Techniques of Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language through Constructivist Paradigm: Malaysian Perspective

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Abstract:

This analysis discusses the constructivist paradigm of teaching Arabic as a foreign language in Malaysian settings. This review examines the role of interactive multimedia in enhancing the chalk and talk methods of teaching Arabic in Malaysian schools. This paper also investigates the importance of Arabic Language in Malaysia. Furthermore, the Malaysian Government's plan of action to introduce a series of major educational reforms in an attempt to develop Malaysia into a regional educational hub is dealt with. In addition, this paper looks further into possible methods in acquiring Arabic as a foreign language in Malaysian classrooms.

This review also takes a closer view at the creative methods of teaching the Arabic Language using state of the art technology. This appraisal also institutes some useful guidelines for instructors to teach Arabic Language effectively. Some practical guidelines are also introduced for the learners to grasp the Arabic language faster. Recommendations and constructive suggestions are outlined in the later part. *Copyright: Qais Faryadi(2007).*

Introduction

There is no doubt that, the Arabic Language has an exceptional position in Islam (Richard Hooker 1999). Allah has chosen the Arabic Language as an effective medium of communication for His message. Arabic is not only a language per se, but a language has been chosen by Allah to communicate with His servants (James Coffman 1995). Allah says in the Quran: Verily, *We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran in order that you may understand* (Translated by:Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali.)

In fact, Allah is directly telling us that learning Arabic is very crucial in understanding His message. Indeed, in order to understand the beauty of Al-Quran, the revelation by which Allah has sent down His Messages, one must put the learning of the Arabic Language as the first priority (Al-Quran). In the educational arena, Malaysia is one of the fastest developing countries in the world. The Malaysian Government initiated a series of major educational reforms since 1996 in an attempt to develop Malaysia into a regional educational hub. In Malaysia, the constitution guarantees the right of education to all its citizens without discrimination (Federal Constitution 2006). The Malaysian National Education System provides primary, secondary and tertiary education with the purpose of creating a united and disciplined community (Malaysia: Education For All. 2001).

Picture 1: Face to face learning

Another type of school available in Malaysia is the Islamic Religious School or Sekolah Agama Rakyat (SAR). These type of schools teach Muslim students all the subjects related to Islam including the Arabic Language (Education In Malaysia).In a dramatic move to enhance the learning of Arabic Language in the country, the Malaysian government has introduced a project called *(J-QAF)* (*Jawi-Quran-Arabic and Fardhu ain*) to introduce Islamic studies and Arabic Language to the schools (Daily Express 2006). This move is an attempt to revise the syllabus to include Jawi, Arabic along with Fardhu Ain in the study.


Picture 2: Chalk and talk learning

The main objective of this endeavor was to change the perceptions that comprehensive Islamic education cannot be obtained in national schools (Rozmal bin Malakan 2005). In addition to that, the move was to encourage Muslim parents to send their children to national schools instead of private religious schools. This serves to be in-line with the call of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to bring the Arabic Language and the Quranic recitation into the mainstream education to foster better Muslims in the society (Malaysia: National schools to teach Islamic studies.2004).

Arabic language, when taught as a second language, is perceived by the learners, to be the most difficult subject (Jassem Ali Jassem 2000). The instructors and teachers ought to use field-tested theories of teaching in order to teach the Arabic Language effectively. Teachers have to enhance their teaching methods by blending multimedia to aid their teachings in order to gain students' attention (Helen Ashton, Ali Zalzala 2004).

