

Students' Perception Towards NLP-based Arabic Language Learning Strategy at a Private Islamic University in Makassar

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Abstract: *This paper reports on the results of a study on students' perception towards the use of NLP-based strategy for learning Arabic language at Islamic universities in Makassar. The study used a method based on the Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) approach by developing a spot capturing model. The purpose or desired effect of the method was concerned with two parties, teacher and learners. Learners were expected to become happy, comfortable, and diligent, as well as find it easy to learn a foreign language. Teacher was also expected to feel the same in the teaching process. Results of the study showed that students were generally reluctant, anxious, and found it difficult to learn Arabic language. This indicated that the strategy for learning the language has so far been ineffective, therefore an alternative strategy was needed. A model developed upon the NLP approach was used as a new strategy of teaching and learning Arabic language for beginners. The new strategy was proved to be useful as about 78% - 86% of respondents found it interesting and they agreed with the model that was based on the Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) approach.*

Keywords: design of a model, learning strategy, Arabic language, NLP

1. Introduction

It is a commonly held by many students that learning Arabic language is difficult. In general, student attend Arabic language classrooms with fear and trepidation, despite the fact Arabic is an important language, especially for Moslems. As one of the international languages, Arabic is used as the language of instruction in the middle-east, and is very important for Muslims since the Holy book Al-Qur'an was written in Arabic. Therefore, all Muslims are encouraged to learn the language. Given the importance of learning Arabic language, many institutions offer courses in Arabic, while several educational institutions in Indonesia provide Arabic language programs. In Islamic schools, Arabic language becomes the main language of instruction and is used for everyday interaction, particularly in madrasa, beginning from primary to *aliyah* and *tsanawiyah* level where Arabic is formally taught. Some schools with Islamic label also incorporate Arabic language in their curriculum, whereas a few public schools only offer a small portion of Arabic lessons. At a tertiary level, the language is taught only in the Department of Arabic Literature and in private and public Islamic universities.

A careful observation will reveal that most of new students who enroll in a university have never learned Arabic, nor can they read the Qur'an fluently and correctly. This lack of knowledge in Arabic language has negatively affected students' attitude towards the learning process in classrooms. Most of them are lack of enthusiasm to learn the language. Therefore, we need to apply an approach that can instill students' interest in learning, and can motivate them to study harder. Given this condition, the writer was inspired to conduct a research on the application of Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP). NLP is one approach that can stimulate and awaken students' spirit and motivation to learn Arabic language. Based on existing phenomenon, we need to design a model of learning Arabic language that is based on the NLP approach. Variables used to measure the model of learning

are: (a) what are the students' perception of the level of difficulty in their learning of Arabic language; (b) what are the students' perception of the level of interest in their learning; (c) what are the students' perception of the level of their enthusiasm during learning the language; (d) what are the students' perception of classroom management, (e) what techniques/methods were used by teachers of Arabic language to present their materials; and (f) to what extent have the available facilities and infrastructures been supporting the learning of Arabic language.

2. Literature Review

a) What is NLP?

NLP stands for Neuro-linguistic Programming or can be translated into Brain Language Program. This method attempts to program/build good or positive utterances which are then transformed into brain language. This article is hoped to contribute positively to the improvement of language learning process, especially Arabic language, both to the learners and instructors.

Neuro-linguistics is a branch of macro-linguistics. It is originated from two branches of science, neurology and linguistics. Neurology concerns with anatomy of human brain nerve (especially in medical field), while linguistics is a study of languages. Literally, the relationship between the two seems very far, however they are actually closely related to each other since both fields concern with the user of language. Neurology and linguistics find a common ground in terms of pragmatism (interdisciplinary), thus giving birth to a new science called "neurolinguistics", a study of the relationship between language and brain's neurons. Neurons are also known as nerve cells, which function to send messages or impulses in the form of stimulants or responses. There are several types of neurons, including: a) **Sensory Neurons**, which are nerve cells that deliver impulses from receptors (senses) to brain or spinal cord. Dendrite of sensory neuron works with human senses which receive

