

## **Exploring the Connection between Out-of-class Language Learning Strategies and In-class Activities**

**Noor Saazai Binti Mat Saad**

Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Malaysia

**Melor Binti Md. Yunus**

**Mohamed Amin Bin Embi**

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

### **Abstract**

Out-of-class language learning strategies (OCLLSs) are strategies taken to ease language learning. These strategies are performed outside of formal language classroom, but seldom connected to in-class activities. Thus, this study aims at exploring the connection between OCLLSs and in-class activities. It was done through a qualitative lens by employing document analysis and interviews as data collection methods. Data were gathered from nine student participants who were international students and three lecturers. The former had to complete a 10-week online posting activity and they were interviewed. The latter were only interviewed. The data reveal four findings to answer the research question of 'How are OCLLSs and in-class activities connected'. First, the assessments boost the employment of OCLLSs. Second, the formative nature of the assessments is the feature that makes assessment as an impetus of OCLLSs among the participants. Third, the use of strategy chain or strategy cluster in tackling the assessments. Lastly, the international students employ the 'integration' strategy in their acculturation of OCLLSs in their English language learning in Malaysia. The four findings prove that there is a connection between OCLLSs and in-class activities.

**Keywords:** acculturation strategy, English language learning, international students, out-of-class language learning strategies (OCLLSs)

\* Corresponding author.

Email address: [nmatsaad@gmail.com](mailto:nmatsaad@gmail.com)

## INTRODUCTION

Language learning strategies (LLSs) are defined as actions done specifically by learners to ease the learning of their target language (Oxford, 1990). A good strategy can expedite successful learning of the language (Bialystok, 1981; Gu, 2010; Kamarul Shukri et al., 2009; O'Malley et al., 1985; Oxford, 1990). In Malaysia, the field of LLSs has been ventured rather extensively with research done on primary (Manprit & Mohamed Amin, 2011), secondary (Punithavalli, 2003), and tertiary students (Kashefian-Naeeni, 2011; Mohd. Zaki, 2011). Most of the studies utilised Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) invented by Oxford (1990) and Strategy Questionnaire (SQ) designed by Mohamed Amin (2000).

One of the aspects of LLSs is out-of-class language learning strategies where learners employ strategies to learn language out of the formal classroom setting. Out-of-class strategies (OCLLSs) include watching movies, listening to radio, reading story books, and writing letters in the target language. The activities or strategies related to out-of-class language learning are conducted outside of the formal classroom and thus, discussions on OCLLSs are usually divorced from in-class activities. This paper looks at the findings that emerge from the amalgamation of the areas of OCLLSs and in-class activities. It puts forth the elements in the OCLLSs that are affected by in-class activities. The elements are employment of OCLLSs, strategy cluster or chain, and integration strategy (acculturation strategy).

This study centres on the English language learning out of class of a group of international students who had to undertake the English language proficiency class (ELPC henceforth) for one semester. This might be seen as a limitation as the data came from only a group of students and the duration of the study only last for one semester. Nevertheless, since the methods used would be document analysis and triangulated by interviews, the issue at hand would be deeply investigated where the participants had to do online postings twice a week for ten weeks, and they would be interviewed twice over the data collection period.

ELPC would be conducted three hours daily covering three modules; Oral communication, Reading, and Writing. One three-hour class would be for the former two, and two three-hour classes for the latter. At the end of ELPC, the students would pass all the three modules. Considering the limited hours spent in class, it would be worth pondering upon how these students equipped themselves with the English language outside of the formal classroom setting, in relation to the learning that occurred in class.

This paper comprises the methodology, the participants, the findings and discussion, and the summary and conclusion sections. However, there is a need to first look into the academic discussions on the main area at hand; thus, the literature review on OCLLSs is first presented.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The body of literature on LLSs has been vast and varied. However, studies done on OCLLSs are rather limited. One of the first and highly-cited journal articles on OCLLSs was published by Nigel Pickard in 1996. He wrote about the OCLLSs employed by 20 German students studying English in their own country. The participants answered a questionnaire, and they were interviewed on what they did to learn English when they were out of formal classroom setting. The findings showed that they preferred reading and speaking activities. Other studies were done by Pearson (2004), Hyland (2004), Bunts-Anderson (2004), Mukundan et al. (2009), Ihsan (2012) and Eksi and Aydan (2013). Similar to Pickard's (1996) study, all studies except for Mukundan et al.'s (2009) discussed the OCLLSs that included all skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These studies show that students prefer receptive skills where they choose to perform listening and reading activities as strategies done out of their classroom to make them better at the target language. Mukundan et al. (2009) on the other hand only focused on reading materials preferred by learners learning two different target languages.

In terms of the connection between OCLLSs and in-class activities, none of the studies mentioned earlier have made a direct connection among the use of textbooks, interaction in class, and practice of assessments. Pickard's (1996) and some of the earlier mentioned studies only stated teachers as making the connection between the OCLLSs and in-class activities. Pickard (1996) highlighted that the learners in his study performed activities that interested them but not what the teachers had advised them to do. In a similar light, the participants in a study by Eksi and Aydan (2013) attested that they had followed their teacher's direction in carrying out activities after the class time was over.