Using technology and multimedia not only motivates learners, but it also enhances their performance in the classroom (Paul Catley 2005). Study indicated that using state of the art technology significantly improves the capability of students in acquiring knowledge and helps them to continue learning (Inci Morgil, Soner Yavus, Oagi Ozyalcin Oskay and Secil Arda 2005).
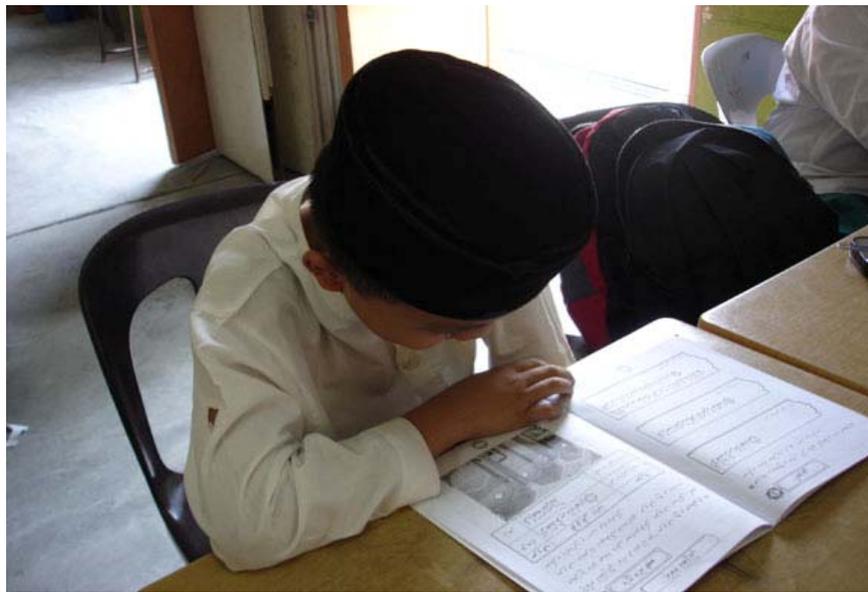
Picture 3: Learning with tension

The Learning Process

Study claims that, Arabic Language can be mastered more meaningfully if instructors utilize sounds, patterns, gestures, symbols and blend multimedia in everyday lessons. (Wikipedia 2006).

Computer mediated teaching methods not only provide opportunities for the teachers to prepare excellent instructions, but it also paves the way for more challenging and more meaningful learning environments (Cengiz Hakan Aydin 2005). Learning and teaching do not happen in isolation. It involves learning plan and student- instructor collaboration. If teachers introduce plan-oriented learning models to their students, it motivates them and helps them to continue learning. (Lui, Kat E. 2005). Successful teaching and effective learning occurs when instructors use creativity and effective strategies based on group work and cooperative learning (Neo, M. 2005).

Experts assert that, personality and the pattern of preferences effect teaching and learning processes. Naturally, people are related to each other and they can learn better if there is group collaboration in the classroom (Clarkson, A. 2005). Another study has established that, in order for students to gain knowledge, instructors must create a meaningful and technology-mediated learning environment (Andrew Gemino, Drew Parker, Adrienne, Olnich, Kutzschan 2006).

Further claims report that an objective-oriented instructor promotes critical thinking in the classroom to achieve results (Merideth E. Kiger 2003). He or she must engage learners as a precondition to provide an effective learning environment in the classroom. Trainers must foster learner-to-learner interaction modules for meaningful learning outcomes. Teachers should promote the role of engagement in the classroom by constantly praising students for their achievements (Hal Beder, Jessica Tomkins, Pasty Medina, Regina Riccioni, Weiling Deng 2006).

Picture 4: Non-conducive environment
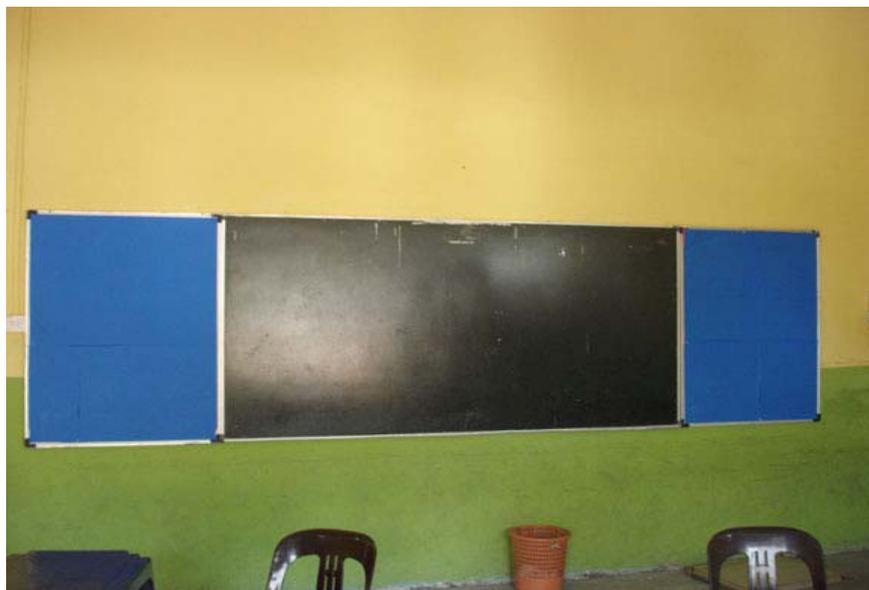
Picture 5: Tedious environment

