

STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING THE MALAY LITERATURE COMPONENT IN MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

ESTRATÉGIAS PARA APRENDER O COMPONENTE DA LITERATURA MALAIA NAS ESCOLAS SECUNDÁRIAS DA MALÁSIA

ESTRATEGIAS PARA EL APRENDIZAJE DEL COMPONENTE LITERATURA MALAYA EN LAS ESCUELAS SECUNDARIAS DE MALASIA

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ABSTRACT: Malay language literature is an essential component in language teaching and learning, and thus, the literature component is increasingly emphasized as an important subject in Malaysian secondary schools. Therefore, research indicates the need to determine students' strategies for learning the Malay literature. This research aims to examine the strategies preferred by secondary school students in learning the Malay literature from environmental, psychological, sociological, and practical perspectives. The study employed a survey method in which a self-developed questionnaire was used to collect data from a sample of 160 fourth-year students in the literature from selected secondary schools in Terengganu, Malaysia. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics comprising the mean and standard deviation via the SPSS software Version 21. The findings revealed that the students prefer to learn the Malay literature while sitting on a chair or table and require a quiet, well-lighted, and equipped environment.

KEYWORDS: Literature component. Language learning. Malay culture. Secondary schools

RESUMO: *A literatura em língua malaia é um componente essencial no ensino e aprendizagem de línguas e, portanto, o componente de literatura é cada vez mais enfatizado como um assunto importante nas escolas secundárias da Malásia. Portanto, a pesquisa indica a necessidade de determinar as estratégias dos alunos para aprender a literatura malaia. Esta pesquisa visa examinar as estratégias preferidas por alunos do ensino médio para aprender a literatura malaia de perspectivas ambientais, psicológicas, sociológicas e*

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práticas. O estudo empregou um método de pesquisa no qual um questionário autodesenvolvido foi usado para coletar dados de uma amostra de 160 alunos do quarto ano de literatura de escolas secundárias selecionadas em Terengganu, Malásia. Os dados foram analisados por meio de estatística descritiva compreendendo média e desvio padrão por meio do software SPSS Versão 21. Os resultados revelaram que os alunos preferem aprender a literatura malaia sentados em uma cadeira ou mesa e necessitam de um ambiente silencioso, bem iluminado e equipado.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Componente de literature. Aprendizagem de línguas. Cultura malaia. Escolas secundárias.*

RESUMEN: *La literatura en lengua malaya es un componente esencial en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de idiomas y, por lo tanto, el componente literario se enfatiza cada vez más como una materia importante en las escuelas secundarias de Malasia. Por lo tanto, la investigación indica la necesidad de determinar las estrategias de los estudiantes para el aprendizaje de la literatura malaya. Esta investigación tiene como objetivo examinar las estrategias preferidas por los estudiantes de secundaria en el aprendizaje de la literatura malaya desde perspectivas ambientales, psicológicas, sociológicas y prácticas. El estudio empleó un método de encuesta en el que se utilizó un cuestionario de desarrollo propio para recopilar datos de una muestra de 160 estudiantes de cuarto año en el flujo de literatura de escuelas secundarias seleccionadas en Terengganu, Malasia. Los datos se analizaron utilizando estadísticas descriptivas que comprenden la media y la desviación estándar a través del software SPSS, versión 21. Los hallazgos revelaron que los estudiantes prefieren aprender la literatura malaya sentados en una silla o mesa y requieren un ambiente tranquilo, bien iluminado y equipado.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Componente de literature. Aprendizaje de idiomas. Cultura Malaya. Escuelas secundarias.*

Introduction

The literature component is increasingly emphasized as an important subject in Malaysian secondary schools (ATEK *et al.*, 2021; RASHID; VETHAMANI; RAHMAN, 2010). As such, a special curriculum has been formulated by the Malaysian government since 2000 to incorporate elements of literature into the Malay language learning at the secondary school level. This curriculum is gradually being improved from time to time. This is because the literature component is considered by the government as an essential element in language learning, both formally and informally. Additionally, the research emphasizes that literature learning could improve students' writing skills, including syntax and grammatical knowledge (ATEK *et al.*, 2021). The learning of language and literature can also be one of the significant determinants of students' identity formation (AZMI *et al.*, 2020). Thus, an effective literature

curriculum can help students to develop self-identity as well as language and communication skills.