In the extant literature on OCLLSs, the participants involved were mostly second/foreign language learners studying the target-language in their own country. For example, the scholars investigated Germans learning English in Germany (Pickard, 1996) and Indonesians learning English in Indonesia. Nevertheless, the participants in Pearson's (2004) study were Mainland Chinese studying in New Zealand. They were similar to those in this study in the sense that the participants are international students.

This paper proposes to delineate the findings of the connection between the in-class activities and the employment of OCLLSs among the international students in an institution in Malaysia.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

The purpose of the study is to explore the connection between OCLLSs that are employed by the international students in an institution in Malaysia and their in-class activities. In achieving the purpose, a specific objective is generated that is then fulfilled by answering the corresponding research question (RQ) as seen in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Research objective and research question

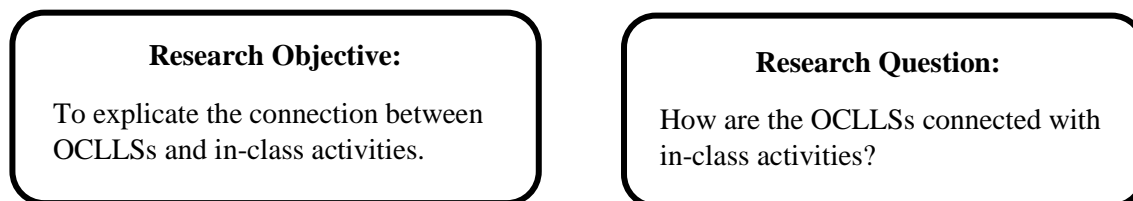


Figure 1 displays the research objective and its corresponding research question. The OCLLSs here refer to the strategies taken by the international students outside of their formal English language class or specifically known as English Language Proficiency Course (ELPC) in learning English in an institution in Malaysia. The in-class activities here refer to the actions related to the ELPC that these international students were undergoing in the time of the study.

This study recruited nine student participants and their three lecturers. Although a case study usually involves less than ten participants (Creswell, 2012), its meaningfulness lies in the in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. The methods used in doing so are explained in the next section.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

With the purpose of exploring and explicating the connection between OCLLSs and in-class activities, and also with the research question that begins with 'how', the best approach for this study is through the qualitative lens. The data collection methods included document analysis and interviews. As for the former, the documents were the participants' online postings on Google+ and pro-formas of the modules in ELPC. For the latter, the interviews involved two sets of participants – student participants and their lecturers for the three modules in ELPC. The online postings on Google+ ran for ten weeks and the participants posted their entries twice weekly. Elaboration on the online postings activity on Google+ has been reported elsewhere (for example Noor Saazai et al., 2014). The information from the online postings developed the protocol for the interviews that were

conducted twice with the student participants – at the beginning of the semester and at the end of it. The areas covered in both interviews are shown in the Appendix. The data were also triangulated with the information from the interviews with the lecturers. The data were analyzed following the six-step thematic analysis detailed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The data analysis was managed by utilising ATLAS.ti, a piece of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS).

## The Participants

As mentioned, there were two sets of participants. The first set consisted of nine international students undergoing ELPC in an institution in Malaysia, while the second set comprised all the lecturers involved in teaching the three modules in ELPC. The student participants were from seven different countries: Iraq (3), Iran (1), Bahrain (1), Indonesia (1), Libya (1), Algeria (1), and Palestine (1). They were here to pursue their postgraduate degrees majoring in sciences (5 participants) and social sciences (3 participants). All except for two stayed off campus. Detailed information can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*The student participants*

Pseudonym/ Gender (M – male; F – female)	Country of Origin	Age	Faculty	Level of Education	Place of stay/ Marital Status (m–married; s – single)	Results for ELPC (Oral-Rdg-Wtg)
Basri / M	Algeria	38	Islamic	PhD	Gombak/ m	5-3-4
FatinMalik / F	Iraq	39	Mathematics	PhD	Kajang / m	5-4-4
Faizah / F	Indonesia	25	Islamic	PhD	Kajang / s	4-3-4
Fairus / F	Libya	27	Computer	Master	Kajang / m	5-5-4
Imran / M	Palestine	24	Islamic	Master	Kajang / s	4-4-3
Mohsin / M	Iran	23	Computer	Master	Serdang / s	4-5-4
Nabil / M	Bahrain	22	Computer	Master	Za'ba / s	5-4-4
Faizal / M	Iraq	23	Engineering	Master	Za'ba / s	5-5-4
ShamsulWahab/ M	Iraq	32	Engineering	PhD	Serdang / m	5-5-4

Table 1 displays the pseudonyms given to the participants as to retain anonymity. It also includes the participants' home countries, ages, levels of study and faculties. Other information includes their residence in Malaysia, their marital status, and also the results of ELPC according to the three modules.

The second set of the participants was the three lecturers who taught the student participants. They were the lecturers for the three modules in ELPC. All of them were Malaysians. Although their teaching experience exceeded 20 years, two of them (Dr. Saleh and Dr. Farah) have had only a few years of experience teaching international students, and one of them (Dr. Kaseh) had only taught international students for one semester. All names are pseudonyms.

