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How Do Excellent Students Interact with Arabic Poems?

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Abstract

Interaction with Arabic literature requires special effort and knowledge. Arabic poetry in particular is often viewed as difficult to understand. To address this, a qualitative study was conducted on students who excelled to identify strategies used to understand Arabic poems. For this purpose, three Malay students majoring in Arabic language in Malaysian public universities were chosen as respondents. The data obtained through the interview method were then analysed based on six main reading strategies; namely memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social. The results showed that all six strategies were used. Information related to life rather than linguistics were used when applying memory strategies, and cognitive strategies were used at the word, sentence and context levels. Compensation strategies were used most often, and many intelligent guesses were made based on the information in the text. From the aspect of metacognitive and effective strategies students were found to heavily relate to Islamic elements such as reciting *bismillah*; they have strong determination and prepare by reading more poetry. As for social strategies, their trust in their teacher as a source of reference is evident. These findings will contribute towards assisting students and teachers in the effort to understand Arabic poetry.

Keywords: Arabic Poem, Interaction, Literature, Literary Texts, Reading Strategies

Introduction

Arabic literature is one of the basic components in the learning of Arabic language in Malaysia, be it at the upper secondary level or at the level of higher learning. At the schooling level, students begin to specifically learn Arabic literature in the sixth form, or better known as the pre-university level. Whereas at the higher learning level, several Public Universities in Malaysia which offer the Arabic Language program include Arabic literature to complement their programs. For example, the National University of Malaysia offers several literature courses as a component of the bachelor majoring in Arabic language program, similarly for the International Islamic University and Universiti Putra Malaysia that offer several courses relating to Arabic literature as a minor major. There are also other universities such as the

Islamic Science University of Malaysia and Universiti Malaya that offer literature courses to complement the said bachelor program.

Due to the presence of the literature component in studying Arabic language in Malaysia, several studies relating to literature have been conducted, amongst them; problems in learning Arabic literature in Public Universities (Toklubok & Mezah, 2009) and a guide to understanding Arabic poetry (Jusoh, 2009). In reality, the number of studies conducted in this area is sorely lacking. Hence, the findings from those studies are not yet able to assist in overcoming the problem of learning Arabic literature in Malaysia, even more so when the learning is often connected to several negative connotations such as difficulty in understanding the literary text as well as its irrelevance to present times. Therefore, the objectives of this study are as follows:

- To identify the interaction of excellent students with Arabic poems
- To analyse the strategies they use to understand Arabic poems.

Literature Review

Reading and understanding in the interaction process

In discussing the issue of learning Arabic literature, it is very connected to the skill of reading and understanding text, which are two important processes in one's interaction with the reading text. Generally, the connection between reading and understanding in this process is particularly strong. In fact, reading and understanding are two matters that require one another. Anyone who reads but does not understand what was read is actually assumed as not having read because understanding complements the reading activity. Without having the understanding, the reading activity is of no use (Yusoff, 1999).

The reading activity and understanding in one's interaction process with the reading text is an invaluable skill in mastering a language. Even so, studies on the skills of reading Arabic text is still not carried out much in Malaysia, much less so for those relating to reading Arabic literature. The studies by Musa et al (1999); Shaari (1996) for example, showed that the students' mastery is at a weak level, whereas Zabidi (2010); Abdullah (2006) found that their level of mastery of reading is average. This is different from the study by Nordin (2006) which found that 80% of the secondary school students are at a good level of mastery of reading.

The researchers also found that the weakness in mastering reading is very much connected to the weakness in command of vocabulary, language style and also grammar (Shaari, 1996). The students' lack of skills in applying grammar when reading also contributed to this weakness (Nordin, 2006).

In the study on reading in general, several factors which help the process of understanding text were identified. Among those often mentioned by language scholars is the mastery of vocabulary, knowledge of schemata and metacognitive awareness (Bernhardt, 1991; Block, 1986; Yusoff, 1999; Tu'aymah, 1989; Othman, 2008). Apart from that, there were also researchers who specifically related the ability to understand text with the knowledge of grammar (Bernhardt, 1991; Halim, 2013; Tu'aymah, 1989).

