

Gender-Based Utilization of Indirect Language Learning Strategies Among Non-Native Arabic Speakers at a Malaysian Public University

Asma' Fauzi, Aqilah Arshad, Chun Keat Yeap*

Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Melaka, Malaysia.

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study aims to investigate the indirect language learning strategies among non-native Arabic speakers employed by 116 Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) students who have enrolled in the Arabic Language course for one semester in the year 2022. Data collection for this study utilized the Strategies Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire, developed by Oxford in 1990. Descriptive statistics were employed to discern the preferred prevailing indirect language learning strategies favoured by male and female students in the Arabic Language course. Additionally, the independent sample t-test was applied to scrutinise potential significant differences in the utilization of indirect learning strategies between male and female learners. The study's findings underscore the prevalence of metacognitive strategies as the predominant learning approach among these students, with affective strategies and social strategies following closely in popularity. Furthermore, the mean scores for indirect learning strategy variables among both male and female learners suggest that there are no noteworthy distinctions in the application of metacognitive, cognitive, and social learning strategies during their Arabic language learning journey. Hence, the study recommends that social learning strategies can be considered as part of improving the Arabic learning language process.

Keywords : Arabic Language, Indirect Learning, Gender Differences, Language Learning Strategies, Non-Native Speaker

INTRODUCTION

Arabic language learning in Malaysia has been a part of the education system for a long time. It is taught in primary and secondary schools, as well as in higher education institutions such as public universities, where Arabic courses are offered as the main form of education. The Arabic language is one of the foreign languages offered in most public universities in Malaysia. Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) for example has included Arabic as one of the university's required courses in line with other foreign languages (Kamarul Shukri et al., 2012). Learning Arabic as a foreign language in Malaysia can be an exciting experience, but it can also come with its own set of challenges. Moreover, it is challenging for non-native speakers to become proficient in the Arabic language due to the lack of adaptive learning strategies and the need to utilise effective strategies (Zulkarnain, 2022). In addition, as with other languages, optimising acquired language skills requires a certain technique to facilitate student understanding. Likewise, early exposure to some basic learning strategies in a simple approach will stimulate students' interest in learning Arabic (Isyam, 2011).

In the context of learning Arabic as a foreign language in Malaysia, it is not just about understanding the subject to pass and having good grades; it also requires appropriate learning strategies to master the language. Many factors contribute to the success of the foreign language teaching and learning process. However, a factor in the process is the choice of language learning strategies (Chamot, 1993; Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; Kamarul Shukri & Mohamed Amin, 2009). According to Kamarul Shukri et al. (2012), the use of correct, suitable, and effective learning strategies among students leads to good achievement in dominating the target language. Thus, students need to choose and execute suitable learning strategies to attain Arabic successfully (Norjuwaini & Harun, 2021). Language excellence is closely linked to learning strategies.

Therefore, students need to choose and practise the right learning strategies to affect their performance, particularly in Arabic language skills. Therefore, it is essential for non-native Arabic speakers, especially learners who are studying Arabic as a second language or as a foreign language, to determine their learning strategies. (Siti Fatimah, 2021). Based on the literature gathered, it can be concluded there is a need to explore indirect learning strategies among non-native Arab learners in Malaysia. Therefore, there is a gap in the exploration of how gender variables might influence the use of language learning strategies in Arabic as a foreign language. Moreover, the strategies Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) developed by Oxford in the year 1990 is used as the theory of this study which will be further explained in the next section.

Language Learning Strategies

There are many different methods and interpretations for defining language learning strategies. When learning and using a second language, individuals often employ a variety of language learning strategies to improve their performance. This concept, as defined by Cohen (1998), encompasses the various tactics and techniques employed by language learners. In addition, being a proficient language learner requires not only strong linguistic ability and motivation, which can contribute to exceptional performance but also active and imaginative engagement in the learning process through personal learning strategies. According to Rubin's (1975) proposed learning strategies, successful language learners possess the skills of guessing, communication, seeking opportunities for language practice, fearlessness in making mistakes, attention to word structure and meaning, and continuous observation of their own and others' speaking abilities.