## Research Site

This study looks into the international students' OCLLSs and their connection to in-class activities. Thus, it is of paramount importance to look at the class that the nine student participants attended. The class referred to the English Language Proficiency Course (ELPC). International students who did not meet the English Language Requirement set by the university had to attend ELPC where there were three modules. Dr Farah was teaching the Reading Module, Dr. Saleh was in-charge of the Writing Module, whereas Dr. Kaseh taught the Oral Communication Module. The Reading and Oral Communication Modules were conducted two hours per week while the Writing Module was for four hours weekly. Each course had its own pro-forma that outlined its learning objectives, weekly lesson plans, and set of assessments. Passing ELPC was compulsory for the international students to graduate from the institution and pursue their postgraduate studies in it.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Our research question is ‘How are the OCLLSs connected to in-class activities’. Adhering to the tenets of a qualitative research approach, the data analysis was done concurrently with the data collection (Merriam, 2009; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Thus, the data gathered were comprehensive as one inquiry led to another. Consequently, the stipulated singular research question gave rise to four main findings. They concern firstly, the in-class activity that boosts the employment of OCLLSs, and secondly, the nature of that in-class activity; next, the pattern of the OCLLSs employed in relation to the in-class activity, and lastly, the acculturation strategy in terms of the employed OCLLSs in participants’ home countries and in Malaysia. Each finding is discussed and made clear by attaching relevant data extracts from the online postings, pro formas, and interviews. The online postings are indicated as (Basri, op) - Basri is the pseudonym, ‘op’ refers to online posting. Each finding is deliberated alongside the related discussion.

### Finding 1: Assessments Boost the Employment of OCLLSs

Based on the online postings and interviews with the nine student participants, it was discovered that the in-class activity which boosted the employment of OCLLSs was the assessment. In other words, the participants used OCLLSs to handle the assessments in all the three modules. This is depicted in Table 2. .

Table 2 also includes the corresponding number of times that each OCLLS is reported in the student participants’ interviews and online postings.

**Table 2**

*Modules in ELPC and OCLLSs*

<b>READING MODULE</b>	<b>WRITING MODULE</b>	<b>ORAL COMMUNICATION MODULE</b>
<b>Doing revision – 2</b> Discussing – 1 <b>Doing homework – 5</b> Matching - 1	Translating – 6 Translating and checking – 1 Choosing own words – 3 Doing corrections – 4 Being corrected – 6 Searching for points – 3 Finding meanings – 2 Rephrasing – 2 Getting help – 1 Keeping Vocabulary – 1 <b>Following a template – 14</b> <b>Seeking opportunity to write - 13</b>	Choosing own words – 1 Practising speaking – 4 Translating – 3 Reading aloud – 1 Practising speaking (outline) - 4 Rephrasing – 4 Memorizing – 1 <b>Doing mental picture – 5</b> <b>Writing up – 5</b> <b>Searching for points – 10</b>
<b>4 types of OCLLSs</b> <b>9 reported cases of OCLLSs</b>	<b>12 types of OCLLSs</b> <b>55 reported cases of OCLLSs</b>	<b>10 types of OCLLSs</b> <b>39 reported cases of OCLLSs</b>

Table 2 has three columns for the three modules in ELPC. Almost all of the reported OCLLSs are connected to both their preparation to do tests/quizzes and oral presentations, and also completion of their assignments. The Writing Module indicates the highest number (12) of various strategies used, whereas the Reading Module has the least (4). As for the number of reported OCLLSs, Writing, Oral Communication and Reading Modules list 55, 39 and 9 cases respectively. The two highest reported OCLLSs by the participants for each module are highlighted in Table 2. They again strengthen the link between OCLLSs and the assessments that the participants had to do for each module. This finding provides additional insights to the existing literature. As mentioned earlier, research that

touches on the connection between these two entities has highlighted only on the role of the teachers in advising learners to perform out-of-class activities (for example Eksi & Aydan, 2013). Thus, the first finding of assessments being the impetus for boosting the employment of OCLLSs provides concrete empirical evidence of the connection between OCLLSs and in-class activities.

Although the connection between the use of OCLLSs and assessments has been established, there are differences in the variety and reported cases of OCLLSs as displayed in Table 2. Hence, there is a need to look into the nature of the assessments that can better boost the employment of OCLLSs.

### **Finding 2: Formative Assessments Boost the Employment of OCLLSs Better**

The assessments for the Reading Module were tests and quizzes while for the Writing and Oral Communication Modules, the assessments were assignments and oral presentations. Naturally the tests and quizzes were conducted in class whereas the assignments and the preparation for oral presentations were done outside of class. This might be the main justification for the difference in the variety and the number of reported OCLLSs made: the Reading Module shows the least number in both areas as the assessments were all tests and quizzes. Triangulating the data gathered from the student participants with the interviews conducted with the lecturers and the pro-forma for each module, it is highlighted that all the assessments were formative in nature. Table 3 elucidates the type of assessments with their weighting for each module.