As stated by Brass (2013), there are two primary targets in the teaching of literature components in secondary schools: 1) to encourage students to express opinions and views; 2) to help students develop reading and writing skills as well as understand literary works. Nevertheless, some studies mentioned that determining an appropriate approach to the learning of literature remains a major challenge (AZIZ; NASHARUDIN, 2010; ATEK *et al.*, 2021). Accordingly, overcoming this weakness could help the Malaysian Ministry of Education to strengthen the literary component. This research, therefore, aims to examine the strategies preferred by secondary school students in learning the Malay literature from environmental, psychological, sociological, and practical perspectives. To some extent, this study can help to enhance students' language and communication skills, particularly in the Malaysian context.

Literature Review

Cognitive Components in the Comprehension of Literary Texts

Literary language refers to the form of a language used in literature, and every language has oral or written literature (BOBKINA; DOMINGUEZ, 2014). The use of oral or written language as a medium of information transfer demands clarity and accuracy (SEGABUTLA; EVANS, 2019). Nevertheless, in literature, language requires careful selection and arrangement of words in both speech and writing (ATEK *et al.*, 2021; RASHID *et al.*, 2010). The beauty of literary genres, such as the novel, poetry, and prose are that they are used to express feelings and ideas as well as reveal authors' experiences (AZMI; HASSAN; SIDEK, 2020).

Additionally, feelings and ideas are expressed through figurative language or literary devices such as simile, metaphor, symbolism, and imagery (HARYA, 2017). Thus, the feelings of readers or listeners are triggered through literary devices, which leads to imagination and emotions. Another feature of the literary language is that it prioritizes a balanced “value of taste” and “value of meaning”. The balance in taste value and meaning value refers to the choice and arrangement of words that form the expressions found in reading materials.

The terms “cognitive” and “comprehension” are closely related to mental and output processes. They generally involve thinking to interpret, learn, and understand something. The role of the cognitive process in reading and comprehension is multidimensional and interspersed between its components included in several key variables, including vocabulary recognition, linguistic comprehension, and reading strategies (BERNHARDT, 2010; GRABE; STOLLER, 2019; STAHL; FLANIGAN; MCKENNA, 2009; NASSAJI, 2003).

Although there are difficulties in accurately concluding the contribution of cognitive components in reading comprehension, scholars in the field of reading agree on two crucial orientations; lower-level and higher-level reading comprehension processes (DROOP; VERHOEVEN, 2003; GRABE; STOLLER, 2019; JEON; YAMASHITA, 2014; KREMMEL; BRUNFAUT; ALDERSON 2015; NASSAJI, 2003). Considering these two levels of processing, scholars have categorized reading skills based on the cognitive abilities possessed by the reader.

Moreover, Hellekjær, Brevik, and Olsen (2016) explained that “the low-level, bottom-up process involves recognizing the written words in the text along with relevant grammatical information, which in turn hinges upon automatic word recognition (decoding words and relating print to sound)” (p. 162). This process, according to the authors, offers the foundation for top-down, higher-level processing, which entails the creation of meaning in an interactive process between the information in the reading material, the reader’s knowledge of language and content, and the reader’s processing skills and strategies.

Also, Grabe and Stoller (2019) enumerated five significant cognitive components that contribute to reading comprehension: a) syntactic knowledge and processing skills; b) reading strategies that support comprehension; c) the integration of reading strategies and higher-level processing to develop strategic reading; d) the role of discourse knowledge; e) the centrality of vocabulary knowledge (p. 195). In this regard, Tunmer and Hoover (2014) discussed the relationship of cognitive components with the process of reading comprehension. The authors also explained cognitive foundations in learning reading that contribute to the reader’s ability to comprehend reading material.

