

IIUM STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' PRACTICES OF LANGUAGE LEARNING
STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the practice of language learning strategies (LLS) among two stakeholders in education (students and teachers) at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) Matriculation Centre. The study used the mixed methods design to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The instruments used for the study were the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning Strategies (SILL), interview protocol and classroom observation protocol. Nine sets of lesson plans were also analysed. The respondents for the study were 300 students who were divided into two groups consisting of 150 students who passed (EPT-pass) and 150 students who failed (EPT-fail) the English Placement Test (EPT). Four English language teachers at the institution also participated in the study. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation scores), thematic analysis, and document analysis. The findings showed that the EPT-pass ($M=4.083$, $SD=0.672$) and EPT-fail ($M=2.722$, $SD=0.466$) students utilised indirect language learning strategies more than direct strategies. The EPT-pass group utilised metacognitive strategies ($M=4.361$, $SD=0.954$) while EPT-fail students utilised affective strategies ($M=3.077$, $SD=0.398$) the most. LLS were also evidently nurtured in the nine sets of lesson plans examined with cognitive strategies being the mostly nurtured strategies. The four teachers were found to have incorporated LLS into their lessons. It can be concluded that indirect strategies were more prominently used by the students and LLS were nurtured, albeit indirectly in both the lesson plans and lesson implementation. The study implies that LLS are an integral part in the teaching and learning of English and should be directly nurtured and incorporated in English language classrooms.





AMALAN STRATEGI PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA DI KALANGAN PELAJAR DAN GURU UIAM

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji amalan strategi pembelajaran bahasa (LLS) di kalangan dua pihak berkepentingan dalam bidang pendidikan (pelajar dan guru) di Pusat Matrikulasi Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM). Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kaedah campuran untuk mengumpul data kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Instrumen yang digunakan untuk kajian ini adalah Inventori Strategi Pembelajaran Bahasa (SILL), protokol temuduga dan protokol pemerhatian kelas. Sembilan set rancangan pengajaran juga dianalisis. Responden untuk kajian ini ialah 300 pelajar yang dibahagikan kepada dua kumpulan yang terdiri daripada 150 pelajar yang lulus (EPT-lulus) dan 150 pelajar yang gagal (EPT-gagal) Ujian Penempatan Bahasa Inggeris (English Placement Test (EPT)). Empat guru bahasa Inggeris di institusi tersebut turut mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Data dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif (skor min dan sisihan piawai), analisis tematik dan analisis dokumen. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar EPT-lulus ($M=4.083$, $SP=0.672$) dan EPT-gagal ($M=2.722$, $SP=0.466$) menggunakan strategi pembelajaran bahasa tidak langsung lebih daripada strategi langsung. Strategi yang paling kerap digunakan oleh kumpulan EPT-lulus ialah strategi metakognitif ($M=4.361$, $SP=0.954$) manakala bagi pelajar EPT-gagal ialah strategi afektif ($M=3.077$, $SP=0.398$). LLS juga jelas dipupuk dalam sembilan rancangan pengajaran yang dikaji dengan strategi kognitif dikenalpasti sebagai strategi yang paling kerap dipupuk. Empat guru terbabit didapati telah menjadikan LLS sebahagian daripada pelaksanaan pengajaran mereka. Dapat disimpulkan bahawa strategi tidak langsung lebih kerap digunakan pelajar dan LLS terbukti dipupuk, walaupun secara tidak langsung, dalam kedua-dua rancangan pengajaran dan pelaksanaan pengajaran. Kajian ini membuktikan bahawa LLS merupakan intipati penting dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris dan harus dipupuk secara langsung serta dijadikan sebahagian dari pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter is basically the general introduction to what the study is all about. It

covers all the essential details to introducing the scope of the study which includes the

background of the study, the statement of the problem, the significance of the study,

the conceptual framework of the study, the research objectives, the research questions,

the summary of the methodology and the definition of terms.