In addition to the factors stated above, there is one factor which was also observed by the researchers of late, that is reading strategies. Several studies have proven that the correct use

of reading strategies is able to have a positive impact on understanding, and in fact acts as a yardstick in determining the level of understanding of the reader (Olshavsky 1976-1977; Oxford, 1989). The use as well as the importance of strategy in the reading process was further proven by the studies of modern scholars such as (Carrell, 1998; Chamot, 2005; Cohen, 1990; Oxford, 1990). Therefore, emphasis on the use of strategy in the reading activity should be prioritized so that the reading process can be completed easily and effectively.

Reading strategies in language learning

In the field of language learning, strategy is defined as any activity that is performed consciously by the student with the intention of systematically controlling their language learning (Griffiths, 2009). This activity is performed by students so that their learning is easier, faster, interesting, more effective and can be self-performed in various situations (Oxford, 1990).

According to Oxford (1990) reading strategies is generally seen as one of the language learning strategies (LLS), and it is correlated to reading skills. Whereas Olshavsky (1976-1977) and Hosenfeld (1977) stated that reading strategies is used to resolve problems in understanding faced by the reader.

As a result of the scrutiny by scholars on LLS, several forms of classifying strategies emerged, Rubin (1975); Stern (1975); O'Malley and Chamot (1990); Oxford (1990) were among those who put forward various forms of classifying LLS. However, Oxford's (1990) classification into six types of strategies, which are Metacognitive, Cognitive, Memory, Compensation, Affective and Social is widely used in LLS research (Nambiar, 1998).

According to Nambiar (1998), Oxford's classification of strategies has certain merits not found in strategy classifications done by other scholars; such as specification of types of memory strategies. This type of strategy is greatly needed by students learning a second or foreign language, such as Arabic language (Mustapha, 2011). Whereas other scholars are inclined to combine the memory strategies with the cognitive strategies (Nambiar, 1998). Furthermore, in this classification there is an additional strategy, which is the compensation strategies that is related to activities to overcome the limitation in learning (Nambiar, 1998). In fact, this Oxford classification is identified as more stable, complete and comprehensive (Da'dur, 2002; Hsiao & Oxford, 2002).

The influence of Islam in language learning strategies

In studies on LLS in Malaysia, local researchers have conducted studies as those conducted by overseas scholars. However, from the year 2005, some researchers tried to connect Islamic elements in their research. Among the earliest is the study done by (Mahamod, 2006; Mahamod & Embi, 2005). This quantitative research involved adding several items which had Islamic elements; among them the strategy for reading the Quran and the strategy of reciting prayers before learning. The results of this research showed that these strategies are often practiced by excellent students.

Strategies with Islamic elements are also practiced while reading Arabic texts; such as saying *Basmalah* before starting to read, saying *Hamdalah* when finished reading and relating the word found in the reading text with verses in the Quran which have already been memorized.

In fact, the respondents admitted that these strategies greatly helped them in understanding text (Mustapha et al., 2008).

A comprehensive study on the strategies with Islamic elements was conducted by Teh (2009) when he added a construct in the LLS questionnaire that specifically related to Islamic elements. This construct is known as the Metaphysics Strategies. However, in Mustapha's (2011) research, it was found that actually the Islamic influence strategies did not need to be separated from Oxford's six types of main strategies, in fact it is actually absorbed in all of Oxford's LLS, especially metacognitive, cognitive, memory and affective strategies. This difference is seen as caused by the analysis approach adopted by both studies, where Teh (2009) conducted quantitative research whereas Mustapha (2011) performed qualitative research.

Differences in strategies between excellent and weak students

The nature of learning is such that there will be differences in student ability in understanding and responding to what is being learnt. Therefore, in an effort to understand the text, the strategies used by the excellent students and the weak students are also different.

Studies have proven that excellent students will use more strategies in their effort to understand a text compared to weak students. In fact, these various strategies are used repeatedly (Teh, 2009; Husin, 2003). However, the number of strategies used is not a determinant for the level of understanding. This is because excellent students have been recorded as someone who is able to use the strategies effectively in accordance with the requirements of the text (Cohen, 1998; Mustapha, 2011).

If we look at the use of strategies based on the reading process, the excellent student is skilful in relating the information available with the information that is being read so as to be able to understand the text more easily. This is related to the Top-Down reading process as well as the interactive process (Bernhardt, 1991; Cohen, 1998). This situation is vastly different for weak students who are inclined to use the Bottom-Up reading strategies, which is to understand the meaning of every word, form the meaning of the sentence, and finally try to understand the entire text (Oxford et al., 2004).

