



## Foreign Students' Learning Strategies of Malay Language: Extralinguistics Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the formal and informal learning strategies of foreign students in learning the Malay language. The Language Learning Strategy Model by Mohamed Amin Embi (2000) and quantitative analysis have been applied to identify the relationship between the learning strategies and the extralinguistic factors. The research sample comprised of 114 foreign students at one of the private universities in Malaysia who had followed the National Language (B) classes (Malay Language) for 14 weeks. From the 59 strategies listed in the questionnaire, it was discovered that the strategy most preferred and practised formally is 'students giving full attention while the teacher is teaching'. This was followed by 'students will listen carefully to the way the teacher speaks in the Malay language' and 'students will participate in the activities prepared by the teacher'. Meanwhile for the informal strategy, 'students will try to repeat the vocabulary loudly during revision, so that it is easy for them to remember the words' was most favoured. The study reveals that foreign students are relatively passive and depending a lot on the instructors in the mastery of the learning strategies. They are more suited to learn Malay language in formal environments as a result of limited opportunities of exposure to social activities. As such, instructors play the important role to guide, to motivate and to support the learning process among foreign students.

### KEYWORDS

learning strategies, Malay language, foreign students, foreign language, mastery process, extralinguistic perspective, formal context and informal context.

### Background

In the year 2010, a total of 86,923 international students from 167 foreign countries registered with Malaysia's institutions of higher learning. A total of 62,705 study at Private Institutions of Higher Learning (PIHL) of university and local branches status, PIHL of overseas branches, PIHL of college university status or PIHL of non-university status (Perangkaan Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia 2010). To overcome the communication problems of foreign students in Malaysia, the National Language (B) syllabus namely the Malay language was offered to interested non-Malaysian citizens. The National Language (B) is to be taught at PIHL that use language of instruction other than Malay. The success of a student – particularly from foreign nations, in learning the Malay language is related to the use of suitable and effective strategies capable of inculcating their interests. Besides, the success of a student in mastering language is also based on integrative orientation and instrumental orientation (Gardner, 1985). Hence, the effectiveness of a strategy and the extralinguistic factors (the context of non-language elements that influence the attitude and motivation of learning) will determine the success of learning a language.

The goal of learning the Malay language is not only to assist the foreign students in using it in the activities of their daily life but it could also help them when doing references of academic materials in the Malay language. Nevertheless, currently it is shown that language is seen as merchandise that is measured from the benefits that can be obtained by the person who learns and then masters the language. For the language to be 'bought' by other people (race), the language should have a competitive edge (Zawawi Ismail, Mohd Sukki Othman and et. al 2005). From the perception of non-native speakers,

their willingness to learn a target language is for the sake of fulfilling their needs or wants. As an example, language such as the English language has the function as a tool of international communication; in addition, each of the young generation in Malaysia has already mastered this second language (Maimunah and Norizah Ardi, 2003).

Since English is an international language that is widely spoken by most of the younger generation in Malaysia, it is thus easier for the foreign students to use English rather than the Malay language to communicate with Malaysians. However, in the survey conducted by Mathias Diederich (2003), the perspective of the foreigners is different. Sometimes they feel frustrated because Malaysians prefer to use English with them. Not to mention, the ensuing problem is quite complicated because of the factors of influence and motivation of foreign students in the learning of the Malay language is different in comparison to that of the local students. This matter is a result of the fact that not all of the language skills such as reading skill, speaking skill, writing skill and listening skill are required by foreign students.

Thus, the effort to develop an effective study method is limited by the lack of comprehensive research focusing on the learning of BM as a foreign language especially for the group of foreign students who studies at Private Institutions of Higher Learning (PIHL). If the role and function of the Malay language can be managed among the foreign speakers, then they would be able to learn the Malay language easily.

### Objective of Study

i. To analyse the strategies used by the foreign students formally and informally in learning the Malay language.

ii. To identify the relationship between learning strategies and extralinguistic factors in learning the Malay language.