impulses; b) **Motoric Neurons**, which serve to transmit impulses from brain or spinal cord to the effectors (body muscles or glands). These neurons are called motoric neurons since dendrites of motoric neurons are related to other axons; c) **Connecting neurons** (interneurons), which are bipolar neurons containing many axons and dendrites. These neurons serve to continue the stimulation of sensory neurons to motor neurons. These neurons are called connectors neurons because one end of a dendrite is connected to the other end of other neuron axons; d) **Resting Neurons**. Nervous impulses are the nerve messages that flow along the axon in the form of electric waves. When a nerve impulse does not deliver any message, the nerve fiber is in an idle state, hence they are called the resting neurons. (Muhammad, 2010).

b) The Potentials of Human Brain

Human beings are equipped with abilities to acquire language, both verbal (spoken) and nonverbal abilities, as stated in the summary of M. Said's dissertation (2009). Humans are created by Allah in the best of shape (ahsani taqwim). One of many things that distinguishes humans from other creatures is their senses (memory) that are capable of storing a variety of information. When an event occurs, human memory will automatically record the event and is ready to retrieve them again a few moments later, or even recall events that have long happened (Ahmad Badran, 2010). On the other hand, it is also a human's nature to forget anything, due to a variety of factors.

Before discussing the brain, let us first consider nephron. As part of human brain, nephron is the center for arrangement with a volume of about 1350 cc, and consists of 100 million nervous cells or neurons. Human brain is responsible for setting up the whole body and mind, therefore a close relationship exists between brain and thinking. Brain, and nervous cells (neurons) that it contains, are believed to have some effects on human cognition. Our knowledge about brain has then influenced the development of cognitive psychology.

The main parts of the brain are, among others, large brain, back brain, and small brain. Large brain (telencephalon, cerebrum) is the foremost part of brain. Brain consists of two hemispheres, the left and right hemisphere. Each hemisphere serves the opposite part of the body, thus the left hemisphere governs the right part of body, and vice versa. Consequently, if the left hemisphere of brain experiences a disorder, then the right part of body will be impaired, or even suffers from a paralysis. Large brain is composed of two layers, the outer layer/cortex (a thin grayish layer containing nerve cells) and the inner layer (white layer). In the outer/cortex layers are many different nervous centers, while in the inner layer are many nerve fibers (dendrites and neuritis). Cerebral cortex consists of 15-33 billion neurons, each connected to about 10.000 synapses. There are many different layers of the cortex of nerve centers, which function to control memory, attention, perception, judgment, language, and consciousness.

Large brain is the major center of nerves because it has very important functions in the regulation of all activities performed by our body, particularly those related to

cognition (intelligence), retention (memory), awareness, and consideration. Different activities are controlled in different areas. In front of the middle slit (central sulcus) are motor areas which control voluntary movement. The lower part of the motor cortex is related to speech. The anterior region of the frontal lobe is associated with the ability to think, and at the back (posterior) of the sulcus entrails are sensory areas. It is in this area where feelings are received and interpreted. Regional hearing (auditory) is located in the temporal lobes. In this area, impression/sounds are received and interpreted. Visual/sight area is located at the tip of the occipital lobe which receive images to be interpreted later. The center of taste and smell is located at the end of the anterior temporal lobe. Large brain is part of the brain that is specifically associated with human intelligence, and it becomes the source of all conscious activities or movements that are driven by our will. (Muhammad, 2010).

Human brain consists of two parts: left brain and right brain. Left brain is associated with IQ (Intelligence Quotient) and academic functions. IQ is related to human ability to calculate, formulate speech, read, write, apply logic, and analyze. Left brain works with short-term memory. A person with dominant left brain tends to be more self-centered, selfish, easily jealous, arrogant, and the like. Those who use left brain dominantly tend to obey and abide stipulated rules since they are not brave enough to violate the rules. They also work in line with their experiences, and are unable to think beyond the limits of rationality, as many thinkers possessed. (Muhammad, 2010).