Learning Strategies among Students in Malaysia

To some extent, learning strategies have a positive influence on students’ learning outcomes and academic success. This notion has been proven by several studies conducted recently (ARIFFIN; ABDUL HALIM; DARUS, 2021; HANID; SAID; YAHAYA, 2020;

MAHAMOD, 2021). For instance, Razak, Ismail, Aziz, and Babikkoi (2012) assessed the learning strategies employed by secondary school students in Malaysia. The findings showed that learning strategies can reveal learners' interest in learning the subject. The students tend to employ different categories of learning strategies, including memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social aspects. Also, Ariffin *et al.* (2021) found that metacognitive strategies “were helpful to students in planning and organizing their studies” (p. 267).

According to Hanid *et al.* (2020), instructors are encouraged to plan well-structured teaching and learning components that take into consideration the students' needs and learning objectives as well as the forms of support such as learning equipment and the types of learning strategies appropriate to students' needs. Thus, appropriate learning strategies must be determined to improve the quality of the learning process. Students must employ effective learning strategies “to help them learn more efficiently and effectively” (ARIFFIN *et al.*, 2021, p. 261). According to Ghavifekr (2020), “students are required to be active learners in the learning process from various aspects” (p. 9), such as environmental, cognitive, and practical viewpoints. For example, Ghavifekr (2020) argued that the success of learning is also, to some extent, dependent upon the school's capability to enrich the learning environment.

Some studies demonstrate the use of games as a learning strategy (ATMA; AZMI; HASSAN, 2020; HANID *et al.*, 2020; NG; AZIZIE; CHEW, 2021). Hanid *et al.* (2020) conducted a meta-analysis to identify learning strategies implemented using Augmented Reality technology. The outcomes revealed that “interactive learning, game-based learning, collaborative learning, and experiential learning are the dominant strategies” (p. 51) used by students. Additionally, Ng, Azizie and Chew (2021) identified some advantages of games in the learning environment, including the development of independent learning as well as a positive learning experience.

Moreover, collaborative learning has been described as an important learning strategy adopted by students. Ghavifekr (2020) found that students prefer to work in groups rather than individually, which indicates their desire for collaborative learning. The students believe that “collaborative learning encourages everyone to work best with others and enhances socialization among members” (p. 9). According to Ghavifekr, “collaborative learning makes the teaching and learning process more creative” (p. 20).

Additionally, Ariffin *et al.* (2021) examined the strategies used by students in language learning and their correlation with academic performance. According to the

findings, learning strategies “were helpful to students in planning and organizing their studies” (p. 261). The learning strategies “have impacted the students positively” (p. 261). Nevertheless, the correlation between students’ learning strategies and their academic performance was found to be insignificant.

Very few studies focused on the strategies preferred by students in learning the Malay language, particularly in the Malaysian context. For instance, Mahamod (2021) determined the strategies used by secondary school students in learning the Malay language. The findings show that, to a moderate extent, speaking is the most preferred strategy employed by the students, followed by listening, writing, and reading strategies respectively. According to the study, effective learning strategies can be used “as a means to enhance Malay language proficiency among students” (p. 31). However, to the best of our knowledge, none of the previous studies have investigated the strategies adopted by the students of the Malay literary component at the secondary school level, which this study aims to examine.

Methodology

This study employed a survey method to determine the strategies used in learning the Malay literature component in Malaysian secondary schools. The survey method is described by Creswell (2012) as one of the most widely used techniques among researchers in various fields due to its various advantages. The advantages of survey methods include their ability to measure the characteristics of a large group of individuals, facilitate the data collection process, and provide adequate data in a short time (COHEN; MANION; MORRISON, 2007). According to Neuman (2000), results obtained from a survey can be generalized to a larger population.