**Significance of Study**

In the effort to enhance the quality of education that is Malaysian context oriented, identification of language learning strategies (LLS) that are most frequently applied by the foreign students is really important so that lecturers can plan a more effective teaching and learning session. This research is important for the group of instructors who teach the Malay language as a foreign language; the language skills needed and required can be determined effectively. The effort to identify the extralinguistic factors at the basic level can stimulate interest and facilitate the learning of the target language among the foreign students. As such, the foreign students will be more motivated to continue learning the Malay language.

**Literature Review**

In general, the expansion of literature review on learning strategies have been identified since a few years ago; a few studies indicate that there are several strategies that have been applied by students to master the knowledge of the language and the application of these strategies is also influenced by its external factors. Studies that have investigated language learning strategies (LLS) in foreign language in Malaysia are such as Kang, Hyeok (1999) – Korean, Roslina Mamat (1999) – Japanese, Anida Abdul Rahim (2003) – Arabic, Neo Swee Leng (2005) – Spanish, and Suzana Ismail (2005) – Japanese.

Apart from the efforts that have been undertaken to identify the types of LLS for foreign languages, studies on LLS in the learning of English and Malay have also received attention among researchers. These studies are generally conducted to see the relationship between the uses of language learning strategies with the success achieved by the students in language learning, and to suggest a model of language learning based on the findings of the research. Examples are Mohamed Amin Embi (1996), Abu Talib (1998), Mohd Nazali et al. (1999), Zamri Mahamod et al. (2002), Supian (2003) and others. Previous studies on LLS in the subject of Malay language as the first language or second language were at the primary school, secondary school or university level. However, the application of LLS by a group of foreign learners who are learning the Malay language as the third, fourth or foreign language in developing countries, for example Malaysia fails to be detected.

To further clarify the differences of LLS, the majority of researchers have touched on issues relating to the identification of strategies used by language learners who excelled (Griffiths, 2003; Chamot and El-Dinary, 1999), analysis of relationship between the use of LLS and the achievement of students' performance (Wharton, 2000), or the evaluation of students' strategic performance in the different areas of language skills (Rocio Dorniquez and Silvia Pessoa, 2005). Meanwhile, the findings of these past studies have given different views. The difference lies in the level of flexibility of the student when choosing strategies, and the manner in which the LLS are applied to specific situations. In addition, the findings of research on the LLS factors are also not so consistent and consensus that is uniform failed to be achieved. Research on gender differences showed that the use of LLS that is significant by females (Green and Oxford, 1995; Ehrman and Oxford, 1989; Oxford and Nyikos, 1989; Politzer, 1983) while the research by Tran (1988) reported the opposite. With regard to the relationship of language ability and the use of LLS, new findings have also been reported. Several ESL/EFL (English as a Second Language/ English as a Foreign Language) research have shown that the level of language ability influences the use of LLS, with students of higher language ability generally using more varied strategies (Chang, 1991) and using the strategies more frequently compared to students of weaker language ability. However, there are studies that report no consistent differences between the skill groups (Phillips, 1991).

Based on the past studies before this, researchers and teach-

ers around the world have been conducting research that includes students of different races, nations, countries or cultures. Most of them focus on the examination of factors that influence the student's choice of learning strategies. The majority of these factors are related to motivation, age, gender, attitude and confidence, type of activities, teaching methods, learning styles, level of academic ability, cultural background and ethnic groups. Nevertheless, most of the researchers have neglected the notion of 'influence of culture, community and educational policy' from their research consideration in LLS. Clearly, this research that is grounded on the identification of LLS and the extralinguistic factors among the foreigners seems really necessary.

**Methodology**

Quantitative method through questionnaire is used to realise the objective of the study. The questionnaire consists of 59 questions on the strategies used by the students while learning BM in the class, outside the class and when facing their examination based on the model of Mohamed Amin Embi (2000). A total of 114 sets of questionnaire were given to foreign students in class on the last week of the semester. The questionnaires were returned and analysis was conducted. The data obtained from the questionnaires were then analysed quantitatively using Excel and SPSS software.

The population is made up of students from various field of study such as engineering, management, information technology and creative multimedia learning the National Language B in two different semesters. All of the population number has been used as the sample of this research. Although they learn in different classes, they are taught by one lecturer using the same syllabus. The difference is only in terms of time and place of study. It is compulsory for the study sample to follow the National Language (B) – basic Malay language based on the syllabus set by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) in one semester which is 3 hours of face-to-face lecture for 14 weeks. The book Basic Malay (2009) is used as the guide and exercise book apart from the use of 'power point'. Not forgetting, the English language is the medium of instruction in National Language (B) subject.