**Table 3**

*Assessments and their weighting for each module*

Module	Type of Assessment	Weighting (%)
Reading Module	Assessment 1 (main ideas)	15%
	Assessment 2 (outline)	15%
	Assessment 3 (mock test)	30%
	Final test 4	40%
Writing Module	Paragraph Writing I	20%
	Paragraph Writing II	20%
	Essay Writing	20%
	Online postings	10%
	Proposal Writing	30%
Oral Communication Module	Reading Aloud	10%
	Group Discussion	20%
	Informative Presentation	30%
	Informative Speech Product	20%
	Impromptu Speech	20%

For the Reading Module, Assessments 1 and 2 are like quizzes where they test specific skills such as finding main ideas and outlining. However, Assessment 3 is a mock for Final Test 4. This gave the students a chance to do revision and practice; hence the highest two reported the strategies of 'doing revision' and 'doing homework'. Both are highlighted in Table 3. In fact, 'doing homework' is actually revising as described by Shamsul Wahab in the interview:

**Interviewer :** *You do exercise*

**Interviewee :** *Yeah, some exercises and examples about this test. Sometimes the teacher give me somewhere exercise to do*

**Do at home**

*Yeah. Near the test.*

**I see. Same idea. Same style**

*Yeah. Same style, this test and this exercise same*

**You do it at home as homework**

*Yes.*

(ShamsulWahab, int)

For the Writing Module, Paragraph Writing I was a one-paragraph writing while Paragraph Writing II was a two-paragraph writing. The former was done in class but the latter was done as take-home assignments. This gave them opportunities to apply OCLLSs. However, no strategy was linked directly to the two assignments. On the other hand, a few strategies spun from the online postings activity throughout the semester. Every week they had to do two tasks - responding to the topic posted, and writing their weekly reflections on their English Language Learning Experiences. Since this activity was done on Google+ with the similar features of Facebook, participants were free to 'like' and make comments on their friends' postings. Hence the OCLLS of 'seeking opportunity to write', as penned by Fatinmalik, leads to the advantage that "*we enjoyed when we write online and share our friends in English group their opinions and ideas about the subjects*" (Fatinmalik, op).

The biggest portion of the assessment for writing is Proposal Writing. It was a process writing where they had to send out the drafts before the final submission. This opened up opportunities for the participants to utilize the OCLLSs like 'being corrected' and 'doing corrections'; as found in "*then I give this draft to Dr. for corrections then I correct the assignment and write the final copy*" (Shamsul Wahab, op). In fact, the OCLLS of 'following a template' is an idiosyncrasy of Proposal Writing. The writing lecturer admitted that he gave "*them template to follow*" (Dr. Salleh, int).

As for the Oral Communication module, there are five assessments as shown in Table 3. Dr. Kaseh, the lecturer for the module, allowed time for preparation for all (Dr. Kaseh, int). This gave the participants a chance to 'search for points', 'write the points', and 'do a mental picture' in preparing and practicing for the oral presentations. Below are data extracts of the main reported in OCLLSs.

*I read several articles online about each topic for collecting information*  
(Fairus, op)

*On the subject of talk in a general topic, I put in each subject the main points and I write a small paragraph on the topic I have selected* (Nabil, int)

*[W]hen I want to prepare I imagine my self out side and I try to talk about that topic* (Faizal, op).

All in all, it is axiomatic that only take-home work will open opportunities for the employment of OCLLSs by the participants. That is why there are more reported cases and varieties for the Writing and Oral Communication Modules compared to the Reading Module. Besides, the nature of the assignments given also plays a role in promoting OCLLSs among the participants. This is evident in the Writing Module where the assignments required different ways of completing them. There were online postings activities that involved not only the participants' own postings but also opportunities for them to respond to their friends' postings. Moreover, writing a proposal required the participants to produce drafts. When the draft was submitted, marked and then returned to the participants, they had to do corrections before the final submission.

Scrutinising the OCLLSs attached to the Writing and Oral Communication Modules, it can be seen that there is a pattern in the reported strategies. This leads to the next finding.

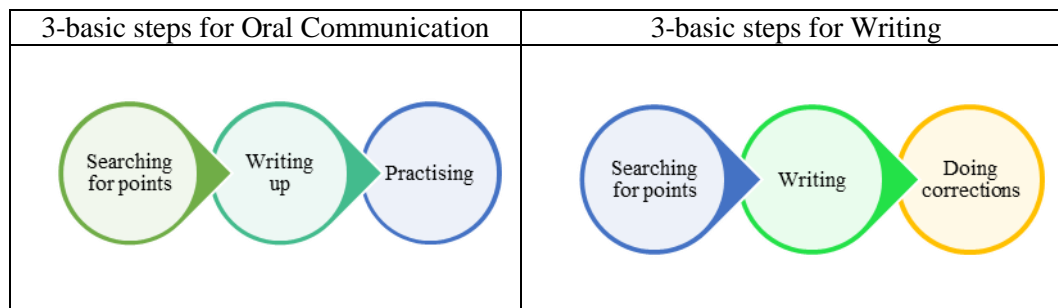
### **Finding 3: Strategy Chain or Strategy Cluster**

The patterns of OCLLSs that were employed in only the Writing and Oral Communication modules were determined because their assessments were in the form of assignments where participants had to prepare and complete them out of class. For the Reading module, however, the OCLLSs utilized were minimum due to the nature of the assessments which was test-based, and thus dropped from this discussion. The OCLLSs reported by the participants in the Writing and Oral Communication Modules revealed two observations: first - a pattern of main OCLLSs in three-basic steps, and second – variations in how the three steps were performed.