Meanwhile, Oxford (1990) suggests that utilising language learning strategies can enhance the learning experience by making it more convenient, efficient, enjoyable, self-reliant, and impactful. When learning a second language, learners have the option to utilise one or multiple learning strategies. The distinction lies in the manner in which language learning strategies are utilised, including the choice of strategy types and how often they are employed. Various studies have demonstrated that successful students consistently utilise a range of suitable strategies with persistence (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989). Cohen (1998) describes how incorporating language learning strategies can help learners enhance their ability to retain, recall, and practice knowledge during the language learning process. The effectiveness of learning a language may depend on the language learner's implementation of appropriate language-learning techniques.

In summary, language learning strategies span a wide spectrum of techniques designed to bolster language acquisition. Academics stress the significance of employing these strategies consistently and flexibly to maximize learning results. Through grasping and applying a variety of strategies, language learners can actively participate in the learning journey and attain proficiency in their chosen language.

This study highlights the Oxford (1990) theoretical framework as part of theory for this study. The theory classified language learning strategies into two categories which are direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies include memory, cognitive, and compensation while indirect strategies are metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. However, this study is based on Oxford's theoretical framework for language learning strategies and focuses only on the indirect strategies. The indirect strategy includes three indirect strategies of classification that is much needed in knowing the preferred indirect learning strategy by the non-native arabic speakers prefer (refer to Figure 1).

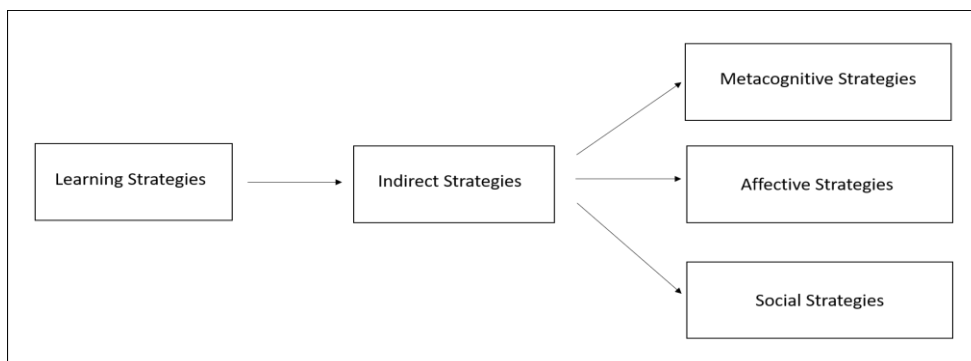


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework : Indirect Learning Strategies (Oxford, 1990).

Past Studies on Gender and Indirect Language Learning Strategies

Much research on language learning strategies has been done in Malaysia, especially on indirect learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1990). According to Alfian (2018), successful students used metacognitive strategies while unsuccessful students used affective strategies. Similarly, Muniandy and Shuib (2016) also discovered that the metacognitive strategy is the most frequently used strategy by 50 undergraduate students in learning English for Business Communication in Malaysia.

Multiple studies have recorded the use of language learning strategies related to gender differences. The results of the studies show differences in language learning strategies used by male and female students, while other findings are the opposite. Research by Tezcan and Deneme (2015) reported that female students used more language learning strategies compared to male students in Turkish. Meanwhile, overall research findings by Rianto (2020) also reported in his study that female students used more language learning strategies than male students in EFL learning. This study also found that metacognitive is the most commonly used strategy by male and female students, while affective and social strategies are average. Likewise, Kiram et al. (2015) found that female students used more strategies compared to male students in all language learning strategies among 56 pre-university EFL students (22 males and 34 females) at University Malaysia Sabah. Pital & Mat Teh (2018) disclosed that female students were employed more frequently for overall language learning strategies than male students in their study of 350 students in 12 religious schools in Kedah, Malaysia.