Right brain is usually associated with emotional intelligence (EQ = Emotional Quotient). This part of brain is related to personality, intuition, ability to apply things, stage and arts ability, artistry, creativity, feelings, emotions, style, imagination, fantasy, color, self- and others introduction, socialization, and personality development. Apparently, human intelligence is not only related to the left brain but also to the right brain. Given this fact, a person's future is not only determined by his/her academic prowess, but also by his/her creativity, which in fact can make a very big difference in human success. Right brain works with long-term memory. If right brain is damaged due to, for example, stroke or brain tumor, then the functions of this brain will be impaired, causing troubles to visual abilities and emotions. Right brain regulates extra rational matters or intuition, which is associated with beauty or art and feeling of beauty that is difficult to measure quantitatively. Right brain deals with questions with a wide range of possible answers and concerns with questions such as "why this is true and that is wrong?" In contrast to this, left brain is related to questions with only 'yes' and 'no' answers and concerns with questions like "what is right and what is wrong?" (Muhammad, 2010).

Linguistic (language) potentials are located in the left brain, and if they are aligned with the potential use of the right brain, it will give birth to linguistic intelligence. Linguistic intelligence is the ability to formulate thoughts clearly and express them competently through words, e.g. talking, reading and writing. This intelligence is usually exhibited by orators, negotiators, lawyers, statesmen, etc. People who have linguistic intelligence are able to choose the right

words, give a brief illustration, and keep a discussion focused, systematic and communicative. Even if they are speaking in front of a crowd, they are able to engage all participants with a dialogue about a topic. They are also capable of defending themselves from rebuttals and criticism, especially ones intended to undermine them. Under any context and circumstance, people with a high intelligence in linguistic are able to employ various methods of speech, using the right the style of language, speech, verbal movement, and appropriate expression when talking, all containing allure and are convincing to their listeners. (Muhammad, 2010).

c) Frequency of Human Brain

Research revealed that only 8 percent of the whole potentials of human brain works under a conscious state of mind, while the remaining 92 percent works in subconscious conditions. Separating the conscious and unconscious mind is a line filter called the reticular activating system (RAS). This line serves to protect a person from any unnecessary information so that the person can stay conscious and sane. (Widiasmadi, 2020).

There are four conditions of human brain that underlies consciousness:

- Delta (0.5 Hz - 4 Hz) is a condition when we are sleeping. The speed of brain waves during a sleep is only 0.5 to 3.5 revolutions per second. At this frequency brain waves have a large amplitude. These waves appear when we have a dreamless sleep. This is when our body and mind rest. This condition is required by our body to rejuvenate body's cells. When we do not sleep well, some parts of our body do not rejuvenate so that we may feel hurt with our body when we wake up.
- Theta (4 Hz - 8 Hz) occurs when our brain waves reach up to 3.5 to 7 rotations per second. Brain waves at this frequency occur when we sleep lightly or just about to start sleeping. Some people may reach this frequency of brain waves during hypnosis, meditation, prayer, or performing religious rituals with deep focus.
- Alpha (8 Hz - 12 Hz) is the most important condition to penetrate the subconscious mind since it can open up 88 percent of subconscious power. Brain waves at this frequency occur when we are doing a relaxation or taking a rest. Alpha state can also occur when we are fantasizing and daydreaming. The velocity of alpha wave reaches 7 to 13 rounds per second. The difference between alpha and theta condition is in terms of awareness, in which during an alpha state we can still feel our limbs and we are in a state between being conscious and being unconscious.
- Beta (above 12 Hz or 12 Hz to 19 Hz) is a condition when we are fully awake. Brain waves at this frequency occur when we are performing our daily routines as well as when interacting with others.

In addition to the four frequencies of brain waves mentioned above, another brain wave frequency, namely Gamma, can occur at 16 Hz - 100 Hz when we are thinking hard or engaging ourselves in highly demanding mental activities.

3. Research Method

This research applied the neuro-linguistic programming approach, which was based on the brain wave technology, aimed at enhancing mind ability and developing human beings, and can be applied to any age. Previous studies reported that brain waves do not only show a state of mind and body, but can also be stimulated to change a person's mental state (Widiamsi, 2010).