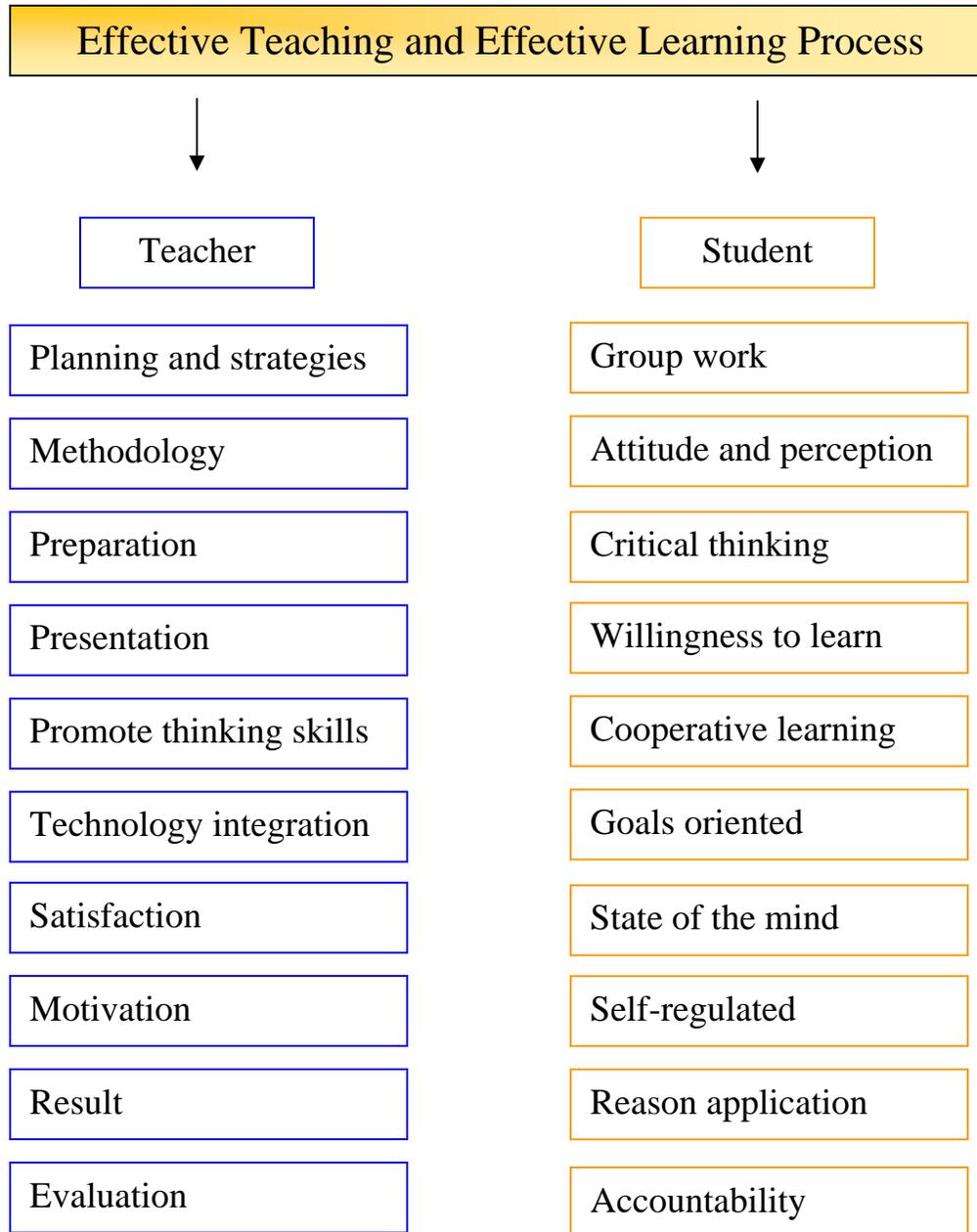Picture 6: Mind achievement

Picture 7: Student-centered learning

Effective Teaching and Effective Learning Process	

Teacher	Student
Planning and strategies	Group work
Methodology	Attitude and perception
Preparation	Critical thinking
Presentation	Willingness to learn
Promote thinking skills	Cooperative learning
Technology integration	Goals oriented
Satisfaction	State of the mind
Motivation	Self-regulated
Result	Reason application
Evaluation	Accountability