Another study by Isa et al. (2022) was done to explore the most used language learning strategies by gender differences. A total number of 186 students learning French as a foreign language were selected. They found that female students used metacognitive strategies more often compared to male students. Alyani & Irfan (2021) investigated 78 EFL students and reported that female students preferred to use metacognitive strategy over male students. A study by Mahmud & Nur (2018) indicated male students used metacognitive and social strategies more often compared to female students among 71 EFL students in Makassar, Indonesia. However, Alhaysony (2017) found no significant gender differences in the language learning strategies used by the 66 male and 68 female Saudi EFL students. This study shows that the commonly used language learning strategies between males and females are almost the same.

In summary, these studies underscore the intricate nature of gender variances in language learning strategies, underscoring the necessity for additional research to deepen our comprehension of these distinctions and their impact on language instruction.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore the indirect learning strategies used by different genders among Arabic non-native speakers. The objectives are as follows:

- 1) To profile the use of indirect language learning strategies among Arabic non-native speakers.
- 2) To identify the preferred indirect language learning strategies among Arabic non-native speakers at a Malaysian public university.
- 3) To determine the significant differences in the use of indirect learning strategies among Arabic non-native speakers of a Malaysian public university

Research Questions

1. What is the profile of the use of indirect language learning strategies among non-native Arabic speakers of a Malaysian public university when taken as an entire group and grouped by gender, language background, learning experience, level of schools, and number of years?
2. What are the preferred indirect language learning strategies among non-native Arabic speakers at a Malaysian public university?

3. Are there significant differences in the use of indirect learning strategies among non-native Arabic speakers at a Malaysian public university grouped by gender?
4. Are there significant differences in the preferred indirect language learning strategies among non-native Arabic speakers at a Malaysian public university when grouped by gender?

Based on the RQ3, three hypotheses were suggested

H1: There is no significant difference in metacognitive strategy used by the gender among students in UiTM Melaka.

H2: There is no significant difference in the affective strategy used by the gender among students in UiTM Melaka.

H3: There is no significant difference in social strategy used by the gender among students in UiTM Melaka.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative design. This study aims to identify the indirect learning strategies used by non-native Arabic students at UiTM Malacca. The questionnaire consists of two sections. The first section consists of the students' demographic profiles and their background experience of learning arabic. The second section consists of indirect learning strategies which were adapted from SILL Worksheet Version 7.0 by Oxford (1989). The questionnaire items consist of 21 questions using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never or almost never do this) to 5 (always do this) .

Population and Data Collection Procedure

The sampling technique used in selecting the sample is purposive sampling. The respondents of the study are 116 students who have enrolled in the Arabic language for Semester 2022/2023. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents using a Google form. The collected data were analysed using SPSS. A descriptive analysis includes a t-test analysis that compares two groups in which produces a set of mean values as part of its result. These results were used to answer the research questions formulated for the study.

Instrument

An instrument was formulated using the Strategies Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire by Oxford (1990). This questionnaire was adapted from a combination of questions consisting of metacognitive, affective, and social learning strategies as part of gathering data. It comprises two parts which are part one that consists of 4 items while part two consists of 21 items.

In addition, the first part of the questionnaire describes the respondents' demographic profile such as gender, language background, learning experience, level of schools, and number of years of the non-native Arabic speakers in this study. Meanwhile, the second part of the questionnaire was to identify the indirect learning strategies (metacognitive, affective, and social strategies) used in the learning process. A reliability test was conducted to verify the questions used in the questionnaire. The reliability test results are presented in the following section.

Reliability Test

A pilot test was carried out to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the study instrument. Table 1 presents the results of the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test. The instruments in Table 1 exhibit Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the value of 0.70. Consequently, all the items in this study can be deemed to possess a high level of reliability and validity.