According to Hosenfeld (1977) the types of strategies used by excellent and weak students are markedly different. Among the strategies used by the excellent students are as follows (Hosenfeld, 1977)

- 1- Depending on the translation of the meaning of the sentence in a wider context.
- 2- Guessing the translated meaning so that they can benefit from it to understand the text as a whole.
- 3- Benefiting from other words or understanding the context meaning especially when faced with difficulty understanding a word.
- 4- Able to differentiate between an important word that contributes to understanding the text and the word that is less important.
- 5- Ignoring words which are seen as not contributing to understanding the text.
- 6- Having positive self-principles.

Whereas for weak students, they usually use the following strategies (Hosenfeld, 1977):

- 1- Very dependent on the translation of every word in the text.
- 2- Depending on translation of meaning of every word without referring to meaning in context.
- 3- Referring to every word when faced with a difficult word.
- 4- Placing importance on every word without differentiating.
- 5- Having negative self-principles.

Based on the difference in using strategies among excellent and weak students, hence the reading strategies of excellent students is seen as the focus of the research which is crucial to be considered by researchers as it is able to expose the true process of how a reader interacts with reading material (Carrell, 1989; Oxford et. al., 2004), in fact this exposure is extremely useful for helping students and teachers overcome the weakness from the aspect of understanding (Chamot, 2005; Oxford, 1989).

When the results of the discussion above are related to students understanding of Arabic literature text, or specifically poetry text, several questions start to arise; amongst them:

1. How do excellent students interact with Arabic poems?
2. What are the strategies used by them to understand the text in poems?

Methodology

This is a field research which uses the qualitative analysis method. This method is used to describe and detail the specific strategies used by excellent students in the effort to understand Arabic poems.

This study involved three Malay respondents who are second- and third-year students in three local universities which are: the International Islamic University Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and Universiti Putra Malaysia. They major in the Arabic Language and have registered for several literature courses. The respondents were selected by purposive sampling, as qualitative research requires this type of sampling to produce a clearer understanding about the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 1990). These three students are excellent students based on the achievements obtained in their examination results and are represented as R1, R2 and R3 in this research. The data obtained from the three informants reached the saturation level after the analysis was done. This is because they have given similar inputs regarding their interactions with Arabic poems.

To obtain the data relating to the strategies that they used, these students attended an interview session which was conducted individually. The interview data recorded was transcribed until a protocol was formed. This protocol is the result of an interview conducted; therefore, each informant had an individual protocol. The data in these protocols was then analysed based on thematic approach according to the six main LLS introduced by Oxford (1990) namely the Metacognitive, Cognitive, Memory, Compensation, Affective and Social for classification purposes. As the interview session was conducted in the Malay language, the data was presented in that language, then the translation of the responses is presented in a condensed version.

Findings

The results of the research analysis found that all the students used various types of reading strategies when interacting with literary text in the effort to understand it. Following are the findings on the reading strategies used by the students:

Memory Strategies

These strategies are related to the two processes which occur in one's mind when reading, which are retaining the meaning just understood and reproducing it when required (Oxford, 1990). Findings show that respondents used these strategies as such:

Try to recall what was learnt earlier

The data which was analysed showed that all the research respondents tried to recall what was learnt earlier when interacting with the Arabic poem text. According to them:

“Saya cuba ingat balik apa yang pernah belajar dalam kelas sastera lah” (R1: U103)

[“I try to recall what was learnt in literature class”]

“Saya kalau nak faham kaitkan dengan...emm.. contoh kalimah yang biasa guna dalam kelas,... atau ingat perkataan yang ada ustaz ustazah ajar” (R3: U2)

[“For me to understand I will relate to examples of phrases usually used in class,... or recall the word Ustaz and Ustazah taught”]

“...saya kaitkan dengan benda lainlah... dengan teks belajar dalam kelas...” (R3: U32)

[“...I relate it with other things ...with the text learnt in class ...”]

