

## CHAPTER FIVE CASE STUDIES

### Introduction

The study of the relationship between perceptual learning style preferences and learning strategies of Malay ESL students at university level is continued in this chapter. This is carried out through the study of three cases. Three students with distinctly different perceptual learning style preferences were drawn from the same group of respondents. The focus of this chapter is the learning strategies used by the three students who differed in their learning style preferences. Essentially, this chapter seeks explanations for some of the variations in the learning strategies used by the students with different learning style preferences. This chapter answers the last research question in this study which is as follows:

#### Research Question 6:

How do three ESL students who differed in their perceptual learning style preferences select their learning strategies for a reading comprehension task?

### Description of the Study

Three ESL students who differed in their learning style preferences were selected as cases for this study. The first case, Hashim (pseudonym) rated himself as having major preferences for all the learning styles. The second case, Zainal (pseudonym) had major preferences for auditory, kinesthetic, tactile and group and minor preferences for visual and individual learning styles and as such

represented a "typical case" in this study. The third, case Azizah (pseudonym) rated herself as having minor preferences for all the learning styles while learning the English Language.

The aim of this exercise is to determine if there are differences in the learning strategies used by the students with distinctly different learning style preferences. The learning task in this case was reading comprehension. All three cases were given two passages to read and comprehend see (Appendix E and F).

Data was collected by means of a series of semi-structured interviews. In the semi-structured interviews, the questions outlined the areas within which the students were free to report and the researcher kept the students on the topic, probing to help students clarify their ideas and/or to ascertain what they mean. Then when it was felt that the area was exhausted, the interviewer leads the learner on to the next one.

The interviews involved retrospective reporting. Each student was interviewed about eight times over a period of eight days. The first interview session was used for "ice breaking" and establishing trust and rapport with the students. During the ice-breaking sessions the students were asked general questions about their backgrounds, hobbies and other interests.

In subsequent interviews, the students were questioned on the learning strategies they used when working on the given learning tasks (discussed in detail in Chapter 3). The task was reading and comprehending two passages during an English language lesson. The questions on the learning strategies used were developed using the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1986) as a guide and therefore, were related to the six categories of learning strategies, that is, memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social. The interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed. The transcripts were analysed using the content analysis method. The ten themes were as follows:

1. background of the cases;
2. language proficiency;
3. perceptual learning style preferences;
4. self image as an ESL learner;
5. efforts to learn the language;
6. reasons for learning the English language;
7. home environment for ESL learning;
8. levels of information processing in reading;
9. use of learning strategies; and
10. learning strategies taught by teachers.

### Background of the Cases

The first case, Hashim is a 19 year old Malay boy from Kuala Lumpur. He had his primary and secondary education in schools in Kuala Lumpur. After completing his Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) he obtained admission into Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) to pursue a Diploma in Business Management. He comes from an upper middle class family. His father is an engineer while his mother is a principal of a kindergarten. He has been studying English for 15 years. He speaks both the English language and the Malay language at home.

The second case, is Zainal. He is also 19 years of age, of Malay origin and is from Kajang, a small town in the state of Selangor. He obtained both his primary and secondary schooling in rural schools near Kajang. His exposure to the English language outside the classroom is minimal. He has been studying the English language for 12 years. After completing his SPM he joined UiTM to pursue a course in Secretarial Science.

The third case, is Azizah. She is a 19 year old Malay girl from Kota Tinggi, which is a small town located in the state of Johor. She received both her primary and secondary school education in her hometown. All her formal education in the English language has been in school. The language spoken at home is the Malay language and opportunities for speaking the English language

outside her classroom were minimal. She has been studying English for 12 years.

### Language Proficiency

Hashim obtained grade A (distinction) in English Language at SPM level and grade A- for his Foundation English Language results. Zainal obtained a credit (3C) in English Language at SPM level and a B+ in Foundation English while Azizah obtained a credit (4C) for English Language in the SPM examination. Her grade in Foundation English was B-.

### Perceptual Learning Style Preferences

When Hashim was administered the PLSP questionnaire he had major preferences for all the six learning styles, that is, auditory, visual, kinesthetic, tactile, group and individual learning styles. Zainal represents a "typical case", that is, his learning style preferences were reflective of the majority of the respondents. He had major preferences for auditory, kinesthetic, tactile and group learning styles and minor preferences for visual and individual learning styles. Azizah had minor preferences for all the learning styles.