This research was limited to the strategies of learning Malay among the foreign students who were following the National Language (B) subject at one of the private universities in Malaysia. The study sample was students from 22 countries namely Central Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia. Library method was used in this study because there are books, journals, theses and periodicals that became the additional reference materials to strengthen the arguments. The researcher also applied the observation method.

**Research Findings**

Objective 1: To analyse the strategies used by the foreign students formally and informally in learning the Malay language.

The questionnaire was distributed to the 114 study sample at one of the private universities in Malaysia. The following table is the research findings based on analysis from the 38 Malay language learning strategies used formally in the classroom and during preparation for the examination which have been arranged according to the frequency percentage value.

**Table 1: Malay Language Learning Strategies in Formal Context**

Question	Sample No.	Questionnaire Scale (% of Frequency)					Descriptive Statistics	
		N	S	ST	O	A	Mean	Standard Deviation
A5	114.0	3.5	3.5	21.1	42.1	29.8	3.91	0.983
A17	113.0	3.5	7.1	23.9	38.9	26.5	3.78	1.033
A19	114.0	2.6	7.9	28.9	29.8	30.7	3.78	1.054
A18	113.0	6.2	11.5	19.5	33.6	29.2	3.68	1.190

A20	113.0	3.5	9.7	33.6	28.3	24.8	3.61	1.073
A6	113.0	6.2	9.7	32.7	26.5	24.8	3.54	1.150
C9	111.0	7.2	10.8	30.6	27.0	24.3	3.50	1.182
A7	114.0	3.5	12.3	34.2	34.2	15.8	3.46	1.015
A9	114.0	5.3	12.3	32.5	33.3	16.7	3.44	1.073
C7	112.0	5.4	9.8	38.4	28.6	17.9	3.44	1.064
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A16	113.0	14.2	24.8	38.9	16.8	5.3	2.74	1.067
A23	114.0	15.8	29.8	30.7	15.8	7.9	2.70	1.152
A1	114.0	15.8	19.3	50.0	10.5	4.4	2.68	1.007
A2	114.0	25.4	30.7	28.1	12.3	3.5	2.38	1.100

**Note: N-Never, S-Seldom, ST- Sometimes, O-Often, A-All-ways**

According to the findings in Table 1, it was found that the foreign students preferred learning Malay through teacher teaching in the class. The main Malay language learning strategy most often applied by the students is giving full attention when the teacher teaches. This formal strategy obtained the highest average of 3.91 and the frequency percentage of students who often and always practised this strategy is 71.9%. There are two formal strategies that clearly have the second highest average value in formal learning strategies which is 3.78. These strategies show that the foreign students listened carefully to the way the teacher speaks in Malay (65.4%) as well as participated in the activities planned by the teacher (60.5%). In contrast, the strategy that was seldom or rarely applied while learning Malay formally is doing the exercises in the text book before class (2.38). A total of 56.1% from the total number of students never or seldom applied this strategy. Meanwhile, the subsequent strategy is reading the text book before the class (2.68).

It is clear that the foreign students learning Malay do not prefer or seldom use reading materials or reference books in class. Hence, self-study without the assistance or guidance of the instructors is seldom applied by these students. Not forgetting, the findings of this study also show that the foreign students preferred activities that are prepared by the language teacher. The strategy of participating in exciting activities as well as activities that live up the learning environment can help them in doing their revision and applying the Malay language formally in the classroom.

Additionally, from the information in the study, it was found that English is the native language for only 6 students in the study sample. However, the strategy that is most preferred to be applied when preparing for examination is Malay-English translation. The foreign students will translate the text (3.50) or memorise the vocabulary (3.44) of the Malay language based on the English language. It is clear that the majority of the students from this study sample used the second language namely English in their learning of the target language and not their respective mother tongue.

The following Table 2 lists the strategies applied by the foreign students based on the percentage of frequency and mean value (average). They have used the language learning strategy outside of the classroom or categorised as informal Malay language learning strategy.