1.2 Background of the Study

The present study was conducted at the Centre for Foundation Studies of the

International Islamic University Malaysia (CFS IIUM), Petaling Jaya, Selangor. Since

its establishment, English and Arabic are the two primary languages used as

instructional languages in the university, depending on the specific programme of

study. Applicants wishing to pursue their studies in programmes with English as





medium of instruction must present a score of 550 in the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or Band 6.0 in the International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) test with a minimum Band of 5.5 for each of the skills – writing, reading, listening and speaking.

It is compulsory for those who apply for Bachelor of English Language and Literature to obtain Band 6.5 in the International English Language Testing Service (IELTS) with a minimum Band of 6.0 for each of the skills - writing, reading, listening and speaking. Alternatively, they may sit for the IIUM-administered English Placement Test (EPT) and obtain a minimum of 6.0 points with a minimum Band of 5.5 for each skill - writing, reading, listening and speaking to fulfil the English language requirement.



Applicants interested in programmes with Arabic as a medium of instruction must achieve an exemption after sitting for the IIUM-administered Arabic Placement Test (APT). Applicants who are unable to submit satisfactory results in any of the above tests may take up language proficiency courses at the university to fulfil the admission requirements (IIUM, 2016).

Students enrolled at CFS IIUM are SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education, translated *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*) school-leavers (equivalent to eleventh grade in America's K-12 education). Generally, all of them would sit for English Placement Test (EPT) upon enrolment (to determine whether or not they meet the English language requirement imposed by the university) in which failing the test would cause





them to follow English classes to improve their English proficiency. That would normally take them at least a semester or 14 weeks. At the end of the 14-week, they would have another attempt at English test and they would have to make sure they fulfil the English language requirement by then or else the same cycle (following English class for one semester or 14 weeks) will take place again until they meet the English language requirement (and that has to be done before they begin following classes at faculty level, or referred to as *kuliyah* at the university). Meanwhile, students who fulfil the English requirement after sitting for the English Placement Test will be spared from following any intensive English class throughout their study period at the university. Owing to that, students at the learning institution could in a broader context be divided into successful students (referred to as EPT-pass in throughout the study) and less successful students (better known as EPT-fail in this



Studies have proven that the use of language learning strategies (LLS) is what discriminates successful and unsuccessful learners (Ag. Bambang Setiyadi, 2014). Holding such importance, the study was made centralised around language learning strategies to further establish the findings of abundance of studies which proposed for positive impact of LLS on language learning as well as mastery. The study went more than just studying individual students' practice of language learning strategies as the word 'learning' (among others) takes in two major stakeholders in education which are students and teachers. Besides studying the possible differences in language learning strategy practices between EPT-pass and EPT-fail students (reflected via questionnaire), this study also studied the practices (including stands which were





reflected via interview sessions) of four teacher-participants when it comes to language learning strategies (reflected via lesson plans and lesson implementations).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Students enrolled at CFS IIUM are expected to reach at least high-intermediate English proficiency in order for them to be able to follow lessons at *kuliyah* (faculty) level properly and quite effortlessly. Considering the fact that students who enrolled at the Centre for Foundation Studies of the International Islamic University Malaysia are the products of the same education system, it is rather perplexing to still have them segregated into EPT-pass and EPT-fail groups according to the EPT results.

This is due to the fact that they had spent the same amount of time learning English formally (11 years) in schools, excluding preschool level (Ramiza Darmi & Albion, 2013). Rubin (1987) mentions that when differences can still be drawn out of learners sharing the same L1 background, learning the same target language under the same circumstances and in the same context, the differences could be attributed to usage of language learning strategies. Hence, language learning strategies were made the focal point of the study.

What is more, the Ministry of Education Malaysia has been implementing different programmes designed to strengthen the command of English among school students – the once controversial teaching of Mathematics and Science in English (translated *Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa*





Inggeris or *PPSMI*, the suggested acronym), teaching English intensively, adding more content to the English language subject at pre-school level, increasing the number of periods for the language in schools schedule and bringing in teachers who are native speakers of English, among many (Idris Jala, 2014). Despite the far-reaching efforts, some students still could not achieve the required level of language proficiency when they pursue studies at tertiary level. In this study, it was found that some students still performed below the required level of proficiency when they first enrolled at the Centre for Foundation Studies of the International Islamic University Malaysia and those students are referred to as EPT-fail students in this study.