Data Collection

This study used a self-developed questionnaire as a data-collection tool. It consists of 28 items measured using the five-point Likert Scale. The questionnaire was administered to a randomly selected sample of 160 fourth-year students in the literature stream from two secondary schools in Terengganu, Malaysia: 1) Sekolah Menengah Ibrahim Fikri; 2) Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Dato' Razali Ismail. The sample was determined using Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970) formula for sample size calculations.

Data Analysis

Before the actual data collection and analysis, the questionnaire items were piloted using experts' evaluation and Cronbach's Alpha to determine the ability of the instruments to provide valid results. First, the questionnaire items were evaluated by two experts and revised based on their suggestions. Second, Cronbach's Alpha revealed a value of 0.782, which is considered a high-reliability level (CRONBACH, 1951). Research instruments with a high degree of reliability could provide more accurate results (HASSAN *et al.*, 2021). Subsequently, the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation via the SPSS software Version 21 at ≤ 0.05 level of alpha.

Results and Discussion

This study focuses on strategies for learning the Malay literature component among students in Malaysian secondary schools. All the questionnaires (160) administered to the students were returned, signifying a 100% response rate. As explained earlier, the learning strategies were examined from environmental, psychological, sociological, and practical perspectives. Since the five-point Likert scale was used, the learning strategies are measured within the range of 0.00-5.00 mean values. The findings are reported in the following sections.

Learning Strategies from the Environmental Perspective

The first part of the findings describes the students' learning strategies of the Malay literature component from the environmental aspect, which was measured using items 1-7 of the questionnaire. This part is described based on the indicator level of low, moderate, and high mean values. The findings related to the students' learning strategies from the environmental aspect are presented in Table 1 as follows.

Table 1 - Students' learning strategies based on the environment aspect

SN	Items	Mean (SD)
1	I learn Malay literature in a dim-light environment	2.82(0.80)
2	I learn Malay literature in a noisy environment	1.92(0.59)
3	I learn Malay literature in a quiet environment	3.18(0.68)
4	I learn Malay literature while lying down on the bed or floor	2.43(0.86)
5	I quickly feel drowsy while reading the Malay literature on a chair	2.24(0.73)
6	I learn Malay literature in a brightly lit place	3.35(0.59)

7	I learn the Malay literature while sitting on a chair or table	3.45(0.68)
Average Total Mean		2.77(0.70)

Value indicator: low=0.1-2.99, moderate=3.0-3.49, high=3.5-5

Source: Devised by the authors

As shown in Table 1, the overall mean score for students' learning strategies from the environmental perspective is low (Mean=2.77) with a standard deviation of 0.70. Additionally, the mean scores range from 1.92-to 3.45. In particular, the students are less likely to learn the Malay literature in a dim-light (Mean=2.82), a noisy environment (Mean=1.92), or while lying down on the bed or floor (Mean=2.43). They prefer to learn or read the Malay literature in a quiet environment (Mean=3.18), in a brightly lit environment (Mean=3.35), or on a chair or table (Mean=3.45). These outcomes indicate that the students require a quiet, well-lighted, and equipped environment to learn the Malay literature component effectively.

Moreover, learning the Malay literature on a chair or table has the highest mean value (Mean=3.45), followed by a well-lighted environment (Mean=3.35). Therefore, the students specified sitting on a chair or table as the most-preferred learning strategy. These findings are consistent with Ghavifekr's (2020) assertion that to a certain extent, the school's ability to enrich the learning environment represents one of the important factors that determine positive learning outcomes. Also, Hanid *et al.* (2020) mentioned the need for well-structured teaching and learning components as well as the students' needs and learning equipment as significant factors that determine the success of learning.