Relate to Arabic culture

One of the respondents stated that they would try to relate what was being read to Arabic culture as explained:

“...sebab kita bukan daripada orang Arab nak faham...kita cuba faham *thaqofah* [budaya] yang dia gunalah...*thaqofah* yang dia pakai..macam *tu je* lah. Lepas tu kita try kaitkan dengan *syi'r*...” (R3: U34)

[“...because we are not Arabs to understand ...we try to understand the *thaqofah* [culture] they use. Then we try to relate to *syi'r* (poem)...”]

Relate to life

There are those among them who used the strategy by relating the poem with life, when they say:

“...sebab bila kita nak hidup ni kita kena *ready* dengan ketentuan qada dan qadar lah...sebab macam mana pun kita tengok *ni* ada kesusahan, ada kemudahan dalam hidup *ni*... Kadang kadang macam contoh malam... semua tak kekal lama, macam malam pun dia akan silih berganti...” (R2: U11)

[“...because when we want to live we must be ready with the determination of *qada* and *qadar*...because we can see difficulty and easiness in this life... Sometimes it is like the night ... all of it doesn't stay long, the night for instance will also rotate...”]

Relate the word not understood with the word which meaning is already known

Respondents also admitted that they also related with the word in their memory which meaning has already been understood when faced with difficulties understanding a new word, such as:

“macam saya cuba cari perkataan yang dekat dekat dengan dia [perkataan yang telah difahami]...cuba linkkan dengan perkataan yang saya tak faham...” (R2: U17)

[“I try to find a word close to it [a word that is already understood]...try to link it to the word I do not understand ...”]

Relate to the knowledge of Balaghah (Rhetoric) learnt

When interacting with poem text, they use other knowledge of Arabic language, amongst them the knowledge of *Balaghah*, as stated as follows:

“saya cuba try pakai contohnya *istifham*...haa dia pakai *istifham..ni* ada *uslūb balaghah la..* sebab sebagaimana saya belajar dalam kelas..kebanyakan *syi'r* ni saya perhati *uslūb balaghah* tu mesti ada...” (R3: U22)

[“I try to apply for example *istifham*...he uses *istifham..this must have uslūb balaghah..* as what I learnt in class..most *syi'r* I notice must have *uslūb balaghah ...”*]

They also added that the knowledge of *Balaghah* is used more often compared to other knowledge of Arabic language because this knowledge provides more understanding from the aspect of context, as their words state:

“saya orang jenis suka kepada benda yang lebih kepada pemahaman kita daripada konteks..., macam kita belajar ilmu *ma'ani* kan...ilmu *ma'ani* kan lebih kepada *siaq*..., memanglah kita kena tahu dulu nahu tu..tapi saya lebih kepada konteks lah..tak sangat nahu” (R2: U33)

[“I am the type who prefers understanding from context..., like when we learn *ma'ani* ... *ma'ani* is more towards *siaq*. (context).., so we definitely must know the vocabulary first..but I am more to context..not so much vocabulary”]

“..sebab dekat dalam kelas pun ustaz Badri cakap *ma'ani ni* lebih tinggi daripada nahu sebab kita kena faham dulu jumlah tu sahih baru *ma'ani* ni lebih kepada *al-kalam al-baligh* kan..tapi ustaz kata kadang kadang benda *tu* memang lebih kepada kita boleh teka benda *tu*..kita fikir daripada *siaq* dia..haa tu yang diajar oleh ustaz Badri lah..macam daripada kita nak fahamkan ayat al-Quran kadang kadang kan dalam *balaghah* *tu* ada macam makna tersirat ..tapi sebenarnya benda *tu* kita boleh fikir dia secara kalau kita tengok balik lama lama kita boleh faham daripada *siaq..tu* yang saya boleh praktislah daripada apa yang saya belajar dengan benda *ni*.” (R2: U41)

[“..because even in class Ustaz Badri says *ma'ani* is higher than grammar because we must first understand the total is true then *ma'ani* is more to *al-kalam al-baligh*..but Ustaz says sometimes it is more towards something we can guess...we consider the *siaq* ..that was what was taught by Ustaz Badri .. to understand the Quran verses sometimes in *balaghah* there is like an implicit meaning..but actually we can think about it by looking at it sooner or later we can understand from the *siaq..* that is what I can practise from what I learn by this.”]