According to Young, Hyuck, Sunyoung and You (2014, p.241), “Teachers’ instructional strategies and learners’ learning strategies both affect students’ learning.” As the word ‘learning’ is not tailored exclusively for learners and that instructional strategies positively affect language achievement (Roh, 2009), the study also investigated into the practice (which also includes individual stand) of another important group of education stakeholders which consists of four teacher-participants who voluntarily became part of the study.

1.4 Significance of Study

Language learning strategies are of great importance for several reasons. Germane LLS could lead to greater performance and aplomb on the part of the language learner. Language learning strategies have been found to correlate with proficiency





and performance (Kamarul Shukri et al., 2008; O'Malley et al., 1985; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985 as cited in Zeynali, 2012). Those researchers suggest that language learning strategies could actually be used as denotation to one's success in language learning. Similarly, most educators would reflect on the same view if they were to be cross-examined on the relation between language proficiency and performance with whatever strategies applied to learn a language. In other words, they would wholeheartedly agree that language learning strategies are inextricably linked. Having to hold such importance, it was only wise to conduct this study as this study will help establish a more substantial awareness of the effective power of language learning strategies in helping learners to perform not only in any language classroom, but also later in their life. The researcher feels buoyant that more educators will be driven to establish language classrooms that incorporate language learning strategies after this.



Teachers, lesson plan developers as well as administrators at the Centre for Foundation Studies of the International Islamic University Malaysia may find this research useful for improving their lesson plan design and practice as a whole. They may be more cognizant of the potential power of language learning strategies and conceivably incorporate and nurture language learning strategies with extreme concentration or effort in time to come. More than that, this study would also provide language practitioners as well as administrators at the Centre for Foundation Studies of the International Islamic University Malaysia input on what differentiate(s) both EPT-pass and EPT-fail students they have existed within the compound of the institution and using the input or data collected from the former group of students, they could draw out plan of action(s) in order to help the latter group of students to improve further when it comes to language proficiency which could then lead to





language mastery and also passing the next English test or meeting the needed English language requirement set by the institution.

As to practical implications for the classrooms, there have been discussions about whether language learning strategies should be taught as a separate subject or be integrated with classroom instruction in the sense that some of the classroom time can be allocated for the teaching of language learning strategies to help equip language learners with proper strategies and hence, improve their language competencies regardless of their language learning abilities (Bialystok & Frohlich, 1978; Williams & Burden, 1997 as cited in Kayaoglu, 2012). Those discussions could possibly be turned into solid practices owing to literatures (shared via this study) supportive of language learning strategies as well as findings of this study which help further substantiate not only those literatures but also findings on LLS studies conducted since the very first study on language learning strategies which put concern on the characteristics of ‘good language learner’ (Bai, 2016).

1.5 Rationale of the Study

It has been observed by a number of language educators that some learners become more successful in the language learning process, whereas, some others fail to reach such success (Rubin, 1975). Many study findings suggest the reason behind the previously illustrated scenario is due to lacking in the usage of language learning strategies which in turn affect language proficiency (Juan Zhao, n.d.) and MacIntyre





(1994) further emphasized that strategy use results from and leads to increased proficiency. The focus of the present study is to fill in gap on the difference between successful and less successful language learners where language learning strategy usage is concerned. The successful learners in this study is referred to as EPT-pass students whereas the less successful learners is referred to as EPT-fail. “It is thought that if the strategies of successful language learners can be identified it would be possible to teach them to less successful learners and thus, increase their learning outcomes” (Esim Gursoy, 2010, p.164). It is hoped that EPT-fail students would be enlightened further about language learning strategies (as to which strategy works better, if not best) after the strategy usage practices between the two groups being drawn out and hence, continue progressing from there (in terms of language mastery).



As for EPT-pass students, they could improve further by practicing more variations of strategies for “successful learners often use strategies in an ‘orchestrated’ fashion” to be linked to a particular language skill (Oxford, 1994 as cited in Nor Ashikin Ab Manan, Ahmad Ashaari Alias, Johana Yusof and Ambigapathy Pandian, 2011). In other words, EPT-pass students would have richer knowledge about language learning strategies and utilize each strategy interchangeably according to language tasks at hands and not stick to a few limited strategies when it comes to tackling language tasks or activities.