**Table 2: Malay Language Learning Strategies in Informal Context**

Question	Sample No.	Questionnaire Scale (% of Frequency)					Descriptive Statistics	
		N	S	ST	O	A	Mean	Standard deviation
B8	111	4.5	11.7	36	28.8	18.9	3.46	1.068
B7	112	6.3	11.6	39.3	22.3	20.5	3.39	1.126
B3	112	5.4	11.6	39.3	33	10.7	3.32	0.997
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B9	112	36.6	25	16.1	11.6	10.7	2.35	1.360
B12	112	42	26.8	17	8.9	5.4	2.09	1.197
B11	112	36.6	37.5	16.1	5.4	4.5	2.04	1.073
B13	109	48.6	25.7	14.7	7.3	3.7	1.92	1.123
B19	85	58.8	18.8	10.6	8.2	3.5	1.79	1.145

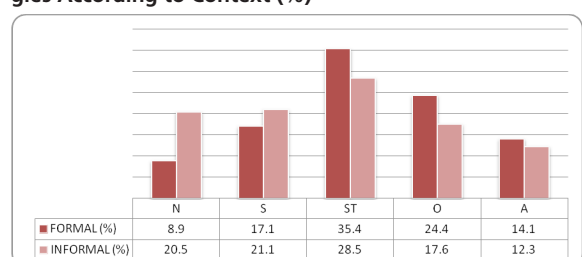
**Note: N-Never, S-Seldom, ST- Sometimes, O-Often, A-All-ways**

In informal situations, the B8 strategy was the strategy most often or always chosen among the foreign students at 47.7%. While learning Malay, the students preferred to repeat the vocabulary aloud so that the Malay word can be easily remembered (B8). The second highest average value (3.39) in Malay language learning strategy outside the classroom is reading aloud. This strategy is applied to enhance their mastery of Malay pronunciation. In addition, the students would also correct their own mistakes if they were aware of it during conversation (3.32). Hence, the foreign students preferred self-learning in informal situations. By repeating in Malay, the students not only can remember the vocabulary in the target language, but they can familiarise themselves with the sound or intonation of this new language.

Nevertheless, the strategy that was seldom applied informally is writing e-mails in Malay (77.6%). In addition, the strategies of memorising the lyrics of Malay songs and listening to Malay programmes through radio programmes are also seldom applied. The total percentage of seldom or never practising these strategies reaches 74.3% and 74.1% respectively. Moreover, strategies such as listening to Malay songs as well as trying to understand their meaning (2.09), watching news and TV programmes (2.35) are strategies that were not preferred among the 59 strategies listed. Hence, it can be concluded that foreign students learning the Malay language do not prefer or seldom use this language as a medium to deliver or receive information. Apart from that, hobbies or activities with the elements of the target language during their free time will also not be their choice.

By comparison, the Malay language learning strategies between formal and informal situations can be shown as in Figure 1 below:

**Figure 1: Comparison of Malay Language Learning Strategies According to Context (%)**



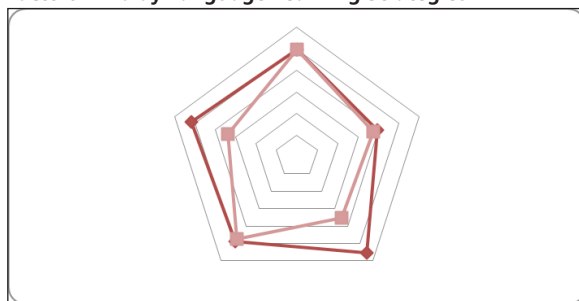
**1-Never (N), 2-Seldom (S), 3-Sometimes (ST), 4-Often (O), 5-Always (A)**

Scale 4 (often) and 5 (always) in the questionnaire represent the tendency of practising the Malay Language Learning Strategies (MLLS). Meanwhile, the strategies in scale 1 (never) and 2 (seldom) are the tendency of not applying MLLS. Through the above figure, it was found that a total of 38.5% of the foreign students used MLLS in their formal learning that is when attending class and when facing examinations. In contrast, in informal situations, the percentage of frequency of foreign students is passive with the practise of MLLS at 29.9%. By comparison, a total of 41.6% of students never or seldom used MLLS in informal situations. As expected, MLLS outside the classroom is less practised if compared to formal situations. This might be because the Malay language learnt formally in the classroom is only to prepare for the examinations. In addition, the geographical factor of the private institution of higher learning in this research which is located in the MSC area (Multimedia Super Corridor) also saw more significant exposure of the foreign students to the English language than the Malay language in their daily social activities.