### Self-image as an ESL Learner

Hashim had a good self-image of his English language proficiency. In the Background Questionnaire, he rated himself as 'good' for his proficiency in English language; proficiency in the English language compared to other

students in his class; and his performance in the English language as compared to native speakers of the English language. As he put it during an interview session that, "*... I am good in English so I can understand ...*" and "*... I am a good reader.*"

Zainal had a relatively low self-image of his English language proficiency. In the Background Questionnaire, he rated himself as 'fair' in his overall proficiency in the English language as well as, his performance in the English language compared to the other students in his class. He rated his overall performance in the English language as 'poor' compared to native speakers of the English language. During one of the interviews he expressed that it was very important to become proficient in the English language. When asked whether he enjoyed learning English, he replied that he enjoyed the lessons but encountered difficulties because of his weakness in the language. As he put it, "*... but it was difficult because I don't understand ... I am poor and shy to speak ... in school I try a lot but I am not good.*"

Azizah's self-image regarding her proficiency in the English language was low. In the Background Questionnaire, she rated her overall proficiency in English language and her overall proficiency compared to other students in her class as 'poor'. She rated her overall performance in the English language compared to native speakers as 'poor'. During the interviews she explained that, "*I feel shy to speak in English ... I (am) scared my friends (will) laugh at me.*"

### Efforts to Learn the English Language

Hashim attempted speaking in English at every opportunity. He explained *"I try to talk in English with my friends, teachers and everyone I talk to in English . . . ."* He further added that his favourite experience in learning the language is *" . . . speaking in English."* Hashim elaborated that speaking in English helped him to improve his language because *"I won't be able to be good in English if I don't use it."* He appeared to prefer to learn and practise the language naturalistically by both conversing with others, and reading. He further explained that, *"I find it more effective to learn English by conversing with others rather than learning it from the blackboard . . . I also feel that the second best way to learn English is by reading. The materials must not be something that I don't like. It must be something a book on something I prefer most such as sports magazines, general knowledge and history. I will be more comfortable to read them."*

Unlike Hashim, Zainal did not seem to be making any extra effort outside the classroom to improve his English. He conversed in the Malay language with his friends. He was not interested in reading magazines, books and newspapers in the English language with an aim to improve his English. However, because of his keen interest in football he enjoyed watching football matches and *" . . . flicking through football magazines such as 'Match', 'Shoot' and 'Goal'."* These magazines are in the English language. He particularly enjoyed watching international football matches although the commentaries are in the English

language. He felt that he "*. . . can follow some of the commentaries in English although they spoke too fast to understand.*" Among the words he was familiar with were: "*. . . goal, penalty, issue yellow card, offside, sent off, suspended and dived.*" He admitted that, "*. . . watching the matches and reading the magazines*" helped him to improve his English a little.

In the case of Azizah, she seemed to have made some attempts to practise English outside the classroom but her efforts were limited by her poor command of the language. According to Azizah she had been constantly advised by her teachers to speak in English. She confessed that she had tried to follow her teachers' advice but was not successful as she puts it, "*. . . sometimes I try but I can't . . . I am poor.*" She had tried to read materials in English but found it difficult to understand, "*. . . I don't enjoy reading the English newspapers . . . difficult to understand.*" She also did not read storybooks and magazines in the English language for the same reasons. She did not have much opportunity to speak in English outside the classroom because "*. . . all my friends speak in BM (referring to the Malay language) . . . we feel more enjoy speak in BM . . . it more fun.*"

### Reasons for Learning the English Language

Hashim related several reasons for learning the English language. Among these were interest in the language, having friends who spoke the language and the need to pass the language to graduate. In addition, he felt the English



language would be important in his future career. He would also find it useful if he were to travel to foreign countries. He was particularly interested in improving his proficiency in the language because "... *I've been using it (daily).*" He further added that his ability to converse fluently in English would help build his self confidence: "... *it's a big advantage for me to build up my confidence.*"

Zainal's reasons for wanting to learn the English language were to some extent similar to that of Hashim, that is, interest in the language, have friends who speak the language, required to pass the language to graduate, need it for his future career and to travel. His favourite classroom activities were "*reading and acting in sketches*".

As with Hashim and Zainal, Azizah too felt that it was very important to learn the English language. She also enjoyed learning the language. Her favourite classroom experience in learning the language was "presentation". All three of them emphatically stated that they were not interested in the culture associated with the English language.