Broadly speaking, human brain produces four types of brain waves simultaneously, namely beta, alpha, theta, delta, as discussed in the previous section. Among the four waves, there is always a dominant type, which indicates a certain current brain activity. For example, when we fall asleep, the dominant brain waves is delta. Brain waves can be programmed by listening to a sound that has been set to a certain frequency in order to obtain desirable effects.

The current research concerned with the student's perceptions towards the use of NLP-based model as a strategy for learning Arabic, especially for beginner students. Population was students of a private Islamic university in Makassar. Samples were selected based on a criteria, that is, non-Arabic major beginner students who took Arabic language as a general course. In this case, 120 respondents from two PTIS, i.e. UMI and UIM, were selected as the samples of the study. Collected using observation, questionnaire, recording, and interview, data were processed and analyzed using a qualitative descriptive analysis and interpretative technique, following the stages of data reduction, data presentation, data tabulation, and data verification.

a) Results of Learning Process

A questionnaire was administered to measure students' perception about the difficulty level they were experiencing in their learning of Arabic language, their interest level, their level of learning adjustment, classroom setting and techniques, and presentation techniques/learning process. Results showed that out of 120 respondents, there was $> 30 \leq 49.75$ percent who found the learning difficult, only $> 4 > 20$ percent found it easy, and the rest found it at the right level.

In terms of interest, about $> 16 > 18$ percent of the respondents found learning Arabic language interesting, $> 49 \leq 56$ found it uninteresting, and the remaining students were undecided. Furthermore, students who felt happy with the learning process was $\geq 14 < 20$ percent, whereas those who felt bored with the subject was $\geq 42 \geq 44$ percent.

Another variable that affected learning process was classroom management. Result showed that the classroom management had caused $> 19 \geq 28$ percent of the respondents to feel tensed during their learning, $\geq 56 < 70$ percent to feel anxious, whereas the remaining $\geq 16 \leq 20$ to feel enjoyable.

The next variable was the process of presenting learning material. The use of discussion and memorizing techniques was reported by $\geq 32 < 46$ percent of the respondents, lecturing technique by $> 36 \leq 46$ percent, and communicative and varied techniques by the remaining, i.e., $> 17 \geq 22$ percent. Additionally, a variable which was also

quite influential was the availability, and the use, of facilities and infrastructure to support learning. Concerning this aspect, about $> 19 \geq 22$ percent of students mentioned that technology and props had been used in addition to books/other teaching materials. Those who stated that only textbooks had been used was $> 51 \geq 52$ percent, while $\geq 26 < 29$ percent revealed that no equipment/facility of any kind had been used.

The cumulative results of data analysis of the respondents who have negative perceptions towards Arabic language can be seen in the following table:

Table 1

No	Type of activity (variable)	Respondents=120 (%)
1	Have never learnt Arabic language (BPBBA)	80,3
2	Find it difficult to learn Arabic language (MSIBBA)	40,9
3	Find it uninteresting to learn Arabic language (TMBBA)	52,75
4	Learning Arabic is boring (BBBA)	43,0
5	Learning Arabic is a tensed process (MgBBA)	23,6
6	Feel anxious due to a noisy class (G-KG)	58,4
7	Only lecturing technique is used in the learning process (TC-PP)	41,3
8	No facilities/medias have been used (TMA)	27,4
9	Use of memorization and discussion technique (THD)	38,9

The result presented in table 1 is illustrated in the following chart:

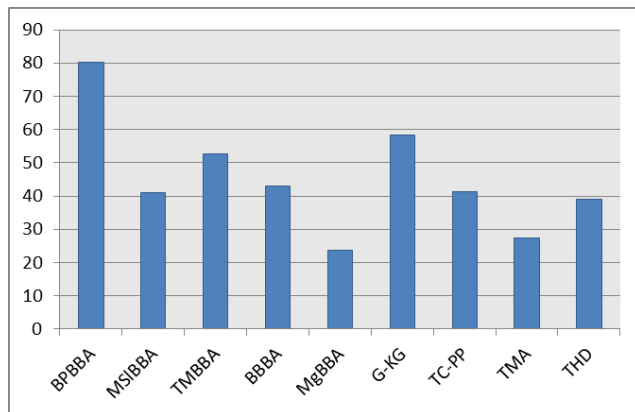


Chart 1

The cumulative results of data analysis of the respondents who have positive perceptions towards Arabic language can be seen in the following table:

Table 2

No	Type of activity	Respondents =120 (%)
1	Have ever learnt Arabic language (SPBBA)	19,7
2	Find it easy to learn Arabic language (MMBBA)	11,1
3	Find it interesting to learn Arabic language (MTMBBA)	16,8
4	Find learning of Arabic language enjoyable (MSBBA)	16,8
5	Feel comfortable to learn Arabic language (MYBBA)	18,0

6	Perception towards the use techniques in the learning process: communicative and varied (TPKV)	19,9
7	Perception towards the use of media/facility: technology/teaching aids had been used in addition to book/handouts (TAPBA)	20,7

The result presented in tabel 2 is illustrated in the following chart:

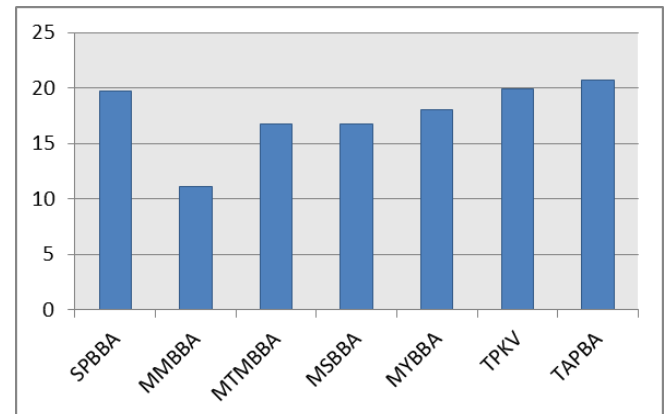


Chart 2

The cumulative results of data analysis of the respondents who have passive, reactive, or neutral perceptions towards Arabic language can be seen in the following table:

Table 3

No	Type of activity	Respondents =120 (%)
1	Difficulty level of learning Arabic language: moderate (TSI-SdBBA)	54,3
2	Interest level of learning Arabic language: moderate (TTr-SdBBA)	30,5
3	Engagement level learning Arabic language:: moderate (TBt-BBSBBA)	40,3

The result presented in table 3 is illustrated in the following chart:

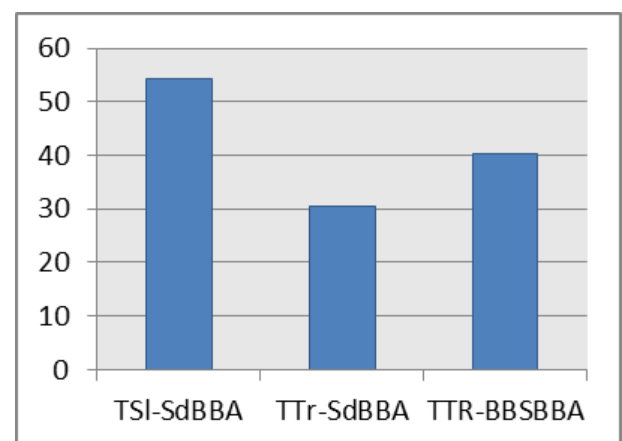


Chart 3

Based on the analysis presented in the tables and charts above, it can be concluded that the process of learning Arabic language has been ineffective. This was indicated by the fact that while the level of interest and enjoyment in learning BA was low (16.8%), the level of difficulty in learning the language was high (40.9%) and so was the level

of interest in learning Arabic (52.75%). This condition has caused students to become reluctant in the class, and found it uninteresting to learn Arabic language. Therefore, based on what have been indicated by these variables, it is necessary to apply a strategy for presenting materials of learning Arabic language to the students in ways that are interesting and fun.

b) Design of Learning Arabic Language

There are two stages in designing or preparing materials for teaching Arabic language: 1) preparing a guidebook for using NLP-based techniques of teaching Arabic language to beginners, 2) designing materials for learning Arabic language which features NLP-based content that follows an existing curriculum. For further explanation or detailed description of the techniques of teaching Arabic language, please refer to a textbook to be published in the near future.