Relate to the words in the Quran & Hadith which meaning is known

They also use their memory of the meaning of words in the Quran and Hadith. According to them:

“Saya kalau nak faham saya guna perkataan berkaitan dengan hadis... Kalau perkataan tu payah saya cuba juga cari ayat al-Quran yang ada kaitanlah...” (R3: U2)

[“If I want to understand I will use words relating to hadith ... If the word is difficult I will still try to find a Quran verse that is related ...”]

“...saya kaitkan dengan benda lainlah..dengan teks al quran ...” (R3: U32)

[“...I relate it with other things ..with text in the Quran ...”]

Relate to the bayt (line) before and after

In this interaction process as well, they relate what they have understood from the *bayt* before it when they state:

“contoh bayt yang sebelum *tu* menerangkan tentang “*kāinat*” ...*haa* bayt lepas *tu* tak faham perkataan, jadi saya agak mungkin *nak* cakap tentang benda benda di sekelilingnya lah *kot...*” (R3: U28)

[“the previous *bayt* that explained about “*kāinat*” ...then the *bayt* after I did not understand the meaning of the word, so I guessed perhaps to talk about the things around it ...”]

Cognitive Strategies

These strategies are any action that occurs directly in one's mind when interacting with reading materials (Oxford, 1990). In this research, several forms of cognitive strategies were used by the respondent, including:

Identify form to differentiate between poem and prose

The form of Arabic literature text, which is the form of poem or prose also has a role in the understanding process. This was admitted by one of the respondents:

“...tengok ...*umm* bentuknya...ada bayt-bayt... *pastu...* lagi satu... *qafiah* lah ...*aa* tu memang nampak *syi'rnya...*” (R1: U5)

[“...look at its form... there are *bayts*... and ... another thing... *qafiah* (rhyme)... so you can see the *syi'r* (poem)..."]

Understand as a whole

Findings also show that they understand text as a whole without focusing on each meaning specifically as per the statement:

“...saya *tak* faham secara spesifik apa *bayt bayt tu*..tapi saya faham macam secara keseluruhan dia...” (R2: U51)

[“...I don't specifically understand the *bayt*..but I understand in an overall manner ...”]

Only understand the keyword in every bayt

For those respondents who only understand the poem in an overall manner, they only chose certain words that is considered as the keyword to be understood specifically, such as:

“yang saya google tu....tak banyak lah..macam kunci kunci dia *je* lah...” (R2: U23)

[“what I googled was not much just those which were key ...”]

Keywords were determined based on the word not understood:

“sebab macam pada saya kunci *tu* macam apa yang saya *tak faham...*” (R2: U25)
[“because for me the key is what I don’t understand ...”]

Try to understand every word

However, there are some respondents who try to understand every word in the text, when they say:

“tengok dari *bayt* pertama sampai akhir lah...aa tengok perkataan perkataan dia..faham kan perkataan...” (R1: U43).
[“look at the first *bayt* until the end ... look at the words.. try to understand the word ...”]

The respondent considered this strategy important because:

Every word has an implicit meaning.

“...emm... biasa *syi'r* kan dia dia *tak* terus maksudnya... dia kiasan kan” (R1: U13)
[“...usually *syi'r* doesn't show meaning directly... it is a figure of speech”]

Therefore, every word must have its meaning understood. To look for the meaning of this word the following are used:

internet:

“...kalau *tak* pun tengok *kat* internet lah...maksud dia...” (R1: U41)
[“...if not look at the internet... its meaning ...”]
“...jadi saya *try google* lah ...” (R2: U17)
[“...so I try *google* ...”]

dictionary:

“kalau saya, apa-apa pun kena tengok *mu'jam* juga lah... *a'ah* kena fahamkan perkataan *pastu* baru cuba *nak* bentuk makna ...” (R1: U117)
[“if it was me, whatever it is must look at the *mu'jam* (dictionary)... have to understand the word then try to form meaning ...”]

Once every word is understood, there is another process that must be mastered because of the implicit meaning found in each word. This process involves understanding the meaning of the word according to the *bayt* context. For them, this process is quite difficult, and they have to use other strategies such as social strategies._

Analyse meaning using the Arabic grammar method

According to the respondent, syntax and morphology are important to understand meaning:

“Emm sebab *syi'r* pun kalau nahu *sorof* pun penting juga sebab *nak* tahu maksud”
(R1: U121)
[“To understand poem, syntax and morphology are important”]
Among the elements of grammar given attention to:

*Identify actor (*fā'il*) for each verb (*fi'il*) and predicate to subject:*

“kalau macam dalam satu satu *bayt tu* kita tahu *fā'il* dengan *fi'ilnya*, mungkin lebih membantu kepada *nak* faham maksud” (R1: U59).