#### Home Environment for ESL Learning

Hashim seemed to have a very supportive home environment where ESL is concerned. His parents encouraged and motivated him to study the English language. As he explained: "*My parents always advise me to study English and I follow their advice.*" He further added, "... *In fact when I was small, my*

*parents told me to talk in English. They taught me when I was three years old . . . my parents always tell me to read a lot."* In addition to the Malay language, his parents also used the English language when speaking to him. ". . . *I think fifty-fifty (speaking English Language 50% of the time).*" His parents had provided a tutor to further help him with ESL: "*My parents tell my tutor to don't let me go out if I don't finish my work.*" He attributed some of his ESL learning strategies to his parents. They had advised him on approaches to learn the language: ". . . *if I don't understand what I read , to read again to understand. Then they (parents) say that when I don't understand a word, to try to guess the meaning.*"

Compared to Hashim, Zainal did not seem to have had a conducive home environment for learning the English language. Zainal's parents were farmers and had only minimal primary education, that too in the Malay language. Although there was no opposition to learning the English language, there was no extra support and encouragement to learn the language either. He only spoke the Malay language at home. Azizah too experienced a similar situation at home. She too only spoke the Malay language at home. There was more emphasis on religious lessons at home. In both these cases there were very little reading materials in the English language apart from their school-books at home.

### Levels of Information Processing in Reading

This section discusses the levels at which the students are processing information while carrying out their reading comprehension task. As mentioned in

chapter three, a model of reading strategy based on the reading theory developed by Gibson and Levin (1975), LaBerge and Samuels (1974) and Kintsch and van Dijk (1978) (cited in Kirby, 1988) was used.

When reading, Hashim operated at four hierarchical levels simultaneously. He shifted back and forth from word level (level four) to macropropositional level (level seven) and back. When he was able to visually recognise the meanings of words and chunks of words (level five), he automatically proceeded to micropropositional (idea) level (level six) and macropropositional (main idea) level. Like he explained: ". . . *and I make the summary that the first paragraph is telling us about the hand phones. Without reading the title, I can guess what is the passage about.*" However, when he came across words and chunks of words that were unfamiliar to him, he shifted back to processing information at these two levels. For example, he was processing at word level in: ". . . *there are some (words) for example 'apprehension' (L24, P1), at first I don't know the meaning. Then I read the sentence and I think how I managed to guess the meaning.*" And processing at chunk level in: ". . . *I wanted to make sure I know the meaning of the word 'embark on' (L333, P1) . . . so I read through the sentence and from the sentence try to guess the meaning of "embark on".*

Unlike Hashim, Zainal mostly processed information at the word level and sometimes at the chunk level. While processing information at the word level, he started by looking at individual words: "*First I look at the word and try to*

*remember the meaning"* and then when he did not understand the words, he proceeded to using key words: *"I learn to read important words in the passage and the words I don't know I ignore only."* When faced with difficult words in a sentence, he tried to translate the words he understood from the passage into the Malay language and in this way tried to gauge the meaning of the unfamiliar word from the context of the sentence in the Malay language: *"... because I don't understand I translate to BM so I can understand it."*

Azizah's information processing in reading seemed to be at lower levels compared to both Hashim and Zainal. Azizah was operating mainly at the word level. She tried to understand the sentences in the passages by finding the meanings of the component words. She mainly translated the words in proximity to the unfamiliar words into her mother tongue, that is, the Malay language (BM) and thereby tried to gauge the meaning of the sentence. She then tried to guess the meaning of the unfamiliar word using linguistic clues. As she explained: *"When I don't understand I usually translate to BM so I can understand it . . . easier for me to understand it. So many words I don't know so I don't understand it, example, 'thickeners' (L2, P2), 'emulsifiers' (L3, P2), 'food conditioners' (L3, P2), 'hyperactivity' (L5, P2) . . . . All so much too difficult to understand and confusing. So I translate to help my understanding for example, 'reactions' (L3, P2), I read and know the Malay word 'lindakbalas' (reaction). Sometimes I automatically translate in my mind."*

### Use of Learning Strategies

Based on the model of reading discussed earlier, strategy influence in reading starts at the word level (level 4).

Table 5.1  
Learning Strategies Used by the Cases

Learning Strategies		Use of Strategy		
		Hashim	Zainal	Azizah
Memory	Grouping		√	
	Associating	√	√	√
	Placing new word into the context		√	
	Semantic mapping		√	
	Using key words		√	
Cognitive	Translating		√	√
	Highlighting	√	√	
	Note taking	√	√	
	Summarising	√		
Compensation	Guessing intelligently	√	√	√
	Adjusting or approximating the message		√	√
Metacognitive	Finding out about language learning	√	√	√
	Seeking practice opportunities	√	√	√
	Self-evaluation	√	√	
Affective	Using progressive relaxation		√	
	Encouraging yourself	√		√
Social	Asking for clarification or verification	√	√	√
	Cooperating with peers	√		
	Cooperating with proficient users of the new language			√

Since the lowest level of information processing by the three cases is also at the word level, the students' reading comprehension tasks were used to identify their use of the different learning strategies to complete those tasks. Table 5.1 shows the types of sub-strategies used by the three cases in carrying out their reading comprehension tasks in particular and their language learning in general.