An important point that should be maintained in the first phase of designing the book is the pillars of NLP, which must serve as a basic foundation in the application of teaching techniques that are based on the NLP approach. The pillars are the main requirements that must be met to achieve desirable change in oneself. There are four pillars, namely: 1) Outcome (Objective or Specific Results to be achieved), 2) Rapport (building closeness), 3) Sensory Acuity (High Sensitivity), 4) Flexibility.

Another important point that must also be considered in the design of the book is a model that represents the principle of capturing spot and learner characteristics (learning style).

4. Principles of Spot Capturing

Spot Capturing principle is a learning model that provides the widest possible space for brain stimulation to be optimally radiated, so that it will capture all events that it sweeps in the dimensions of space and time according to the emission of waves when brain is in a balanced condition. In this way, one does not start with the left brain dogma, nor begin with only one learning goal, e.g., memorization, in mind. The concept is initiated by the absorption of media in a large area through the beaming of all waves of brain (right and left) followed by the propagation of all the waves to be radiated optimally so that it can capture vertices (hence it is called spot capturing) which will result in the strengthening of the following process of: Building of Feelings, Strengthening of Perception, Formation of Imagination, Strengthening of Philosophy, Making of Meaning. Shapes and types of an object can greatly affect the strength of brain waves field being emitted. A riveting visualization of colors, images, animations, and sounds of an object can have enormous influences on the radiation of stimulated brain waves. Conversely, if an object has only one characteristic, e.g. numbers, letters, or a still image, then the amount of waves being stimulated will only be minimum or limited (Widiasmadi, 2010). This concept has been widely adopted in many developed countries, such as Japan.

Spot Capturing principle can be implemented effectively if the followings are attended to:

- a. Stimulants of waves from both hemispheres of brain must be in an equilibrium state and free of pressure or targets.
- b. A learning model must be innovative and creative in order to provide ample spaces for all brain waves to emit maximum radiation.
- c. A territory of initial understanding must be made as widely as possible, for example by integrating visualization of the scenario, motion, sound, color, and layout into every object being discussed in order to stimulate all brain waves.
- d. Students' physical and psychological state must be in a top condition, therefore schools need to maintain conducive academic atmospheres (the concept of learning from nature is very supportive).
- e. Presentation of object of analysis must go from simple to hard according to student's level.
- f. Student's answer during a discussion should not be responded either by teacher or other students in terms of right or wrong only, rather student's statement or opinion need to be appreciated. This is where spot capturing will reveal the truth through an answer or statement provided by students.

5. Learning Style

Every student will be able to undergo a learning process which applies the Spot Capturing model, since this model gives students freedom to actualize their global brain waves, from imagination, creativity, logic, and kinesthetic to biofeedback. Students with different ways of learning and thinking will also be able to comfortably adopt the concept, so the differences in students' learning style will not become a constraint for the implementation of this concept since all senses will be well-stimulated. This is understandable because all information is captured in and pulled directly by global brain. Since students do not entirely depend on their senses only, they will be able to further optimize the stimulation of energy wave emitted by global brain, which serves as a central control for 3-phase emission of brain frequencies, i.e. to transmit, capture, and pull all the information that are presented through the concept of spot capturing.