[“if in one *bayt* we know the *fā'il* and *fi'il*, maybe more helpful to understand meaning”]

“macam nahu *tu* kalau apa yang daripada segi *fā'il fi'il* dia...*mubtada'* *khobar* dia kan...” (R2: U37)

[“like grammar from the view of its *fā'il fi'il* ...its *mubtada'* *khobar* ...”]

Focus on verb to find the object affected with the verb:

“contoh, saya tengok perkataan *tomahtu ni* macam maksud berusaha... dari segi *fi'il*...jadi saya tengok *fi'il* dengan apa selepasnya...” (R2: U25)

[“for example, I look at this *tomahtu* word like it means putting in effort ... from the view of *fi'il*...so I look at *fi'il* with what is after it ...”]

The vowelization also plays a role:

“macam kalau *nak* tahu mana *fā'il fi'il*nya tengok barislah...” (R1: U57)

[“if want to know where is the *fā'il fi'il* look at the vowelization ...”]

Identify the role of the particle that has an effect on the meaning;

For example, ‘*lan*’ which means not forever:

“...emm mungkin juga kalau *lan* dia *tak* kan buat kan” (R1: U67)

[“...maybe if *lan* it wouldn’t be done ”]

Identify the pronoun:

“Aaa lagi satu tengok *dhomirlah*...*nak* tahu dia merujuk kepada siapa siapa kan...”

(R1: U79)

[“Another thing look at *dhomir* (pronoun)...to know who it is referring to ...”]

Translate to the Malay language

Among the cognitive strategies also used is translating to the Malay language, for example:

“...cubalah [terjemah] dari satu *bayt* ke satu *bayt* yang lain lah...” (R1: U71)

[“...try to [translate] from one *bayt* to another *bayt* ...”]

Break the poem down to smaller parts

There are respondents who divide the poem being read into several small parts, as stated below:

“Saya cuba faham dengan pecahkan jumlah *bayt*. Biasanya *bayt syi'r ni*, biasanya atas cakap lain... tengah cakap lain... bawah cakap lain. Jadi, saya cuba pecahkan dulu dan saya cuba faham ...contohnya dua tiga *bayt tu* menerangkan pasal dia... dua tiga *bayt* menerangkan pasal orang lain... dua tiga *bayt* pasal benda lain... *haa* biasa macam *tu*” (R3: U14)

[“I try to understand by breaking down the number of *bayt*. Usually for *bayt syi'r*, the top says one thing... the middle says another thing... the bottom says another thing. So, I try to break it down first and I try to understand ...for example two or three *bayt* explains about the person... two or three *bayt* explains about someone else... two or three *bayt* about other things... usually it is like that”]

Read Repeatedly

When having difficulty to understand, they will read it repeatedly, such as:

“...untuk sayalah, saya baca dalam 7 kali...faham tak faham suku kira tapi try baca dulu..” (R3: U30)
[“...for me, I read about 7 times ...whether I understand it or not, but I try to read it first..”]

Compensation Strategies

Respondents stated that ‘guessing’ or what is known as compensation strategies are the strategies used most often when there are those that say:

“Meneka ini biasa, selalu buatlah... selalu cuba teka untuk faham...” (R3: U 10)
[“Guessing is normal, do it often... always try to guess to understand ...”]

In fact, they also admitted that they would try their absolute best to guess during the interaction process with the poem text, per the statement as follows:

“saya cuba juga sedaya upaya untuk teka juga walaupun salah, tak pe...” (R2: U47)
[“I will also try my very best to guess even though it may be wrong it's alright ...”]

However, these strategies are used in various ways; among them:

Guess the meaning based on title

The title of the poem is the first thing that is relied upon when guessing:

“...aa tengok tajuk dulu...” (R1: U43)
[“...look at the title first ...”]