While all the direct strategies were related to the tasks they had to do, some of the indirect strategies especially those pertaining to the metacognitive and social strategies were not connected to the specific task. In the latter case, the students were asked with reference to their general practice in reading and learning the English language.

Hashim used all the six learning strategies, that is, memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies. When reading, Hashim created mental images by associating (memory strategy): *"In every paragraph I read I will imagine what it is. For example, in the first paragraph, the mobile phone itself, 'tycoons to pensioners' (L5, P1), I will imagine all the businessmen using mobile phone . . . students using mobile phone . . . I form a mental image of the contents that I read for example, when I read about 'a family on a camping trip in some remote region' (L11-12, P1), I imagine nature and forest . . . 'phenomenal' (L14, P1), I relate to when I saw the movie 'Fenomena', that was something out of control . . . 'widespread' (L22, P2), I have seen the*

*word before like when I am playing computer games and they use the word widespread . . . the missiles attack all over the place . . . over a large area."*

Among the cognitive strategies that he used were taking notes, summarising and highlighting. He elaborated on note taking: *"The notes are regarding what the passage is all about. The short notes at the side is about what the paragraph is telling about . . . for example paragraph one, I write h.p, because the first paragraph all the sentences is actually basically telling us about hand phones, like there is no other thing that they mention besides hand phone."* He gave examples of summarising: *" . . . and I make the summary that the first paragraph is telling us about the hand phones. Without reading the title, I can guess what is the passage about"*, and highlighting: *" . . . for example, 'embark on', (Line 33,P1) I wanted to make sure I know the meaning of the word . . . so I underlined it."*

Hashim used compensation strategies when he did not understand the words he read. He used linguistic clues to guess intelligently: *"There are some (words) for example 'apprehension' (L24, P1) . . . at first I don't know the meaning. Then I read the sentence and I think how I managed to guess the meaning, is the word that comes after 'apprehension' and 'even fear' (L24, P1), . . . I wanted to make sure I know the meaning of the word 'embark on' (L33, P1), so I read through the sentence and from the sentence try to guess the meaning of 'embark on'. 'Snarls' (L14, P1), I didn't know the meaning of the word 'snarl',*

*but then I read the sentence and from the sentence the meaning could be traffic jams. From the sentence I read that if you are late for an appointment is because of a traffic jam and then you can use the hand phone. So the word 'snarl' is next to the word 'traffic' (L14, P1) so it means traffic jam."*

He does not translate words that he does not understand into his mother tongue. When asked while he was reading and read something that he did not understand, whether he tried to translate that part of the passage into the Malay language to help him understand the passage he replied: *"No, I read and understand in English. I stop to think but I don't translate."*

He seems really keen to improve his language. He works at arranging and planning his learning which are metacognitive strategies. He has found out about language learning. When asked to suggest ways he can improve his language, he replied: *"Read a lot, always talk in English, see English movies and others."* He works at improving his language by seeking practice opportunities (metacognitive strategies). He said: *"The only way for me to improve my English is to converse in English with friends. I try to talk a lot in English with my friends, teachers and everyone I talk to in English because English is very important."*

Another metacognitive strategy he used was evaluation of learning through self-evaluation: *". . . and read through the sentence again. I make sure it is 'apprehension' and 'even fear' (L24, P1) . . . . And when people correct me, it*



*means that I learn from them. That's how I improve my English . . . I want to see what is the main idea. I want to check it is the same idea or different. That's why I refer back."*

Hashim used certain affective strategies that seemed to work for him. He said he felt nervous when reading the passage because *"sometimes there is tendency for me to not to understand the passage. I find sentences that I cannot understand or words I am unfamiliar with."* In instances like this, he used anxiety-lowering strategies like encouraging himself: *" . . . just go (ing) through the sentence and trying to understand and try again till I understand."* His motivation to study the language seems to be intrinsic. When asked whether he rewarded himself when he felt that he had done well in an English language task he said: *"I think the best reward for myself is self-satisfaction."*

Among the social strategies that he used were asking for clarification or verification and cooperating with peers. When he did not understand some words, phrases, homework or tasks in the English language he discussed them with his friends because: *" . . . two heads are better than one."* When asked whether he liked working in groups he replied: *" Oh yes!"*

Like Hashim, Zainal too used all the six learning strategies. When reading, Zainal used memory strategies like creating mental images by grouping: *"I look at the other words near it . . ."* and associating: *" . . . snack food or junk food, I*

