to use English in the classroom as much as possible, as the aim is for the students to communicate effectively and fluently with each other and to make conversing in English a regular activity. During the school year, English subjects, such as grammar, writing, reading, phonetics, literature, speaking and listening, are taught as major subjects.

However, secondary school students do not learn much English because of many factors, such as the content of the textbooks, methodology, and evaluation system of the teachers. Students do not learn much in English because Libyan secondary school focuses more on memorizing vocabulary and learning grammatical rules, and developing writing and oral skills is neglected (Orafi & Borg, 2009). Furthermore, the students are seldom exposed to English language outside EFL classes. As a result, those students who are interested to learn advanced-level English usually enroll in private language institutes and centers. However, this group of learners also cannot communicate effectively because they do not have the opportunity to use English in real-life contexts.

This study was conducted on third-year English specialization secondary school students in Libya. Students who pass this year will have to join the university English

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department. Specialized secondary schools became an alternative for the general secondary education to fulfill the requirements of the advancements in communication and information technology during the last decades of the 20th century. Among these specialized secondary schools are basic science secondary school, life science secondary school, social science secondary school, engineering sciences secondary school, and arts and media secondary school. This study intends to provide significant findings on language learners in Libya, where the teacher remains at the center of classrooms and little room is left for students to become independent or active learners. The teacher is the only active person in the classroom, and the learners are completely passive and merely follow the instructions of the teacher. In this situation, much can be learned from carefully studying the LLSs used by secondary school students in Libya. The ability to use appropriate learning strategies is one of the factors that lead to successful student learning and also one of the requirements to enable language learners to become autonomous or use independent learning skills. By exploring the factors affecting the strategy use of learners, the shift from the "teacher-centered practice" to a more "learner-centered" one can become a reality.

1.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical framework of this study has a two-fold base, that is, the constructivist theory and the comprehensive model of cognitive view to language learning. The researcher based the study on these theories because they are interrelated and both theories focus on the learner as a processor of information. The learner has a foundation of information in mind upon which he/she builds new input.

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After the dominance of behaviorism theory, which began to decline in 1970s, the current cognitive approaches to language learning emphasize on unobservable constructs, such as mind, memory, attitudes, motivation, thinking, and other internal processes. The psychological cognitive approach stresses that learning is an active, constructive, cumulative, and self-directed process dependent on the mental activities of the learner (Sternberg, 1996). According to Ally (2004), cognitivists consider learning as an internal process that involves memory, thinking, reflection, abstraction, motivation, and meta-cognition. He added that learners use different types of memory during learning. Cognitive psychology suggests that information is received in the sensory store through different senses and is transferred to the short-term and long-term memories through different cognitive processes. Ally provides Figure 1.1 below.

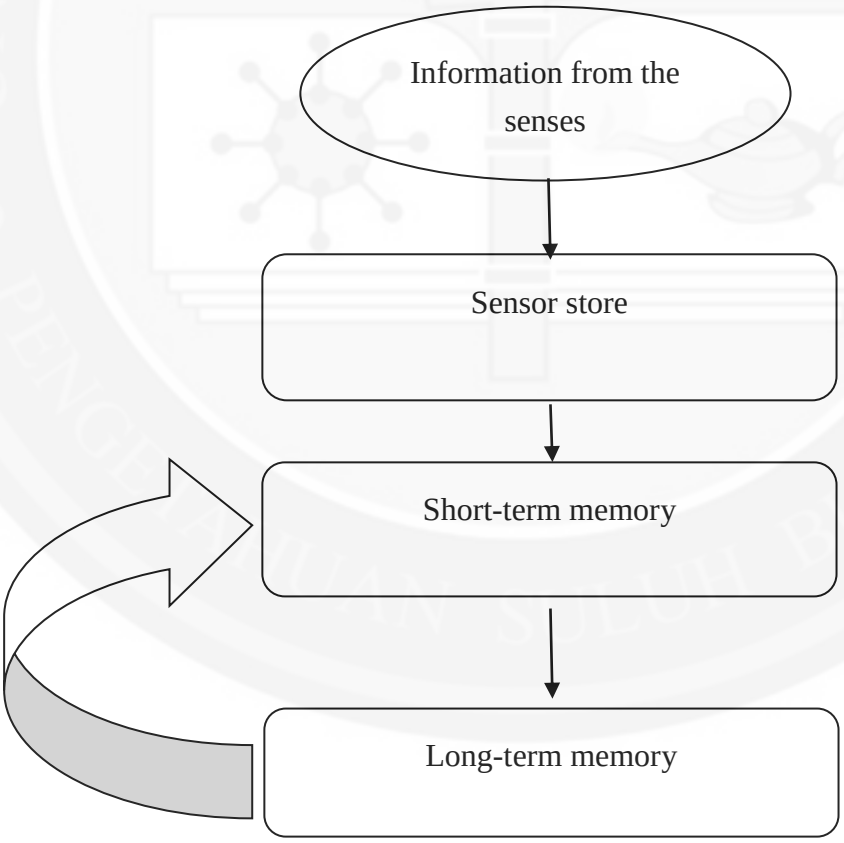

Figure 1.1. Sensory store, (Ally, 2004)

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