Firstly, the data indicated that the participants followed the same basic steps in their strategies employed in each of the two modules. Figure 2 shows the basic steps in each module.

Figure 2 shows that for the Oral Communication Module where the assessments were oral presentations, there were three basic steps that were observable. Participants searched for points to be used in their oral presentations, wrote them down, and then practiced them. As for writing, there were likewise three basic steps – searching for points, writing, and correcting the work.

**Figure 2.** Basic steps for Oral Communication and Writing



The 3-basic steps in Oral Communication and Writing are strategies that proceed in sequence. This orchestrated sequence was termed by Oxford (2011) and Macaro (2004; 2006) as the strategy chain and strategy cluster respectively. Both terms denote a repertoire of language learning strategies taken concurrently or in sequence to complete a language task. The task here refers to the preparation for oral presentations and also the completion of written assignments. Macaro (2006) cited studies discussing strategy clusters on tasks like listening by Laviosa, reading by Graham, and dictionary skills by Neubach and Cohen. When strategies are synchronized well, the outcome will be good. This is evident in the accumulated marks for the participants’ final results for the course as portrayed in Table 1. Everybody passed the English Language Proficiency Course. The overall score for all modules ranges from band 1 – 5 with 5 being the highest. The passing band is 3 for Islamic Studies whereas for others, it is band 4.

Secondly, although almost all participants reported following the same three steps or utilizing the strategy chain or cluster, there were variations in the way each step was done. Figure 3 illustrates the variations.

**Figure 3.** Strategy chain/cluster with variations

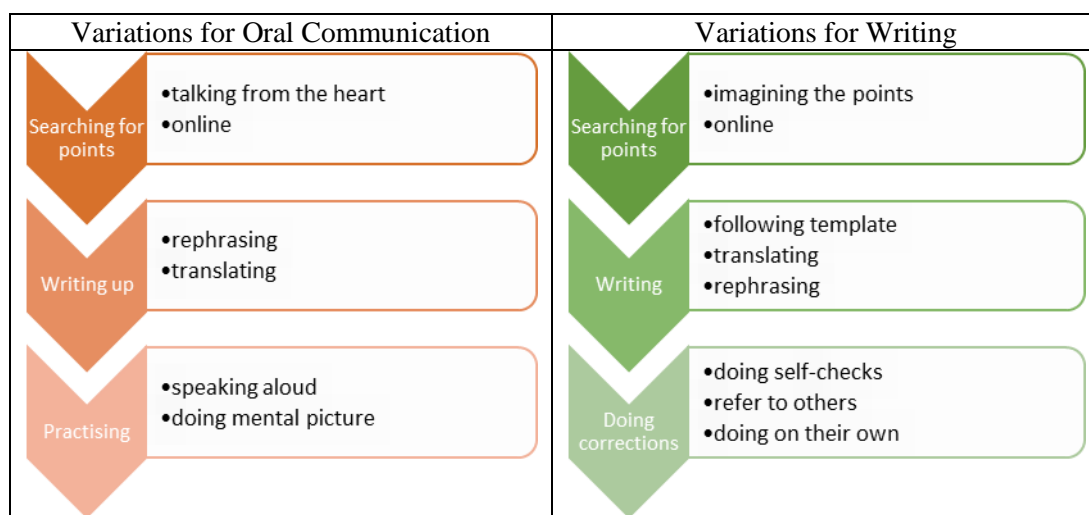


Figure 3 shows the variations to the strategy cluster or chain for both the Oral Communication and Writing Modules. On the whole, it can be seen that there are similarities between the two modules in



one main strategy and a few variations. In tackling the assignments for both modules, the participants searched for points. Besides that, the employment of imagination and think-aloud suggests that the participants used their own experience and relied on their existing level of proficiency to tackle the easier parts of the assessments. Nonetheless, these strategies were utilized only when tackling the simpler assignments where the topics were general, for example talking about a friend or writing about their reasons for choosing to study at an institution. Another strategy found in both modules was rephrasing. It originated from two reasons. Firstly, it was to avoid plagiarism as mentioned by Fairus (interview); secondly, it was to ensure that the words used were familiar to them too (Imran, op).

For the Oral Communication Module, the first step, instead of searching for points online like many of his friends did (for instance Fairus, Nabil, Shamsulwahab, and Fatinmalik), Faizal just “*talk[ed] from [his] heart*” (Faizal, int), he did not need to search for ideas for a topic like ‘My friend’. In the second step, the participants put down the points for their oral presentations. Most participants reported that the notes were in outline or point form (Basri, int; Faizal, int; Shamsulwahab, op; Mohsin, int), but Nabil (int) wrote to the full. Basri explained why he did so:

*I just clutch the paper and I want to find the word. But if I let it open, just notes, no problem. I can talk. No problem. So I use it in English. If I write it becomes hard for me because I try to find word...if I lost... cannot find word.... I stop and I will lose everything. But if just point notes, I talk one point, finish, I go to next point.*

(Basri, int)