*saw factories, small bottles, food colouring, my mother's cooking (for food additives, L1, P2), . . . ya, advertisement pictures for TV, I imagine the mobile phone, how to use the hand set, what is special in the hand set. I always use my friend's hand phone . . . and imagine the phone and the experience using the phone (for mobile phone, L6, P1)", and placing new word into the context: "I just choose another word, tried to substitute in the context of the sentence."*

Under memory strategies he also used semantic mapping: *"First I look at the word and try to remember the meaning" and key words: "I learn to read important words in the passage and the words I don't know I ignore only. But I carry on reading . . . I must understand the main points of the passage and not bother for the not important words . . ."*

Among the cognitive strategies, Zainal used are translating: *"Sometimes I translate the passage. I try to understand in Bahasa Malaysia (Malay language). Usually when the passage is really hard then I translate into Bahasa Malaysia. Because I don't understand I translate to BM (Bahasa Malaysia) so I can understand it . . .", note taking: ". . . write the meaning on the word I don't know . . ."* and highlighting: *"I just underline the words I don't know or the important point or underlining related to answering questions."*

When he came across words, the meanings to which he did not know, he used compensation strategies. He used linguistic clues or other clues to guess

intelligently: "The first word is compact (L43, P1) . . . I think it is small . . . like from the sentence, 'slipped into the pocket', (L43, P1), I guess so it means something small like a compact disk . . . 'Apprehension' (L24, P1), I read the sentence again, I guess it means fear because the sentence reads 'and apprehension'. So I know it means fear . . . I look at the sentence 'adverse reactions' (L3, P2), 'can cause adverse reactions in certain people who are sensitive to them' (L3-4, P2), I find after that sentence and the next sentence with the bad causes like 'asthma' (L7, P2), so, I think the word adverse means bad reaction . . . 'Stringent food regulation' (L19, P2), I read the sentence. It means is strict rule. I read the sentence and I know the meaning. I also read the next sentence to help me understand." From this explicit explanation, it seems as though Zainal was competent in the use of the compensation strategies, but in reality he was not always successful in determining the meanings of the unfamiliar words. For example: "'Region' (L12, P1) and 'remote' (L11, P1), I read but I cannot understand . . . 'summon' (L12, P1), also I don't understand, I cannot guess the meaning, also 'accustomed' (L16, P2), I read the sentence again, I still can't understand . . . 'emulsifiers' (L3, P2), I don't have any ideas, because the words before it is not the same as emulsifier and food is not the same."

Zainal overcame limitations in readings and speaking by adjusting or approximating the message, which is another compensation strategy: "When I come to the word I don't know or difficult word, I just continue to read. I feel I can

*understand the passage. As long I understand whole passage I am OK . . . I learn to read the important words in the passage."*

Like Hashim, Zainal had found out about language learning which is a metacognitive strategy. When asked to suggest ways to improve his English language he said: *"By reading a lot in English. Reading is the best way I think to improve my English. Also by talking to friends in English. I must practise to improve. Reading and talking is good."* But the metacognitive strategy he actively used was seeking practice opportunities: *"I try to do both, reading and talking. But I find it difficult because I can't understand"*. Another metacognitive strategy he used was self-evaluation. As he put it: *"(backtracking to an earlier paragraph) . . . sometimes it helps me to see how I do in my work."*

Zainal seemed to experience fear when called on to do an English learning task. He overcame this fear by using affective strategies that helped him to lower his anxiety. He said: *"I just relax and try again."* He used social learning strategies like asking questions. He explained: *( I ) always discuss what I don't understand."* He asked for clarification and verification from his friends (both of which are social learning strategies) when he encountered problems with the learning tasks.

Azizah used less number of learning strategies compared to Hashim and Zainal. The main memory strategy used by Azizah was creating mental images by associating: *"The 'mobile phone' (L1, P1), how to use the phone. I borrow my*

*friend's phone". She used mainly one cognitive strategy, that is, translating: "When I don't understand I usually translate to BM so I can understand it . . . easier for me to understand it. So many words I don't know so I don't understand it, example 'thickeners' (L2, P2), 'emulsifier's (L3, P2), 'food conditioners' (L3, P2), 'hyperactivity' (L5, P2) . . . . All so much, too difficult to understand and confusing. So I translate to help my understanding . . . for example 'reactions' (L3, P2), I read and know the Malay word 'tindakbalas'. Sometimes I automatically translate in my mind . . . ."*