Learning Strategies from the Psychological Perspective

The second part of the findings describes the students' learning strategies of the Malay literature component from the psychological perspective, which was measured using items 8-14 of the questionnaire. This part is also described based on the indicator level of low, moderate, and high mean values. The findings related to the students' learning strategies from a psychological perspective are presented in Table 2 as follows.

Table 2 - Students' learning strategies from the psychological perspective

SN	Items	Mean (SD)
8	I want to get a good grade in the Malay literature component	3.45(0.78)
9	I am happy when I get good grades in the Malay literature component	3.82(0.94)
10	I diligently carry out the Malay literature tasks assigned to me	2.92(0.51)

11	I do my Malay literature tasks well for evaluation purpose	3.18(0.59)
12	I quickly get bored when learning new things about the Malay literature	2.54(0.48)
13	I remember to perform the Malay literature tasks if instructed	3.15(0.58)
14	I always forget to do or finish my Malay literature homework	3.21(0.63)
Average Total Mean		3.18(0.64)

Value indicator: low=0.1-2.99, moderate=3.0-3.49, high=3.5-5

Source: Devised by the authors

As presented in Table 1, the overall mean score for students' learning strategies from the psychological perspective is moderate (Mean=3.18) with a standard deviation of 0.64. Also, the mean scores range from 2.54 to 3.82. The students are extremely happy when they get good grades in the Malay literature component (Mean=3.82). To a moderate extent, they learn the Malay literature component with a desire to obtain a good grade (Mean=3.45) and perform their Malay literature tasks for evaluation purposes (Mean=3.18). They remember to perform their Malay literature tasks (Mean=3.15) but always forget to perform their homework (Mean=3.21). However, the students do not diligently perform the Malay literature tasks (Mean=2.92), but they are unlikely to get bored when learning new things about the Malay literature (Mean=2.54).

These outcomes indicate that the students are less concerned with the Malay literature tasks but aspire to get good grades and are unlikely to get bored when learning the Malay literature subjects. The students' most-preferred learning strategy from a psychological perspective is to read with a desire to obtain a high grade in the Malay literature subjects. Thus, as pointed out by Ariffin *et al.* (2021), learning strategies are correlated with students' academic performance, although this association was found to be insignificant.

Learning Strategies from the Sociological Perspective

The third part of the findings describes the students' learning strategies of the Malay literature component from the sociological perspective, which was measured using items 14-21 of the questionnaire. This part is also described based on the indicator level of low, moderate, and high mean values. The findings related to the students' learning strategies from a sociological perspective are presented in Table 3 as follows.

Table 3 - Students' learning strategies from the sociological perspective

SN	Items	Mean (SD)
15	I study the Malay literature alone	3.14(0.52)
16	I study Malay literature together with one or two friends	2.89(0.88)
17	I study the Malay literature in groups with many peers	3.05(0.56)
18	I be accompanied by adults while studying the Malay literature	2.78(0.71)
19	Sometimes I like to study Malay literature with my friends	3.26(0.64)
20	Studying Malay literature with my peers makes me uncomfortable	1.86(0.79)
21	Learning the literature with adults makes my comprehension difficult	3.42(0.72)
Average Total Mean		2.91(0.68)

Value indicator: low=0.1-2.99, moderate=3.0-3.49, high=3.5-5

Source: Devised by the authors

As shown in Table 3, the overall mean score for students' learning strategies from the sociological perspective is low (Mean=3.18) with a standard deviation of 0.68. Besides, the mean scores range from 1.86 and 3.42. The students believe that learning the Malay literature with adults makes their comprehension difficult to a moderate extent (Mean=3.42). However, they tend to believe that learning the Malay literature with peers does not make them uncomfortable (Mean=1.86). To a moderate extent, the students prefer to learn the Malay literature alone (Mean=3.14) and, sometimes, with friends (Mean=3.26).