In writing up the speech for oral presentations, whether to the full or in point form, some participants rephrased (Fairus, op; Faizal, int; Imran,op). Imran, for example, was “*trying to use easy words*” (Imran, op). Another OCLLS applied here was translation from their mother-tongues (Basri, op; Fairus, int; Faizah, int). As for the last step before the presentation itself, participants should ‘*practice, practice, practice*’ (int\_Dr. Kaseh). Shamsulwahab and Faizah actually echoed this in their interviews. Besides practicing, Shamsulwahab also believed in memorizing the points (Shamsulwahab,int). On the whole, participants practiced in many ways – some actually practiced out aloud usually to his or her own self but some did a mental picture of what to present. Both are illustrated in the interviews with Faizah and Fairus:

***After that to present, what do you do?***

*To present, I need to practise, practise*

***How?***

*Out aloud in the room*

***Anyone there?***

*No. Alone.* (Faizah, int)

*When I know just I try to think about what I should what I will say, just that*

(Fairus, int)

Similar to the Oral Communication Module, there were also variations to the basic three-step OCLLSs in the Writing Module. In step one where most participants searched for the points for their online writing, Faizal deviated again. He actually imagined what the lecturer wanted:

*Like what he wants like ‘why you take the university’, for example it is big. So I know he wants us to describe place or something like this.* (Faizal, int)

This was applied to simpler assignments like paragraph and essay writing. With the points in hand, they moved on to write; they adhered to the structure that they were taught like “*4 paragraphs consisting of the intro, body then concluding paragraph*” (Dr.Salleh, int). As for the writing of the proposal, “*I write a proposal based on the model which is given to use by Dr*” (Mohsin, op). In writing, they also rephrased and translated their work. Rephrasing aimed to avoid plagiarism as expressed by Faizal in the interview:

*I must read it online and understand because they say don’t copy paste*

***No plagiarism***

*So, must understand and to write it in your language* (Faizal, int)

In contradiction to the norm where “[i]f I want to use some word, but I don’t know in English I will go to Google translate” (Faizal, int), translation was also conducted in a different manner as admitted by Fatinmalik:

*So you translate only after you finish, to see whether it is the same meaning or not?*  
*Yeah.* (Fatinmalik, int)

Completing Proposal Writing could be very easy for the participants especially PhD students who have “an existing proposal that they submitted to gain enrolment into [the institution]” (Dr. Salleh, int) because they could just fit it into the template, as FatinMalik and ShamsulWahab admitted in their interviews. Both of them were from the Sciences. However, the other two PhD candidates (Basri and Faizah) who were from the Islamic Studies actually had another step to do. They had to do translation as confessed by Basri:

*You just translated what you did for your Phd proposal?*  
*Yeah. Honest. I just translated* (Basri, int)

The last strategy in the chain for writing is correction. This strategy is in line with the nature of the written assignments where the participants had to submit drafts. Most participants just handed in the drafts to Dr Salleh, but Shamsulwahab actually checked his own drafts “about two or three times before I [gave] to teacher” (Shamsulwahab, int). Dr Salleh, the Writing lecturer, would mark their papers and make comments on them so that the participants could revise their work before the final submission. They reported that the types of corrections that they had to do for their proposals were in terms of arrangement of points and typing errors (Faizal, int) and grammar (Mohsin, int). Based on the comments given by Dr. Salleh, some amended the works themselves while Fairus actually referred to her ‘senior’s work’ (Fairus, int) so as to understand her mistakes and then make the necessary amendments.

To encapsulate it, the Oral Communication and Writing Modules have proposed a three-basic step or strategy chain/cluster. Although the three steps have been clearly stated, there were actually variations to the way that the main strategy was used. The notion of variation sparked the next finding concerning the comparison between the OCLLSs that the participants employed in their home countries and in Malaysia.

**Finding 4: Integration Strategy**

One of the interview questions was about their OCLLSs in their home countries. Comparing them yielded an interesting outcome. Table 4 provides the comparison.

**Table 4**  
*Comparison between OCLLSs in participants’ own home countries and in Malaysia*

Reported OCLLSs in participants’ own home countries	Reported OCLLSs in Malaysia (taken from Table 2)
Types of OCLLSs: <b>7 types</b> Cases reported: <b>10 reported cases</b>	Types of OCLLS : Reading (4) + Oral Communication (10) + Writing (12) = <b>26 types of OCLLSs</b> Cases reported : Reading (9) + Oral Communication (39) + Writing (55) = <b>103 cases of OCLLSs reported</b>

Table 4 is divided into 2 columns to show the differences between the reported OCLLSs in their own countries and in Malaysia. As seen, in their own countries, they reported using only 7 types of OCLLSs, while in Malaysia, they already employed 26 types. In terms of the number of reported

OCLLS in their own countries, they only reported 10 cases whereas in Malaysia, the number exceeded 100.

This phenomenon suggests that the international students (ISs) had in a way adapted or adjusted to the academic culture in Malaysia, at least in terms of using OCLLSs in their English language learning. This is evident in the high number of OCLLSs types and reported cases in Malaysia as compared to participants' own home countries.

In the issue of the adaptation or adjustment of ISs in a foreign country, the discussion is usually steered towards acculturation. Acculturation is defined as "socio-cultural adjustment and acquisition of dominant cultural norms by members of a non-dominant group" (Gul & Kolb, 2009, p.1). In layman's term, it is the process of ISs adapting to the life in Malaysia. The 'non-dominant group' points to the ISs while the 'dominant cultural norms' refers to the life in Malaysia. Thus, in relation to this study, it is the process of ISs adapting to the English language learning in Malaysia with the focus on their employment of OCLLSs.