When faced with words, the meanings to which she did not know, she tried to guess by using linguistic or other clues (compensation strategy): ". . . another word is 'compact' (L43, P1), I know it mean what but I don't know how to explain. It is like small, can carry and put in the pocket. 'Bulky contraptions' (L34, P1) . . . I guess bulky means big, I read the sentence . . . it say those day, hand phone is huge and I know old hand phone bigger. So bulky is big . . . . 'Remote region' (L11-12, P1), I try to guess, something about outdoor activities, because of camping, I think (the meaning is) 'far away'. 'Inferior' (L15, P2), I think inferior mean below standard 'food that has gone bad' (L15,P2). I read the sentence, it means the food not very good, low standard. 'Trigger' (L26, P2), I guess from the sentence, the word mean that this additive is only believed will affect to asthma, will cause asthma. 'Stringent' (L19, P2), I have hear and seen the word but whether I know the meaning or not (not sure of the meaning). Example in 'stringent' by reading the sentences, then I try to relate to before or next

*sentences. I read the sentences. I know 'regulations' (L19, P2) means rules. Malaysia has food rules but I don't know the meaning of stringent. Then I read the next (sentence): 'For example, several additives allowed in western countries are not allowed here' (L19-20, P2). Here I guess I know it (stringent) mean strict."*

As in the case with Zainal, Azizah also tried to overcome her language limitations by approximating the message: "*. . . just carried on reading. I just read it and just leave the word (unfamiliar word). Usually I try to guess meaning, but if I can't I just carry on.*"

She was not always able to guess the meaning of the unfamiliar words correctly: "*For the word 'constantly' (L6, P1), I read the sentence, but I cannot understand. 'Snarls' (L14, P1), I can't imagine the meaning. Maybe 'scenario'. When I read the sentence, I make a guess of the word, but I cannot guess. 'Integrated' (L28, P1), I read sentence again, think about it. I guess 'divided', 'changing', 'transferred'.*"

Like Hashim and Zainal, Azizah too was aware of ways to improve her English language (metacognitive strategies). When asked to suggest how a person could improve his or her proficiency in the English language, she proposed: "*By reading and watching TV, reading magazines and others, by reading English books.*" She sought practice opportunities to improve her language: "*I read the books.*" Seeking practice opportunities is one of the sub-

strategies under arranging and planning of learning which is a metacognitive strategy.

As in the case with Hashim and Zainal, Azizah too experienced nervousness and anxiety when given a language task to complete: "*. . . because I (am) afraid I can't answer.*" To overcome her nervousness, she used the affective strategy of 'encouraging yourself': "*. . . I still try and I can understand.*" Azizah used two types of social strategies when learning the English language. The first was asking for clarification and verification: "*When I get stuck, I discuss with my friends, check my views is correct or not, and then get their views, and I can learn from them.*" She also learned through cooperating with proficient users of the language: "*Yes, I like to discuss with my friends. So many words in English I don't understand.*"

#### Learning Strategies Taught by Teachers

Hashim attributed the use of particular learning strategies to his teachers and tutors. According to him, his teachers and tutors emphasised on cognitive strategies like repeating: "*. . . they (teachers) do a lot of exercises, a lot of grammar work and I can understand the grammar . . . . Then we read a lot of passages and answer questions and that helped me a lot*", practising naturalistically: "*. . . and (the teachers) always tell me to read in English*", and summarizing: "*My Ilmu Alam teacher (Geography teacher in secondary school)*

*ask me to make short notes in the subject because it help me understand . . . .*  
*We do a lot of main ideas in our reading comprehension (classroom exercise)."*

In addition to cognitive strategies, Hashim's teachers had encouraged him to use compensation strategies like using linguistic clues and other clues to guess intelligently when faced with words that he did not understand: *"My lecturer teach me how to try and guess the meaning of a word when I don't know the meaning . . . get clues from the sentence."*

Zainal's teachers on the other hand, had introduced him to memory strategies like grouping: *"I look at the other words near it like my English teacher taught me"*, cognitive (repeating) and compensation (guessing intelligently) strategies. His teachers had encouraged him to use linguistic clues and other clues to guess intelligently when he encountered unfamiliar words (compensation strategies): *"She teach me about reading strategies like looking for clues and reading many times . . . . then I try to read the sentences after and that how I get the meaning."*

Azizah seem to have been exposed to less strategy training compared to Hashim and Zainal. The main strategy that Azizah's teachers seem to have taught her was the compensation strategy of guessing intelligently using linguistic or other clues: *" . . . try to answer all the questions even when I don't know. I must try, so I always answer the questions. Then I learn to guess the answer that I don't know. I look at the word I don't know and I guess the answer . . . my*



*lecturer teach me how to use reading strategies in class for reading comprehension. I got learn to read the sentence before and afterward to guess the meaning of the words and I use it when I can."*

### Summary of the Case Studies

As mentioned earlier the three cases differed in their perceptual learning style preferences. Hashim had all the six styles, that is, the auditory, visual, kinesthetic, tactile, group and individual as major learning style preferences. Zainal had major preferences for auditory, kinesthetic, tactile and group and minor preferences for visual and individual learning style and as such represented a "typical case" in this study, while Azizah had minor preferences for all the learning styles. Hashim who had major preferences for all the learning styles was found to be more proficient in the language. This seems to confirm the findings of Kirby (1979), that students with greater learning style flexibility are also great achievers.