Table 1. Reliability Coefficient of Study Instruments

Instrument	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Metacognitive Strategies	9	0.927
Affective Strategies	6	0.848
Social Strategies	6	0.873

FINDINGS

Research Question 1 : What is the profile of the use of indirect language learning strategies among non-native Arabic speakers of a Malaysian public university when taken as an entire group and grouped by gender, language background, learning experience, level of schools, and number of years?

The findings presented are to answer research question 1. The demographic profile of students, including gender, family background, Arabic learning experience, and the level of schools where they learn the Arabic language, is displayed in Table 2 to Table 5. The analysis showed that the respondents were mostly female, 82.8% and 17.2% consist of male.

Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of students' family backgrounds in terms of Arabic language usage. The results indicate that 96.6% of the students' family members do not speak Arabic at home, while only 3.4% of them do. This suggests that students generally lack prior experience or a family background in learning Arabic.

Table 2. Profile of Use of Arabic Language among Respondents

		Frequency	Percent (%)
Valid	Yes	4	3.4
	No	112	96.6
	Total	116	100.0

Table 3 displays data related to students' prior experiences in learning Arabic. The results reveal that 78.4% of the students had previously studied the Arabic language before joining UiTM, while the remaining students had no prior background in Arabic language learning before enrolling in the course.

Table 3. Profile of Experience in Learning Arabic of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent (%)
Valid	Yes	91	78.4

	No	25	21.6
	Total	116	100.0

Table 4, on the other hand, presents the results of a survey regarding students' Arabic learning experiences during primary and secondary school. The data reveals that 55.2% of the students acquired Arabic language skills during their primary school years, while 29.3% of them did so during their secondary school education.

Table 4. Profile of Experience in Learning Arabic of Respondents when Grouped by Level of Schools

		Frequency	Percent (%)
Valid	Arabic Primary School	64	55.2
	Secondary School	34	29.3
	Non-Arabic School	18	15.5
	Total	116	100.0

Data regarding students' experiences in learning the Arabic language were collected. Table 5 illustrates that 56% of students have acquired Arabic language skills within a span of 1 to 5 years. Approximately 29.3% of students have less than 1 year of experience in learning the Arabic language, while only 14.7% of students possess over 5 years of experience in Arabic language learning.

Table 5. Total years of learning the Arabic language

		Frequency	Percent (%)
Valid	< 1 year	34	29.3
	1-5 years	65	56.0
	> 5 years	17	14.7
	Total	116	100.0

Thus, from the responses gathered, the majority of the respondents have been exposed to a certain background knowledge of learning Arabic language. Several studies have claimed that the early exposure of learning Arabic will actually motivate the learners to use different language strategies that can indirectly be more

successful in obtaining the pronunciation and competency of the language (Mukmin, 2019). Exploration of indirect learning strategies used for this study will be further explained in the following section.

Research Question 2 : What are the preferred indirect language learning strategies among non-native Arabic speakers at a Malaysian public university?

Table 6 offers a comprehensive analysis of the indirect learning strategies applied by students at UiTM Malacca, categorised into three distinct groups: metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The findings clearly show that metacognitive strategies (Mean = 3.0594, Standard Deviation = 0.73154) are the preferred direct learning methods among these students. Following metacognitive strategies in popularity are affective strategies (Mean = 2.9009, Standard Deviation = 0.74373), and social strategies (Mean = 2.8635, Standard Deviation = 0.82988).

Table 6. Results of the Utilization of Indirect Learning Strategies Among Respondents

Indirect Strategies	Mean	Std. Deviation
Metacognitive Strategies	3.0594	0.73154
Affective Strategies	2.9009	0.74373
Social Strategies	2.8635	0.82988

These results are consistent with the fact that a significant portion of the students (78.4%) had prior experience studying the Arabic language before enrolling at UiTM. Given their prior language learning experiences, it is understandable that they predominantly employ metacognitive strategies. These strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning, which is especially valuable for students with prior language knowledge. Affective strategies, aimed at reducing anxiety and enhancing motivation for learning, and social strategies, which involve seeking help or collaborating with others, are less frequently used in comparison (Oxford, 1999, 2001, 2003).