Therefore, to determine the acculturation strategy that the participants in this study used, Berry's (1997; 2005) Acculturation Strategies can be adopted. He put forth four acculturation strategies to explain how ISs adapt to their new surroundings - Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalisation. The strategies are based on the idea of maintenance and rejection of the old and new culture/habits. Integration, as the name goes, refers to the preservation of the old culture/habits and the infusion of the new ones. In contrast with Integration is Marginalisation where both old and new culture/habits are boycotted. Assimilation, on the other hand, is rejecting old culture/habits but emphasizing new ones, while Separation is preserving old culture/habits but downplaying new ones. In the case of this study, the culture/habits refers to the ISS' OCLLSs.

In order to determine the acculturation of the set of participants in the study, there is a need to look into the list of OCLLSs reported in their home countries and in Malaysia. Table 5 has the data.

Table 5 shows the list of OCLLSs reported by participants in their home countries and also in Malaysia. The OCLLSs in bold are the shared strategies in both places. Hence, referring to Berry's (1997; 2005) acculturation strategies, as a group, the participants in this study used Integration as a strategy in their acculturation towards the different environment for English language learning focusing on OCLLSs. Employing the integration strategy in terms of the employment of OCLLSs, it can be explained that the participants in this study retained some of their old OCLLSs and also embraced new ones when they came to Malaysia.

**Table 5**

*OCLLSs reported in home country and Malaysia*

OCLLSs in participants' home countries	OCLLSs reported in Malaysia
<b>Do repetition- practise, seek help to learn – do correction,</b> seek opportunities to listen and watch, seek opportunities to speak with people, seek opportunities to be in an English-speaking area, <b>do translation</b> and attend tuition	Doing revision, Discussing, Doing homework, Matching, <b>Translating</b> , Translating and checking, Choosing own words, <b>Doing corrections</b> , Being corrected, Searching for points, Finding meanings, Rephrasing, <b>Getting help</b> , Keeping Vocabulary, Following a template, Seeking opportunity to write, Choosing own words, Practising speaking, Reading aloud, Practising speaking (outline), Rephrasing, Memorizing, Doing mental picture, Writing up, Searching for points

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper reported four findings from one research question. The research question addressed the explication of the connection between OCLLSs and in-class activities. It yielded four related arguments. Firstly, assessments are the entity that can be utilized to boost the employment of OCLLSs. Consequently, there is a need to look at the features of the assessments; this provides the second point that formative assessments can boost OCLLSs more effectively. The third idea is built on the overall pattern found in the OCLLSs employed. This can build the strategy chain or cluster. There may be variations to the chain or cluster, however. Since the participants in this study were international students, the last finding is very significant. It shows the acculturation strategy of these participants in the employment of their OCLLSs as reported in their home country and in Malaysia. Students may use the integration strategy through which they retain the old OCLLSs and meanwhile they embrace new ones.

In conclusion, as advocated by the proponents of Language Learning Strategies (LLSs), a good strategy can ease language learning. Thus, employing OCLLSs in learning a language may expedite language attainment. Although the discussions on OCLLSs are usually considered to be unrelated to in-class activities, the four key findings from this paper have proven that OCLLSs are actually connected to in-class activities.

Although the participants in this study were international students, the findings for this study can give insights to other students and teachers of English language. In line with the conclusion that there is connection between OCLLSs and in-class activities, the main implication is for language instructors or teachers to design a language course that encompasses assessments that are formative and variable in nature. This will encourage the employment of OCLLSs and thus concomitantly, enhance language attainment. Furthermore, with the exposition of OCLLSs, especially the utilization of strategy chain and cluster, students are able to learn more about orchestrating the strategies to make English language learning more efficient and productive.

## REFERENCES

- Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46(1): 5-34.
- Berry, J. W. (2005). Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 29, 697-712.
- Bialystok, E. (1981). The role of conscious strategies in second language proficiency. *Modern Language Journal*, 65, 255-262.
- Bloomberg, L.D., & Volpe, M. (2008). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap from beginning to end*. California: Sage Publications.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Bunts-Anderson, K. (2004). *Teachers' conceptions of language learning: Out-of-class interactions*. Paper presented at the Independent Learning Conference 2003, Melbourne, Australia.
- Creswell, J. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Eksi, G., & Aydin, H. (2013). What are the students doing 'out' there? An investigation of out-of-class language learning activities. *AIBU Journal of Social Sciences*, 13(2).
- Gu, Y. (2010). *Advance review: A book on teaching and researching language learning strategies*. Wellington, New Zealand: Wellington University.
- Gul, V., & Kolb, S. (2009). Acculturation, bicultural identity and psychiatric morbidity in young Turkish patients in Germany. *Turkish Journal of Psychiatry*, 1-7.
- Hyland, F. (2004). Learning autonomously: Contextualising out-of-class English language learning. *Language Awareness*, 13(3), 180-202.