All three cases shared a common reason for learning the English language, that is, proficiency in the language would help them in their future careers. At the same time they emphatically stated that they were not interested in the culture associated with the language. This suggests that the main motivation for learning the language was instrumental rather than integrative.

When the three cases were compared, Hashim who was exposed to a very supportive home environment and where the English language was used together with the Malay language, possessed greater self-confidence and a more positive self-image in so far as competence in ESL was concerned. In addition to this, he demonstrated a very positive attitude towards the learning of English and made efforts to learn the language outside the classroom by looking for opportunities to practice the language naturalistically. Several studies have investigated parental role in influencing attitudes of target groups in the learning of a language. Studies by Gardner (1960) showed that students learning French as a second language possessed attitudes which are reflective of their parents. Similar findings were reported by Stern (1967), who found that children's success in Welsh-medium schools was directly related to parents' attitudes towards the Welsh language. Likewise, in this study, parental support seems to have a direct relation with the level of proficiency in the language of the child.

Both Zainal and Azizah on the other hand exhibited low self-confidence and poor self-image. They were also less proficient in the English language. Although both professed to being interested in learning the language, their efforts to use the language outside the classroom appeared to be minimal. This may be due to the fact that they feared that they may become objects of ridicule among their friends due to their poor command of the language. Relationship between self-esteem and learning of second language was carried out by Heyde (1979) and Watkins, Briggs and Murari (1991). These researchers found self-esteem to

be an important variable in second language acquisition. Similarly, Zainal's and Azizah's low proficiency in the English language could be a result of their low self-esteem and self-confidence.

Another reason for Zainal's and Azizah's low proficiency in the English language could be because they did not have much opportunity to use the English language outside their classrooms. The fact that they had gone to schools where the majority of the students were Malays and are presently studying in a university that caters only for Malay students offered them little opportunity to practise the English language. Their inability to attain high proficiency in English is in accordance with the studies by Elias-Olivares (1976) (in McLaughlin, 1985), Beebe (1977) and Giles and Smith (1979). Elias-Olivares (1976) found that children tend to code switch or use colloquial versions of the language when speaking to peers from their own ethnic group. Studies by Beebe (1977) have further demonstrated that the ethnicity of a second language learner's listener will have effect on the learners language proficiency. Beebe (1977) found that Thai spoken by ethnic Chinese sounded more Chinese when they were speaking to an ethnic Chinese than when they were speaking to an ethnic Thai. This is also in accordance with Giles' Social Accommodation Theory which suggests that speech shift occurs in conversation resulting in convergence in which speakers modify their speech to become more similar to their listeners (Giles and Smith, 1979).

Several of the above mentioned factors may have contributed to the differences in the learning strategies used by the three cases when carrying out English language learning tasks.

All three of them, that is, Hashim, Zainal and Azizah seemed to use all the main learning strategies. However, they differed in the use of sub-strategies. While all three of them used the memory strategies of creating mental images by associating, Zainal used additional sub-strategies such as grouping, placing new words in context, semantic mapping and using key words.

The three students also differed in the cognitive strategies they used. While the more proficient Hashim used highlighting, note taking and summarising strategies, Zainal and Azizah who had professed to be weak in the language, very often were translating the English words to their mother tongue in order to understand the passage.

Compensation strategies seemed to be the most favoured strategy by all three cases when faced with unfamiliar words or words, meanings to which they did not know. The most popular sub-strategy was the use of linguistic and other clues. While the more competent Hashim nearly always got the meanings of the words right, this was not the case with Zainal and Azizah. Even with the use of linguistic and other clues, they were not always able to guess at the correct

meanings of the words. As such, they had to resort to additional strategies to gauge the meanings of unfamiliar words.

Where metacognitive strategies were concerned, all three of them seemed to be able to suggest ways of improving their proficiency in the English language. The favourite strategy adopted by them to improve their language was by practising naturalistically. Among the three, only two of them, that is, Hashim and Zainal, used self- evaluation as a learning strategy. In fact Hashim used it more often than Zainal.

All three of them appeared to experience nervousness and anxiety when asked to complete certain language tasks. They tried to overcome these feelings either by encouraging themselves, making positive statements as in the case of Hashim and Azizah or by using anxiety reducing strategies such as progressive relaxation which was the case with Zainal. Another very distinct difference between the more competent Hashim and the less proficient Zainal and Azizah was that, Hashim talked of experiencing self-satisfaction when he did well in the learning tasks. This shows that where the learning of ESL is concerned Hashim is intrinsically motivated.