It is worth noting that previous research by Muniandy and Shuib (2016) also found metacognitive strategies to be the most utilized strategy among language learners in Malaysia, further affirming the significance of this finding. Alfian (2018) has previously suggested that successful students tend to gravitate towards metacognitive strategies, while less successful students lean towards affective strategies, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of both affective and social strategies in the context of Arabic language learning.

Affective strategies, which target anxiety reduction and motivation enhancement, along with social strategies involving seeking assistance or collaborating with peers, play a substantial role in improving language learning skills (Oxford, 1999, 2001, 2003). Given the dynamic nature of language learning, especially in the context of Arabic, educators can guide students in adapting their learning strategies by providing opportunities for practice and application in language learning tasks.

Research Question 3. Are there significant differences in the use of indirect learning strategies among non-native Arabic speakers at a Malaysian public university grouped by gender?

Table 7 displays the preferred learning strategies of both female and male students. Among female students, the highest-ranked strategy is metacognitive strategies (Mean = 3.107, Standard Deviation = 0.72256), followed by affective strategies (Mean = 2.936, Standard Deviation = 0.72066), and social strategies (Mean = 2.907, Standard Deviation = 0.82249).

Table 7. Mean score between Male and Female: Metacognitive strategies, Affective strategies, and Social strategies

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Metacognitive Strategies	Male	19	2.819	0.74922	0.167
	Female	97	3.107	0.72256	0.074
Affective Strategies	Male	19	2.719	0.84993	0.170
	Female	97	2.936	0.72066	0.075
Social Strategies	Male	19	2.640	0.85394	0.190
	Female	97	2.907	0.82249	0.084

On the other hand, male students show a preference for metacognitive strategies (Mean = 2.819, Standard Deviation = 0.74922) as their primary choice, followed by affective strategies (Mean = 2.719, Standard Deviation = 0.84993), and social strategies (Mean = 2.640, Standard Deviation = 0.85394).

It is evident from the results that metacognitive strategies are the most favored indirect language learning strategies among both male and female students. These findings are in line with prior research by Rianto (2020) and Gan et al. (2022), where metacognitive strategies were found to be the preferred choice among English as a Foreign Language learners and Mandarin as a Foreign Language learners. This aligns with the research conducted by Alfian (2018), which suggested that successful students tend to employ metacognitive strategies, while unsuccessful students lean towards affective strategies.

Research Question 4. Are there significant differences in the preferred indirect language learning strategies among non-native Arabic speakers at a Malaysian public university when grouped by gender?

Table 7 presents the findings, which indicate that there are no significant differences in the utilization of Metacognitive Strategies, Affective Strategies, and Social Strategies between male and female learners at UiTM Malacca. These results support the following hypotheses:

Table 7. Results of Significant Differences in the Preferred Indirect Language Learning Strategies: Independent Sample T-Test

		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Metacognitive	Equal variances assumed	-1.578	114	0.117	-0.28782	0.18235	-0.64905	0.07342

	Equal variances not assumed	-1.540	25.001	0.136	-0.28782	0.18689	-0.67271	0.09708
Affective	Equal variances assumed	-1.165	114	0.246	-0.21713	0.18630	-0.58618	0.15192
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.043	23.340	0.308	-0.21713	0.20827	-0.64761	0.21335
Social	Equal variances assumed	-1.285	114	0.201	-0.26687	0.20761	-0.67814	0.14441
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.253	24.981	0.222	-0.26687	0.21296	-0.70549	0.17176

Hypothesis H1: There is no significant difference in the utilization of Metacognitive Strategies between gender learners. This is supported by the statistical analysis ($t(114)=1.578$, $p=0.117$), where the p-value (sig. 2-tailed) exceeds the threshold of $p=0.05$. The results imply that male and female students used metacognitive learning strategies the most in learning the Arabic language.