Guess based on the context of the sentence or the focus of the poem

Besides the title, the respondent also guesses based on the context of the sentence or the focus of the poem, when they state:

“saya banyak teka....teka tu saya nak pastikan dia betul atau tak, saya tengok *siaq* dia..tengok konteks.... yang saya teka saya ikut lebih kepada konteks lah” (R2: U31)
[“I guess a lotto know whether my guess is correct or not, I look at the *siaq* ..look at the context.... what I guess is more by the context”]

Guess the meaning based on the poet and the time period

For one of the respondents, the poet’s inclination and interest towards an aspect helps the respondent to guess the content of the text. This is stated as follows:

“sebab *nak* tahu kadang-kadang penulis *ni* dia lebih cenderung... setengah penulis cenderung kepada *madh*...ada setengah penulis cenderung kepada *hija'*...” (R1: U45)
[“because want to know sometimes the writer is more inclined ... some writers are inclined to *madh*...some writers are inclined to *hija'*...”]

There are respondents who try to understand the text based on the time period of the poet, such as:

“saya cuba gunakan masa bila *syi'r* ini dibuat, contohnya masa jahiliah kita tengok penyair *tu* bila kita kaitkan dengan zaman *tu*” (R3: U6)

[“I try to use the time when this *syi'r* was composed, for example during the time before Islam we see the poet when we relate to that period”]

Guess based on words in the same sentence which are already understood

The word in a sentence is also looked at when reading the Arabic poem, for example:

“tak semua perkataan kena faham.... kena tengok juga la..., sebenarnya benda benda yang sebelah sebelah dia *tu* membantu” (R2: U55)

[“not all words must be understood have to look at it.., actually the things beside it helps”]

“kalau tak faham satu kalimah saya tengok jumlah ayat. Contoh jumlah ayat tu perkaitan satu kalimah dengan kalimah sebelum atau kalimah selepas tu, dan saya try cuba teka” (R3: U4)

[“if I don't understand a phrase I look at the total of the sentence. An example total sentence is the connection between one phrase and the phrase before or phrase after it, and I try to guess”]

Guess based on the word in the text that has been understood

Respondents also used their understanding of a part of the word in the poem text to guess the meaning of other words which are not understood, as stated below:

“Saya cuba teka..., contoh kalau dalam teks ada perkataan *ayyamun*... dia menggunakan *ayyamun*... bermakna satu hari penuh... kemungkinanlah..., jadi saya teka satu hari *ni*... mungkin satu hari yang pernah dia lalui...” (R3: U20)

[“I try to guess ..., for example if in the text there is a word *ayyamun*... he uses *ayyamun*... means one whole day ... probably..., so I guess this one day ... maybe is one day that he went through ...”]

Guess based on the bayt before

They also guess based on the *bayt* before which has already been understood, such as:

“contoh *bayt* yang sebelum tu menerangkan tentang “*kā'ināt*” ...*haa bayt* lepas *tu tak* faham perkataan, jadi saya agak mungkin *nak* cakap tentang benda-benda disekelilingnya lah *kot*...” (R3: U28)

[“for example the *bayt* before it explained about “*kā'ināt*” ...then the *bayt* after that cannot understand the word, so I guess probably to talk about the things around it perhaps ...”]

Metacognitive Strategies

According to Oxford (1990), these strategies are closely connected to the planning before performing the reading activity and also the assessment after the activity is completed. The results of the analysis show that the respondents applied several of these strategies, such as:

Recite bismillah before understanding the bayt of the poem

The respondent admitted that it has become a habit to recite *bismillah* every time before reading literary text. It is done to make it easier for the respondent to understand it, as the respondent said:

mula dapat [teks], sebelum *nak* cari maksud lah... baca *bismillah* lah" (R1:
).
["... first get the [text], before looking for the meaning,... recite *bismillah*"]

Read more literary text

Respondents also stated the need to increase reading literary materials so as to increase the level of understanding, for example

"untuk masa akan datang untuk pemahaman...kalau untuk sastera ni lebih kepada macam yang saya rasalah... kena lebih kepada banyak membaca sastera ...sebab perkataan yang digunakan bukan perkataan yang biasa..dia *uslūb raqiy* kan..." (R2: U57)
["in the future for understanding ...if for literature it is more to, I feel, ... have to read a lot of literature ...because the words used are not the usual words..it is *uslūb raqiy* ..."]

A strong determination to understand

There are respondents with high determination to understand every poem text which are about to be read, as the following statement:

saya mesti baca untuk faham..." (R3: U30)
[“I must read to understand ...”]