All three of them seemed to favour social learning strategies. The less competent ones, Zainal and Azizah, used the social strategies like asking for clarification and verification. Azizah, also gained from cooperating with proficient

users of the language. Hashim enjoyed cooperating with peers because it provided him with opportunities to use the language.

The study of the three cases revealed that the student who had major preferences for all the learning styles was also the most proficient in the English language. The second case who had major preferences for three learning styles was second best in terms of language proficiency while the third case who had minor preferences for all learning styles was also the least proficient in the language. This seems to suggest that, developing major preferences for all the learning styles would enable the learner to acquire greater language proficiency. This is in accordance with the suggestion made by Robotham (1999). He recommends that learners should be encouraged to be competent in all learning style preferences. In this way, they can become self-directed learners and take responsibility for their own achievement.

There also seemed to be a pattern in the use of learning strategies by the cases who differed in learning styles and levels of proficiency. Hashim who had major preferences for all learning styles appeared to use the learning strategies of competent ESL students like note taking, highlighting, summarizing (cognitive strategies), guessing intelligently (compensation strategy), seeking practice opportunities, self-evaluation (metacognitive strategies) and cooperating with others (social strategies). Those with few or no major learning style preferences like Zainal and Azizah seemed to use learning strategies of less proficient ESL

students like placing new words into context, semantic mapping (memory strategy), translating into mother tongue (cognitive strategy), adjusting and approximating the message (compensation strategy) and cooperating with proficient users of the new language (social strategy). This finding is in agreement with those by Tyack and Mendelsohn (1986) and Hosenfeld (1977). According to them, expert language learners employ useful strategies more often than do others and that language learning strategies can predict ultimate language skill or proficiency. However, the hypothesis put forward by Ruben (1975) and Ramirez (1986), that successful learners use more and better learning strategies than do poor language learners was only partly substantiated. While this study found that the more successful learner that is, Hashim, used better learning strategies than Zainal, there was no evidence that the former used more learning strategies. In fact, the findings of this study showed that Zainal, who was less proficient in the English language compared to Hashim, used more sub-strategies. In spite of using more sub-strategies, Zainal was not always successful in completing his learning task. It appears that Hashim's ability to match his choice of strategy to the demands of the task was probably an important factor in his success as a language learner. This finding seems consistent with that by Chamot *et. al*, (1987) who discovered that even ineffective learners were aware of and used a number of strategies, with only the difference between effective and ineffective students being that the effective ones reported greater frequency and greater range of strategy use. In general, the more

advanced the language learners, the more appropriate the strategy will be for a given task and learner.

Many of the findings in this study can also be related to the findings by other researchers. For example, the study of Wesche (1979) on highly successful and less successful students found that the former tended to consciously expose themselves to the target language and to practise it in different ways. This was true in this study where the more proficient student (Hashim) admitted to seeking practice opportunities. The research findings by Hagen, Barclay and Newman (1982), that self-esteem has clear link between an individual's judgment of his or her own competence and the individual's competence on school related tasks also is relevant to this study. The performance of the two less proficient students is in keeping with their low self-esteem. Markman (1981) found that the ability to monitor one's comprehension is necessary for academic excellence. In this study the more proficient Hashim was found to use more self-evaluation strategies compared to Zainal. Azizah on the other hand, did not seem to use any self-evaluation or self-monitoring strategies.

In this study, all the students seemed to have been taught ESL learning strategies by their teachers, the main emphasis appeared to have been on the use of linguistic or other clues to guess the meanings of unknown words. However, Hashim's proficiency in the English language could be attributed to the fact that he was taught learning strategies from an early age. According to



Willing (1987), learners could benefit greatly in the long run, if a substantial proportion of the formal learning time available, be used to train students in ways of learning for themselves. This is further emphasised by Dansereau (1978) who says that by not stressing on learning strategies, educators discourage students from developing and exploring new capabilities. The results of the study carried out by Dansereau, Long, McDonald, Atkinson, Ellis, Collins, Williams and Evans (1975) showed that if the strategies that individuals have spontaneously adopted do not match their cognitive capabilities, the emotional toll may be very large.

In chapter four, the perceptual learning style preferences of the respondents and the learning strategies used by them was discussed, in general. In this chapter, the focus was on the selection and use of the learning strategies by three students, as they relate to a specific learning task (that is, a reading comprehension task), in detail. Several of the findings of chapter four and this chapter have implications for ESL teaching and learning. The implications and the associated recommendations related to these findings are discussed in chapter six.