Some experts have identified several types of learning styles in terms of modality. Modality concerns with how brain optimally absorbs information that come through senses. Based on this process, styles of learning can be categorized into: Auditory, Visual, Reading, and Kinesthetic (Gardner in Widiasmadi, 2010):

- a) **Auditory.** In this type of learning, the main force that stimulates global brain waves is information or impression captured in sound. A person with this style relies very much on his/her hearing to able to understand and remember something. Those who possess this learning style are generally difficult to directly absorb information in writing, in addition to having difficulty in writing or reading.
- b) **Visual.** In this type, the force that stimulates global brain is impression or information that is captured through image(s)), so that people having this style learn more effectively by focusing on visual acuity. Some visual characteristics are possessed by learners with this style:

they always look, pay attention to the lips of a person who is speaking to him, and tend to use gestures when expressing something. They do not really like speaking in front of groups nor listen to others, are usually unable to remember information given orally. In addition, they prefer demonstration to oral explanation, and are usually able to sit quietly in the midst of a noisy crowd without being distracted.

- c) **Reading.** This type gains force for stimulating global brain waves from information displayed in writings (capturing reading), so that a reading-type person can learn most effectively by focusing on writing or notes. People with this learning style usually like to read and make notes. They also find beautiful, neat handwriting very memorable to them, and are able to easily remember what they read or write.
- d) **Kinesthetic.** This type gets a force that stimulates global brain waves through biofeedback. Regarding this type, an amazing research result has been reported by a psychiatrist named Dr. Fennis Waitley, Ph.D. (in Widiasmadi, 2010). Using a tool of biological information (biofeedback) called the visual movement exercise, the researcher installed the tool on some athletes and asked them to run in the mind only. Incredibly, the same muscles move in the same way when they are actually racing. How could it be possible? The conclusion was that our brain cannot really differentiate whether we are actually doing something or just imagining it. Something we perform in mind is interpreted by our brain as something that our body is actually doing. The concept of spot capturing can therefore be used to support a learning process of children with kinesthetic type. People with kinesthetic learning style usually like to touch everything they encounter, like to do everything by hand, and are difficult to keep silent. They usually have a good body coordination, like using real objects as learning media, and find it difficult to learn abstract things.

In addition to the aforementioned factors, other factors are also important, including:

- 1) **Fire the anchor.** This anchor is triggered when a need arises, e.g. when a class turns to be less effective and causes somewhat saggy spirit, so that students can be brought back to a favorable condition. This can be done by showing interesting materials, such as slides in Arabic, in various forms, either visually or auditorily or kinesthetically. At the top right of some slides, which are used to teach in the following days, are the words "Carpe Diem: Seize the Day!" In students' conscious mind, the words may be seen as a mere symbol, or the students may think that the teachers/lecturers use the words simply because they like them. In their unconscious mind, however, the words may trigger certain emotions that they experienced when watching a film.
- 2) **Nested Loop.** Before closing a class, we need to create a "nested loop," a process of assembling various parts of a lesson into an interlocking and interconnected network, involving either previous lessons, specific parts of the lesson today, or other subject in the future. Nested loop is created by using a wide selection of "key words," which, if accessed, will lead to the memory of other before things, subjects, etc. In the NLP-based approach, this is

carried out by using a metaphorical story that applies principles of association.

- 3) **Future pacing.** To make the knowledge we just shared more attached and more applicable, it is important to end a lesson with future pacing, i.e. the process of bringing students' mind to a future situation where they will need such knowledge. Students need to be shown how the new knowledge can be used as a solution to particular issues. Teacher needs to do it with a clear language and sensory base (using VAKGO clearly). VAKGO stands for Visual (sight), Auditory (hearing), Kinesthetic (physical touching), Gustatory (tasting), and Olfactory (smelling). Finally, a teacher needs round off the lesson with a metaphor or story, coupled with the anchor as a clasp.

6. Conclusion

NLP (Neuro-linguistic Programming) is an approach that can be applied in the process of learning the Arabic language, especially for beginner students, because this method builds positive utterances that are transformed into brain language program, so that negative feelings, such as fear, boredom, laziness, no response, and the like commonly perceived by students in their learning of Arabic language, will disappear and are replaced by the senses of fun, comfort, positive response, and curiosity to learn more. This study has demonstrated that students had positive perception towards the use of the NLP approach and method in learning Arabic language. The method was also proved very effective to build students' self-confidence and craving to learn, as well as to help students grasp their lessons more effectively.

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