According to Chiya (2003), teachers must be attentive to students' learning styles and introduce, expose them to suitable learning strategies for successful learning to take place in the classroom. Furthermore, the better understanding of language learning strategies is vital in order for English teachers to effectively help students develop their learning autonomy (Chien, 2010). Hence, this study investigated the practice of the institution at large when it comes to language learning strategies and hopefully, the present study would fill in gap as to how language learning strategies could be embedded into curriculum and be made part of the practice of any learning institution.

1.6 Research Objectives

This study aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To describe similarities or differences in language learning strategies (LLS) employed by students from both EPT-pass and EPT-fail groups.
- 2) To determine the most utilised strategy by EPT-pass and EPT-fail students.

Considering the fact that learners do not have complete understanding of LLS in terms of their classification as well as their usefulness (Rodriguez, 2016) and significant confidence on the interdependency between strategy training and greater language success on the part of language learners (Wijirahaju & Dorand, 2018), the study went further into achieving two more additional objectives:

- 3) To locate evidences of language learning strategies being included into the 9 sets of lesson plans prepared collectively by the academic staff at the Centre for Foundation Studies of the International Islamic University Malaysia.
- 4) To find out whether or not and how English language teachers at CFS IIUM made language learning strategies part of their lesson implementations.

1.7 Research Questions

This study focused on four questions:

- 1) What are the similarities or differences in the practice of language learning strategies between students from both EPT-pass and EPT-fail groups?
- 2) What is the most utilised strategy by EPT-pass and EPT-fail students?
- 3) What are the evidences of language learning strategies being included into the 9 sets of lesson plans prepared collectively by the academic staff at the Centre for Foundation Studies of the International Islamic University Malaysia?
- 4) Do academic staff at CFS IIUM make language learning strategies part of their lesson implementations and how do they go about doing it?

1.8 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The study adopted the following language learning strategy framework developed by Oxford (1990) as to approach and define language learning strategies (LLS) because it is acknowledged as the most inclusive framework up to date (Ellis, 2005).