- Ihsan, I. (2012). *Out-of-class language learning activities and students' L2 achievement: A case study of Indonesian students in a senior high school Bandung, Indonesia*. (Master project paper). International Islamic University of Malaysia.
- Kamarul Shukri, Mohamed Amin, Nik Mohd Rahimi, & Zamri. (2009). Language learning strategies and motivation among religious secondary school students. *The International Journal of Language Society and Culture*, (29), 71-79.
- Kashefian-Naeeni, S., Nooreiny, M., & Hadi, S. (2011). *Malaysian ESL learners' use of language learning strategies*. Paper presented at the 2011 International Conference on Humanities, Society and Culture, Singapore.
- Macaro, E. (2004). *Fourteen features of a language learner strategy*. Working paper no.4.
- Macaro, E. (2006). Strategies for language learning and for language use: Revising the theoretical framework. *The Modern Language Journal*, 90(3), 320-337.
- Manprit, K., & Mohamed Amin, E. (2011). Language learning strategies employed by primary school students. *European Journal of Educational Studies*, 3(3), 473-479.
- Merriam, S.B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mohd Zaki M. A. (2011). *Development and evaluation of a learning-to-learn English module for EFL learners* (Master's thesis). Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Mohamed Amin Embi (2000). *Language learning strategies: A Malaysian context*. Bangi: Fakulti Pendidikan.
- Mukundan, J., Laleh., & Pearson, N. (2009). Exploring the language learning materials used out-of-class by Malaysian TESL students and students of TBFL. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 5(1), 40-56.
- Noor Saazai Mat Saad, Melor Md Yunus, Mohamed Amin Embi, & Mohamad Subakir Yasin. (2014). Conducting online posting activity on a social networking site (SNS) to replace traditional learner diaries. In O. Myron (Ed.), *Cases on critical and qualitative perspectives in online higher education* (pp. 489-508). United States of America: IGI Global.
- O'Malley, J. M., Chamot, A. U, Stewner-Manzares, G., Kupper, L., & Russon, R. P. (1985). Learning strategies used by beginning and intermediate TESL students. *Language Learning*, 35(1), 21-46.
- Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Rowley: Newsbury House
- Oxford, R. (2011). *Teaching and Researching Language Learning Strategies*. Great Britain: Pearson Educational Limited.
- Pearson, N. (2004). *The idiosyncrasies of out-of-class language learning: A study of mainland Chinese students studying English at tertiary level in New Zealand*. Paper presented at the Independent Learning Conference 2003, Melbourne, Australia.
- Pickard, N. (1996). Out-of-class language learning strategies. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 2, 150-159.
- Punithavalli K. M. (2003). Strategi pembelajaran bahasa oleh pelajar-pelajar menengah rendah dalam mempelajari Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Master.

## APPENDIX

Areas covered in Interview 1 (Beginning of the semester) S

- English scenario in home country
  - OCLLSs in home country
  - OCLLSs in Malaysia (since first arrived till the beginning or time of the interview)
  - Differences between experiences of English language learning in home country and in Malaysia (initial stage)
  - Needs for English
  - Plans to improve in English
- + areas taken from the early reflections on online postings.

Areas covered in Interview 2 (End of the semester)

- OCLLSs employed throughout
  - OCLLSs employed in tackling assignments
  - Advice to new international students
  - Plans to be better at English
- + areas taken from reflections on online postings and from interview 1

## **BIODATA**

**Noor Saazai Mat Saad** is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education, University Kebangsaan Malaysia. Her thesis is on international students' English language learning experiences in Malaysia. Her fields of interest include language learning styles and strategies, international students' experiences and acculturation, students' agency and material development. She holds a B.Ed. in TESL from the University of Malaya and a M.ESL from the same university. She is a tutor at the Faculty of Major Language Studies, University Sains Islam Malaysia (the Islamic Science University of Malaysia).

**Dr. Melor Md. Yunus** is an associate professor at the Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. She holds a B.A. in English (Linguistics) from the University of Nevada-Reno, USA and an M.A. in TESL from the Arizona State University, USA. She then earned her Ph.D. in Education (TESL) from the University of Bristol, UK. Her areas of concentration are TESL, language pedagogy and the use of technology in TESL. Currently she teaches TESL methods and teaching of writing courses, as well as graduate courses in research methodology and academic writing. At present she is the deputy director at PERMATApintar National Gifted Centre, University Kebangsaan Malaysia.

**Dr. Mohamed Amin Embi** is a professor of technology-enhanced learning at the Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Presently, he is the Director (e-Learning), at the Centre for Academic Advancement, UKM. He has published more than 25 books on language learning strategies, Web 2.0 and Open Educational Resources. He is a leading consultant, expert and master trainer on e-Learning in Malaysia. His recent publication entitled 'Web 2.0 Tools in Education Series' has recorded more than 850,000 'reads' in Scrbd.com. A Web 2.0 mobile application that he has developed known as JiT2U (Just-in-time Training 2U) has also attracted educators from more than 107 countries worldwide. Currently, he is the Chairman of the Council of the Malaysian Public HEIs e-Learning Coordinators and the President of the Mobile Learning Association of Malaysia. He is recipient of the ISESCO Prize for Science & Technology in 2010 (for e-Learning Technology), the National Academic Award 2006 (Teaching Innovation), the Muslim Outstanding Award 2008 (Education) and the Malaysia Achievement Award 2012 (Outstanding Achievements in Education Category).