Affective Strategies

Findings also show that the respondents use the affective strategies, which are the actions relating to the effort to calm oneself as well as raise the spirit when faced with difficulty in understanding. Among them:

Do not give up easily

Respondents have a high spirit and do not give up easily when faced with obstacles, for example:

"saya tambah berminat untuk mendalami sebab apa..saya dapati perkataan-perkataan yang saya *tak tahu*...jadi saya rasa lepas ni kena belajar lebih lagi lah untuk faham" (R2: U63)
[“I become more interested to delve further because.. I find the words that I do not know... so I feel that after this I must learn more to understand”]

Redha (to willingly and sincerely accept)

They also inculcate *redha* in their hearts when every effort performed meets with failure, for example:

"Kalau dah baca tak faham jugak redha jelah...tinggalkan *bayt* tu..." (R3: U28)
[“If have already read but still don't understand then just *redha*...leave the *bayt* ...”]

Social Strategies

These strategies are strongly linked to the process of communication with other individuals in the reading process. The results of the research show that the respondents use only one strategy, which is:

Refer to the teaching staff

They will refer to the teaching staff when they have the opportunity to do so; as stated as follows:

“Selalunya dalam kelas ada ustaz ustazah... *aa rujuk dengan ustaz ustazah lah...*”

(R1: U37)

[“Usually the Ustaz or Ustazah are in the class so refer to the Ustaz or Ustazah ...”]

Discussion

Based on the finding above, it clearly shows that the excellent students, when interacting with literary texts, tried their absolute best to understand them by using the six strategies explained earlier, namely memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensating strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies.

For the memory strategies, they tried to recall everything they learnt before and related them to the poems being read. Arabic culture was also used by them in their efforts to understand the poems. They also related the poems with words found in the *Quran* and the *hadith* as well as relating them to the knowledge of *nahu* and *balaghah*. Other efforts also taken were relating the *bayt*, which is difficult to understand with the one before and after.

As for cognitive strategies, the excellent students tried to understand the poems on an overall basis, then tried to understand the meaning of each word. This is because every word had implicit meanings. In addition, they tried to understand the key word in every *bayt*, and not just relying on literary knowledge such as relating the verses before and after. They analysed the meaning of the word by using the Arabic grammar method, such as identifying the actor, verb and object, pronoun and particle in every sentence. The line (*i’rab*) for every word was also used by them. Besides that, they also translated the poems into the language of their mother tongue. To make it easier for them to understand, the poems were broken down into smaller parts and read repeatedly.

For the compensation strategies, the excellent students tried to guess the words not understood either based on title, the poet and his period, context of the text and focus of the poems as well as relating them to words in the poems that had already been understood.

Whereas for the metacognitive strategies, the excellent students began by reciting *Basmalah* as the first step and saying *alhamdulillah* after finishing the reading. At the same time, they also put in efforts to increase readings of the literary texts given with strong determination.

For the affective strategies, the excellent students did not give up easily in their efforts to understand the contents of the poems and after that, efforts had been taken to the best of their abilities, they had *tawakkal* (trust in Allah). Finally, for the social strategies they referred to the teaching staff as the final step in order to understand the poems.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study found that the excellent students tried their best to use various strategies to understand the texts. They did not just use one strategy but combined several appropriate and effective strategies. All six strategies as highlighted by Oxford (1990) were

also used. They also used Islamic strategies, such as starting the reading of the text with the basmalah, saying alhamdulillah after finishing, which is in line with the respondents' background as Muslims. This is an added value to the theoretical framework used in the analysis. The respondents also tried to understand the texts by relating them based on their own life experiences. Despite having difficulties in understanding the texts, they displayed strong determination to understand and did not give up easily.

The use of the various strategies had helped the excellent students to increase their understanding when interacting with the Arabic poems. Therefore, the implications of this research on the teaching and learning of Arabic literature are; choosing a literary topic which is closer to the life experience of the students, relating the topic learnt with the experience they go through in their daily lives, and relating the topic being taught with other knowledge such as the knowledge of syntaxis, morphology and rhetoric by integrating all the knowledge so that the teaching and learning process is more effective. Other implications are; relating the words which are difficult to understand with the words in the *Quran* or even the *hadith* and avoiding the use of the traditional approach and to use a modern approach in line with current technological advances.

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