Objective 2: To identify the relationship between the learning strategies with the extralinguistic factors in learning the Malay language.

The findings on the relationship between MLLS (formally and informally) and extralinguistic factors which are the first to fifth factors have been specified in Figure 2 as the following:

**Figure 2: Correlation Statistics between Extralinguistic Factors – Malay Language Learning Strategies**



Learning Strategies	Extralinguistic Factors					
	E1-E3	E4-E6	E7-E9	E10, E23-E24	E11-E22	E1-E24
In the Classroom & Examination (Formal)	0.4987** (0.0000)	0.3927** (0.0000)	0.5535** (0.0000)	0.4864** (0.0000)	0.5153** (0.0000)	0.6064** (0.0000)
Outside of the Classroom (Informal)	0.4959** (0.0000)	0.3762** (0.0000)	0.3528** (0.0001)	0.4747** (0.0000)	0.3375** (0.0002)	0.4701** (0.0000)

**Note:\*, \*\* respectively show significance at 95% and 99% confidence level. The correlation test probability values are reported in parentheses ( ).**

- E1- E3 Malay Language Learning Attitude (A)
- E4 - E6 Malay Language Uniqueness (U)
- E7- E9 Motivator – Instructor (M)
- E10, E23-E24 Instrumental (I)
- E11-E22 Surrounding Culture (C)

Overall, it was found that formal and informal learning strategies showed significant positive correlation. The factor of motivator role that is the language teacher in the classroom is the extralinguistic factor of the highest correlation coefficient when the students applied the formal learning strategies. Clearly, instructors play an important role in the effort to nurture the interest of the foreign students when learning the Malay language. Meanwhile, the highest correlation coefficient value for informal learning is the learning attitude of the students. Those who are interested, confident and self-motivated to learn the Malay language were found to be applying all the learning strategies outside the classroom. Such phenomenon shows that the informal strategies being applied are very much depending on the learning attitude of a foreigner student.

Nevertheless, the correlation relationship between MLLS and the factor of the surrounding culture (learning the Malay language can help me communicate with the community in Malaysia) is less encouraging in the application of strategies outside the classroom. The table above shows that the 5 extralinguistic factors are significant but by comparison, even though this extralinguistic factor (C) plays an important role, it is not so influential that it facilitates the students when communicating in their surroundings.

In the overall results of the findings from Figure 2, it was found that the factor of the Malay language uniqueness clearly has the lowest correlation coefficient in the formal and informal MLLS (in the classroom, outside the classroom or when facing examinations). It is clearly seen that there was no difficulty in learning the system of pronunciation and the Malay language itself and the commercial value in the region of Southeast Asia was not the motivator or the main reason for them to learn the Malay language.

Based on the analysis conducted, the study's findings show that much of the learning process occurred formally in the classroom and they depended on the lecturer to be their main strategy. This is because they only had the opportunity to learn the Malay language in the classroom. These opportunities were scarce outside the classroom particularly because the location or place of study is located in the city. The surroundings informally encouraged them to use English more as it functions as a tool of foreign communication. Furthermore, each of the younger generation in Malaysia has already mastered this second language. The issue that is a problem particularly for the local community is that whenever they see a foreigner, they will automatically converse in English (Maimunah and Norizah Ardi, 2003). Hence, for these foreigners, the Malay language cannot be practised in the real environment.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the foreign students prefer to apply MLLS in the classroom. Foreigners (adults) are more suited to learn a foreign language in formal environments as a result of limited opportunities of exposure to social activities. The findings of this study show that not only are the factors of situation, extralinguistic factors namely the instructors also play an important role in the practice of language learning strategies. Teacher encouragement becomes the student's motivator to use LLS while learning the Malay language. They are of the opinion that Malay language learning process is not only exciting but also received support, motivation or reward which made them enjoy attending the lectures.

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