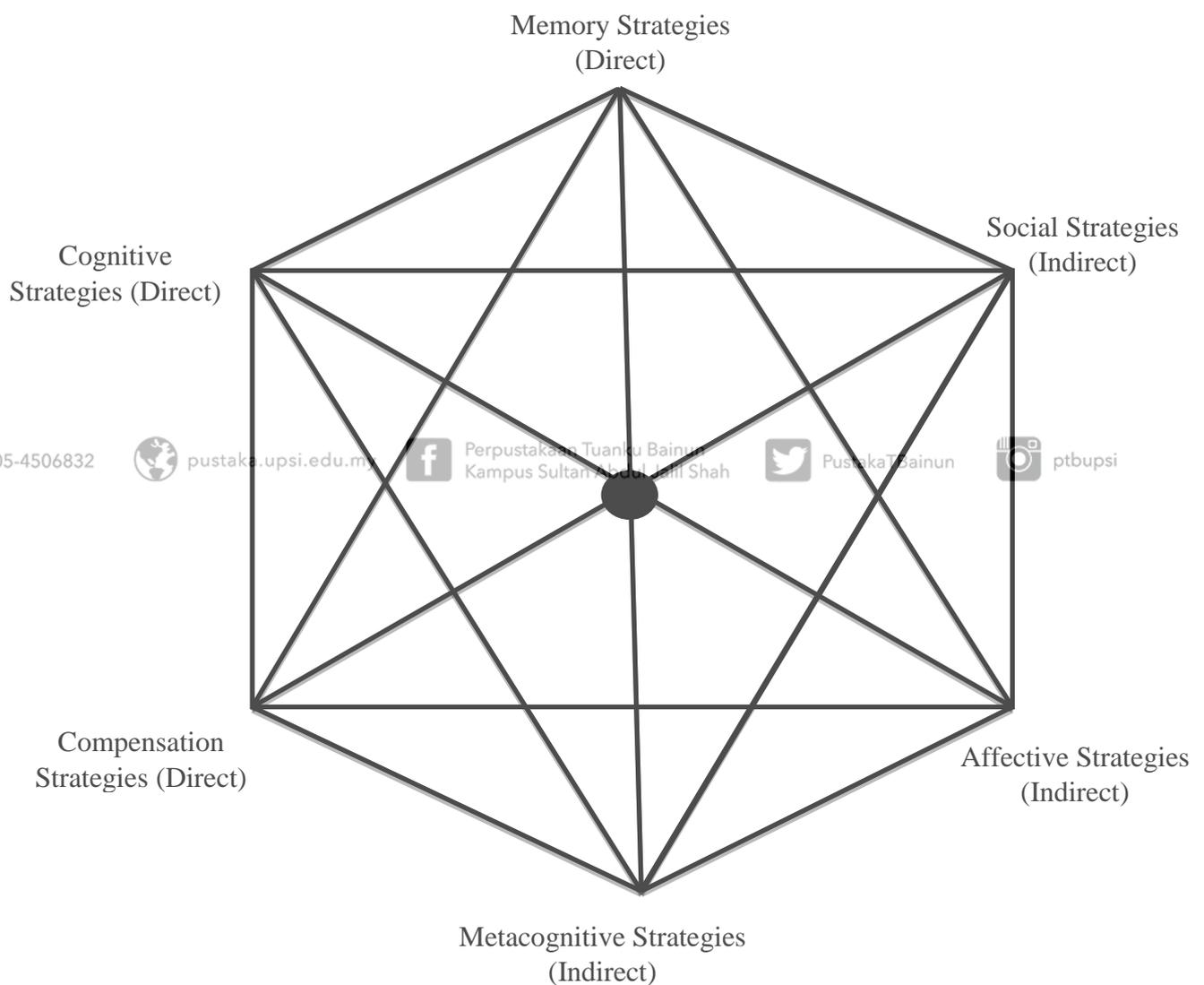


Figure 1.1 Interrelationships Between Direct and Indirect Strategies and Among the Six Strategy Groups. Source: Rebecca L. Oxford (1990), Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know



In Oxford's (1990) framework of language learning strategies, it is believed that all the direct strategies (memory, cognitive and compensation strategies) and indirect strategies (metacognitive, affective and social strategies) are both inter and intra related. Learners would first have to have operative storage system to not only collect information for future use (memory strategies) for them to be able to deploy those stored input in time to come (cognitive strategies) and while still in progression to fully utilize those deposited information, language learners would have to improvise for their language deficiencies (compensation strategies). The situation leads learners to keep track of their own learning in order to progress further in the language (metacognitive strategies) and along with that, they also have to be resilient in order for them to go through the trials and errors in learning (affective strategies). The whole learning process will become a laid-back experience if learners get scaffolding from others as that will not only aid the learning process but also present learners with more occasions to practice the language which in turn lead to language mastery (social strategies).

1.9 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The previously explained theoretical framework adopted for the completion of this study has led the researcher to come up with one conceptual framework to specifically reflect on the current study:



