

## **Anas Hajar: International Students' Challenges, Strategies and Future Vision: A Socio-Dynamic Perspective**

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As the title denotes, the key objective of this book is to investigate the strategies used by international foreign language learners. Although there has been abundant research in this area, researchers are still concerned with language learning strategies and their use in different domains by national and international learners around the globe. The author dedicates time to exploring the participants' different language learning strategies processes in a foreign country. Anas Hajar's main interest is motivational issues in language learning and intercultural engagement. His work concentrates on the areas of language learning strategies from sociocultural perspectives, private supplementary tutoring, materials design, and higher education.

The book is based on a longitudinal study that is intended to explore the language learning strategies (hereafter LLSs) of eight Arab international postgraduate students in the UK. The publication is well organized, consisting of eight chapters in three sections. The first chapter is dedicated to provide background information about the eight participants. It also describes the four phases of collecting data, and it concludes with a short summary of the aim and the general outline of the book.

The second chapter tackles two major challenges in the field of language learning strategies. The first section discusses the long-standing problem of defining LLSs and outlines various points of views while defining LLSs in terms of consciousness, atomicity, and motivation. Different LLSs' conceptual systems are also presented according to three prominent authors in this field. For example, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classify LLSs into three categories which they call cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective. However, Oxford (1990) classifies LLSs into two main categories: direct and indirect strategies, which are further subdivided into six sub-categories. On the other hand, Dörnyei (2005) suggests a four-component classification which divides learning strategies into cognitive, metacognitive, social and affective strategies. The rest of Chapter 2 concentrates on the methodological nature of studying LLSs. Hajar concludes the chapter by highlighting some problems in the research methodology, including the major criticism related to the over-use of SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) questionnaire as the fundamental instrument of collecting data about LLSs.

The importance of the qualitative and context-sensitive approaches is examined thoroughly in Chapter 3 by discussing three major topics: the connection between LLSs and the qualities of good language learners (GLLs), the social impact on language learning, and the effect of the socio-dynamic perspective on LLSs. The characteristics of GLLs described by prominent

authors, such as Rubin and Stern (1975) and Griffiths (2018), are discussed in this chapter. These characteristics of successful language learners are outlined and compared with less successful ones. In addition, the author discusses the tendency shifting from the cognitive theory, which considers language learning as a mental process, to the socially-oriented model, which affirms the socio-cultural role in language learning. Hajar ends the chapter by exploring the socio-dynamic perspectives that take account of the complex interactions of the community, and furthermore, of the practices, identity, and motivations of the language learners.

In Chapter 4, Hajar focuses on the impact of social networks outside the classroom on the strategic language learning efforts. The results of the study underline the deep impact of the participants' background, motivation, and goals on LLSs. This chapter also stresses the importance of the sociocultural environment, and highlights the role of the household members, such as parents and siblings, in shaping the effort exerted in learning foreign languages, and in shaping the learners' future goals. As an example, the writer demonstrates the effect of the students' parents' religious and political beliefs on the participants' strategies use. In one case, one of the participants was not allowed to watch genuine English language films because the parents thought that these movies contained scenes that were not suitable for children. To follow, the writer demonstrates the valuable impact of out-of-class activities in broadening strategy development opportunities.

Chapter 5 compares the impact of formal mainstream schooling with informal education. The participants' language goals, the teaching methods, and peer interaction have an immense impact on the participants' LLSs. The writer describes the two kinds of strategies resulting from the two types of environments as compulsory and voluntary strategies. The assessment practices, especially summative assessment in the Arab world, show a deep impact on the LLSs use of the participants. Learners from the Arab world develop exam-oriented LLSs to pass the exams. The writer reports on the phenomenon of private tutoring that is found necessary to pass high-stake exams in English in the Arab world. The chapter is concluded by examining the near-peer model as a tool to enable students to voice their opinions in a foreign language in their daily lives.

Chapter 6 sheds light on the participants' experiences in learning English in an unfamiliar environment. The chapter reports on the strategies applied in the pre-session course that was taken by the eight participants when they started their MA programs in the UK. Their difficulties of learning English as a foreign language in the UK were shaped both by the learners' previous experiences and by their interaction with their peers in the UK. Their LLSs were affected by their previous experiences in their homelands. However, the shift in the mode of the assessment (from summative to formative) in their new learning environment resulted in a transfer of the strategies the eight participants applied. For example,

they reported using advanced writing strategies such as summarizing, paraphrasing and citing to do assignments after arriving in the UK.

Chapter 7 focuses on the participants' dynamic use of LLSs in the first and second semesters of their MA program. Social interactions with national and international peers shaped their way of using LLSs. For example, one participant reported that he started to use Mendeley Desktop to annotate PDFs after his Japanese friend recommended that. In addition, he also started to use new strategies such as grouping, note taking and highlighting after taking a course in academic writing while completing his MA program in the UK. It can be seen in this chapter that not only peers but also teachers and tutors have an impact on the LLSs use by encouraging students to use critical thinking and other strategies to enhance the students' academic writing skills. It is also found that the use of strategies is also affected by the students' goals, especially when the mode of assessment shifts. For instance, the participants began to use near copy strategies to avoid plagiarism in their assignments subsequent to attending a course in this area.

The last chapter in this book underscores the difficulties encountered by Arab students while conducting their MA dissertation in English. Moreover, it sheds light on their strategic learning efforts that are shaped by some social agents, such as supervisors and peers. While the chapter concentrates on the impact of the supervisors during formulating a dissertation topic with the supervisees, it demystifies the nature of the supervisor and supervisee relationship. On the other hand, it stresses the importance of time management and emphasizes the fact that an MA dissertation is an independent and self-directed work. The chapter is wrapped up with some recommendations to improve the quality of MA theses by adopting the dynamic assessment approach.

To summarize, this book offers a better understanding of the dynamic shift in the use of LLSs by international students in a foreign country. In addition, it sheds light on the challenges that await international students, especially Arab participants, while conducting a master program abroad. The strength of the book stems from combining the theoretical background with the empirical results of an in-depth longitudinal study. It highlights the impact of the sociocultural factors surrounding international postgraduates, which can affect their decision making while using different strategies to conduct an English master program to obtain an MA degree.

## References

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