These findings signify that the students feel comfortable with learning the Malay literature component if they study alone or together with their friends or peers. Thus, the most-preferred strategy from the sociological aspect is to read alone and avoid the company of adults. This kind of learning strategy does not help to gain the benefits of collaborative learning. As discussed by Ghavifekr (2020), learning in a group allows students to exchange ideas with peers and share knowledge as well as experience to make the learning process more effective. Contrary to the findings of the present study, Ghavifekr's (2020) study revealed that students prefer to work in groups rather than individually.

Learning Strategies from the Practical Perspective

The fourth part of the findings describes the students' learning strategies of the Malay literature component from the practical perspective, which was measured using items 21-28 of the questionnaire. This part is also described based on the indicator level of low, moderate, and high mean values. The findings related to the students' learning strategies from a practical perspective are presented in Table 4 as follows.

Table 4 - Students' learning strategies based on the physical aspect

SN	Items	Mean (SD)
22	I learn the Malay literature very well through reading	3.01(0.55)
23	I learn the Malay literature very well through writing	2.81(0.61)
24	I learn the Malay literature well through listening	3.21(0.68)
25	I learn something new about the Malay literature through games	3.28(0.87)
26	I learn the Malay literature well if I study early in the morning	2.90(0.70)
27	I learn the Malay literature well if I study in the evening	2.31(0.78)
28	I learn the Malay literature well if I study at night	3.13(0.84)
Average Total Mean		2.92(0.71)

Value indicator: low=0.1-2.99, moderate=3.0-3.49, high=3.5-5

Source: Devised by the authors

As depicted in Table 4, the overall mean score for students' learning strategies from the practical perspective is low (Mean=2.92) with a standard deviation of 0.71. Moreover, the mean scores range from 2.31 to 3.28. To a moderate extent, the students learn the Malay literature very well through reading (Mean=3.01), listening (Mean=3.21), games (Mean=3.28), and at night (Mean=3.13). Nevertheless, they are less likely to learn the Malay literature through writing (Mean=2.81), in the morning (Mean=2.90), or evening (Mean=2.31). These outcomes suggest that the students are more likely to learn Malay literature through reading, listening, and games. However, the least-preferred strategy from the practical perspective is learning in the evening, perhaps because students often become exhausted after studying at school. Similar to the findings of this study, Mahamod (2021) found that speaking and listening represent the most preferred learning strategies among students. However, Mahamod's study identified reading as the least-preferred strategy. Additionally, previous studies demonstrate the use of games as a learning strategy (ATMA *et al.*, 2020; HANID *et al.*, 2020; NG; AZIZIE; CHEW, 2021).

Conclusion

This study examined strategies for learning the Malay literature component among students in Malaysian secondary schools from environmental, psychological, sociological, and practical perspectives. According to the findings, the students learn the Malay literature while sitting on a chair or table and require a quiet, well-lighted, and equipped environment. The students also read with a desire to obtain a high grade in the Malay literature subjects.

They read alone and avoid the company of adults. Additionally, the students learn Malay literature through reading, listening, games, and in the evening. The findings of this study could be useful to educationists and literature instructors in developing an effective means of teaching the Malay literature component based on students' needs and learning strategies. It is also hoped that the outcomes of this study can help students to develop more creative learning strategies to achieve positive learning outcomes. However, this study is limited to a quantitative analysis of secondary students' learning strategies of the Malay literature component. Thus, further studies may adopt a qualitative approach to provide a more in-depth analysis of this phenomenon, particularly in the Malaysian context.

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How to reference this article

AZMI, N. J.; HASSAN, I.; AZMI, M. N. L.; ATEK, E. S. E.; YAH@ALIAS, M. H. Strategies for learning the Malay literature component in Malaysian secondary schools. **Revista online de Política e Gestão Educacional**, Araraquara, v. 26, n. esp. 1, e022040, Mar. 2022. e-ISSN: 1519-9029. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22633/rpge.v26iesp.1.16516>

Submitted: 03/11/2021

Required revisions: 21/12/2021

Approved: 20/02/2022

Published: 31/03/2022