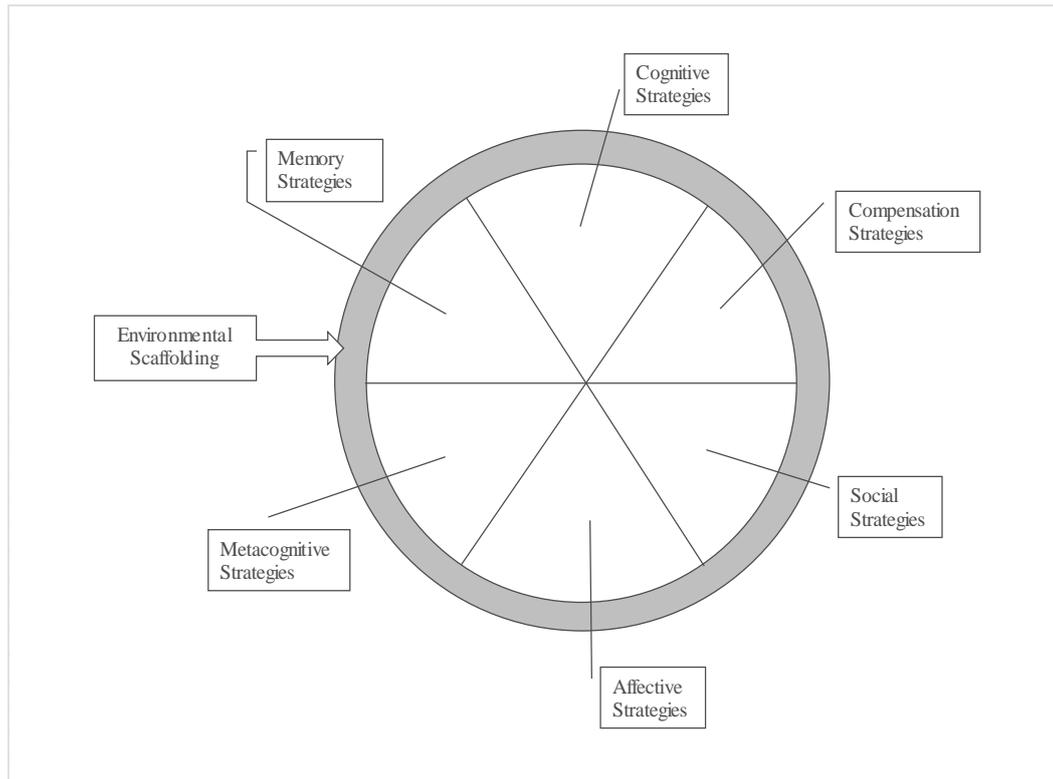


Figure 1.2 Conceptual Framework of the Current Study

Understanding and practice of language learning strategies are crucial should students want to develop their language competency (Masoud Gholamali & Fereshteh Faryadres, 2011) and apparently, good language learners appeared to use larger number and range of strategies than poor language learners (Abdalmaujod, 2013) but for learners to become well versed in utilising language learning strategies, they need (according to Vygotsky's concept of 'Zone of Proximal Development' as cited in Karim Shabani, Mohamad Khatib & Saman Ebadi, 2010) to have collaborative endeavours with skilled individuals. In educational settings, 'skilled individuals' (other than peers or classmates with better language performances), teachers would be the closest individuals which could be referred to as 'skilled individuals'. That is why besides studying the language learning strategy practice between EPT-pass and EPT-



fail students (where similarities or differences were drawn out before finding out the most utilised strategy by each group), the study also went into studying the practice (which also includes the individual stand) of four teacher-participants who volunteered to become part of the study to confirm whether or not language learning strategies are made part of the curriculum which could be reflected via lesson plans as well as lesson implementations. The researcher believe if teachers in general could provide necessary and sufficient scaffolding, in time students would become well-versed with language learning strategies and eventually achieve the required proficiency if not highly proficient.

1.10 The Limitations of the Study



Like other studies, the present study has certain limitations. This study focused only on the foundation students at the International Islamic University Malaysia. Generally, the student population is made of three groups – matriculation students, first degree students and postgraduate students. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised as to represent the practice of the entire institution when it comes to language learning strategies.

The present study strived exclusively for knowledge on practices of language learning strategies. Therefore, this study cannot help outline plan of change involving future practice of language learning strategies as embarking on such action would require experimental research on language learning strategies to first be conducted.





1.11 Definition of terms

1.11.1 Language Learning Strategies

“Learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990, p.8). In this study, the aforementioned definition was used and language learning strategy practice of both EPT-pass and EPT-students were first drawn out to look for similarities or differences before the most utilised strategy by students of each group was identified.

1.11.2 EPT-pass and EPT-fail

EPT-pass and EPT-fail are two groups of student respondents in this study. The names were derived from their results after sitting for the English Placement Test (upon enrolment) in which those who performed below the required level are called EPT-fail and those who performed at or above required level are called EPT-pass students.

1.11.3 Lesson plans

Lesson plans in this study would refer specifically to the ones prepared collectively by the teachers teaching English at the Centre for Foundation Studies of the International Islamic University Malaysia, and not any general lesson plans employed to help assist teachers in delivering the content of their lessons.