Hypothesis H2: There is no significant difference in the utilization of Affective Strategies among both genders of students. This hypothesis is also upheld by the statistical findings ($t(114)=1.165$, $p=0.246$), where the p-value (sig. 2-tailed) is greater than $p=0.05$. The findings suggest that affective learning strategies are the second most used by female students and the third most used by male students in learning the Arabic language.

Hypothesis H3: There is no significant difference in the utilization of Social Learning Strategies by gender students. This hypothesis is reinforced by the statistical results ($t(114)=1.285$, $p=0.201$), where the p-value (sig. 2-tailed) is higher than $p=0.05$. The findings suggest that social learning strategies are the third most used by female students and the second most used by male students in learning the Arabic language.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that there is no statistically significant distinction in the employment of indirect learning strategies, encompassing Metacognitive, Affective, and Social Strategies, among male and female students at UiTM Melaka. This suggests that both genders use these strategies to a similar extent in their Arabic Language learning endeavours. Consequently, students are encouraged to be cognizant of their learning strategies and consider using them to enhance their progress in learning the Arabic Language.

As a result, this shows that regardless of gender, non-native Arabic speakers can be aware of their own progress and language errors through metacognitive strategies during their Arabic classes. Additionally, they are motivated to improve their Arabic language skills as they progress in their learning. For instance, the top three frequently used strategies in the metacognitive category for this study were: "I try to find out how to be a better learner of the Arabic language" ($M=3.34$), "I pay attention when someone is speaking the Arabic language" ($M=3.23$), and "I notice my Arabic language mistakes and use that information to help me do better" ($M=3.20$). In the affective strategy category, the top three popular strategies were: "I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using the Arabic language" ($M=3.22$), "I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of

using the Arabic language" ($M=3.19$), and "I encourage myself to speak the Arabic language even when I am afraid of making a mistake" ($M=3.07$). Among the least frequently used social strategies, the top three popular were: "If I do not understand something in the Arabic language, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again" ($M=3.41$), "I ask Arabic language speakers to correct me when I talk" ($M=3.01$), and "I try to learn about the culture of Arabic language speakers" ($M=2.97$).

On the contrary, regarding gender, findings show that affective learning strategies are the second most used by female students and the third most used by male students in learning the Arabic language. Conversely, social learning strategies are the third most used by female students and the second most used by male students in learning the Arabic language. This shows that male students use social strategies more, as they are more likely to engage in conversation with others to maintain their language skills. In contrast, female students use affective strategies when experiencing negative feelings, such as shyness and fear when speaking with others. This is supported by Anwar's (2023) research on English language learning strategies, which investigated male and female learners' preferences. The results showed that female students used almost all affective strategies at a high level, while male students did not. Conversely, male students rated social strategies as high.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis done, all the research objectives were answered. The findings from this study underscore the preference for metacognitive strategies as the primary learning approach among these students, with effective strategies and social strategies following closely in popularity. Moreover, the mean scores for indirect learning strategy variables among both male and female learners suggest that there are no significant differences in the utilization of metacognitive, cognitive, and social learning strategies during their journey of learning the Arabic language.

Nevertheless, indirect language learning strategies offer significant benefits, including enhanced immersion, increased motivation, and practical language use. The social strategies can be helpful because students can communicate with one another in completing the task, asking questions and collaborating in learning a language. Future research should explore the impact of these indirect strategies on students' success in Arabic courses. A longitudinal study would be ideal to assess whether the effectiveness of these strategies improves as learners progress in their Arabic studies. Additionally, expanding the study to include broader demographic profiles such as different age groups, proficiency levels, and socio-economic background can help determine if the findings hold true across diverse populations. Lastly, raising awareness among students about various indirect language learning strategies and encouraging them to explore and adopt strategies aligned with their learning styles and preferences would be beneficial.

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