Table 1: Teaching and learning process

"*Learning does not occur in vacuum*". (Nira Hativa, Alan Lesgold 1996). In fact learning can be affected by a variety of factors. Such factors include student's behavior, teacher's behavior, student's point of view, student-to-student interaction, social atmosphere, classroom management, learning materials and the learning environment. (Nira Hativa 1996).
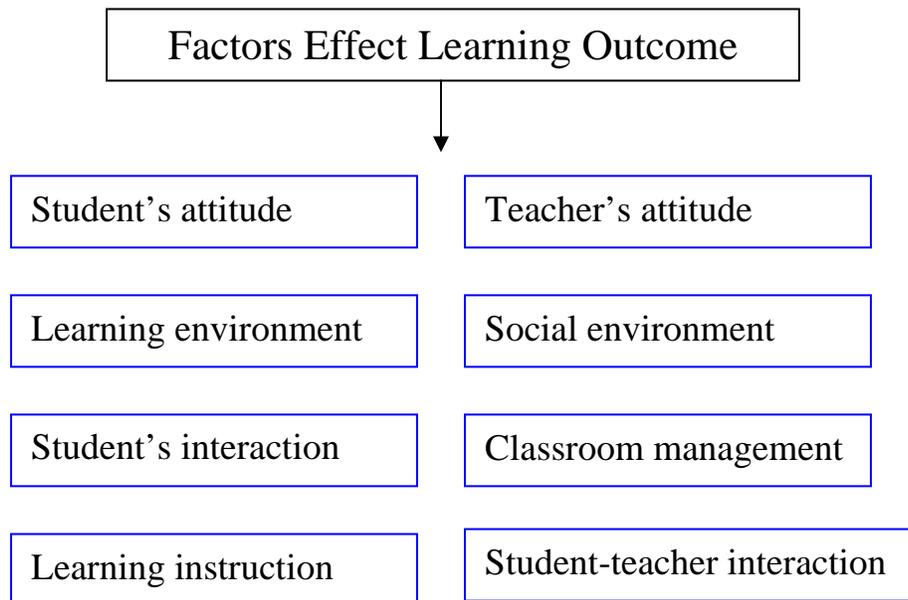
Picture 8: Student-centered learning

Factors Effect Learning Outcome	
Student's attitude	Teacher's attitude
Learning environment	Social environment
Student's interaction	Classroom management
Learning instruction	Student-teacher interaction

Table 2: Factors effecting learning outcome

To expose learners to a fruitful and critical thinking session, as Carol A. Giancarlo, Peter A. Facione (2001) assert, that there are varieties of techniques which can be implemented by an instructor to encourage positive learning outcomes.

One such positive engagement is in including a storytelling session. Storytelling learning environments help to improve learners' listening skills, thinking skills and language abilities (Katherine McGrath Speaker 2000).

Picture 9: Learning through storytelling

Techniques of Positive Teaching

Study designated that promoting problem solving, reasoning, proper communication, appropriate connection and intelligent presentation skills enhance positive learning outcomes (Burns, Marilyn 2001). Research also claims that each individual learner and teacher has left, right or middle-brain preference. Instructors can help their students by understanding the correct mind attitudes, which would bring about an encouraging atmosphere conducive for learning (Diane Connell 2002). Another study also showed that when learners are exposed to content materials which are relevant to their needs, their motivation to learn continues (Melanie Cardell 2005).

Experts have confirmed that, teachers should promote critical thinking and problem solving skills in the class, rather than forcing students to memorize mere facts. By feeding too many facts into the students' memories, they can find only a limited amount of time to understand the subject (Heidi L. Lujan, Stephen E. DiCarlo 2006). Traditionally speaking, teachers often lectured behind closed doors, shying away from the blessing of multimedia (Shulman, Richard E. 1992). The role of the teacher in a traditional setting is to give orders and to ask the students to follow him or her in bitter silence.

With the increasing emergence of computers and interactive multimedia learning, teacher-centered learning is slowly but surely, fading in order to give way to a more meaningful learning environment (Jacobs, Peter 1992). As such we need major structural transformations in our very educational system and methodology of teaching in the classrooms (Elizabeth Hartnell-Young 2006).

Picture 10: Traditionally arranged classroom

"Good teaching means the teacher must: (i) be knowledgeable in her/his discipline, (ii) show enthusiasm in teaching, (iii) emphasize concepts and critical thinking, (iv) encourages question from the students, and (v) be caring to her/his students". (Sanwar

Ali 2005). So a caring instructor would encourage learners' natural curiosity and creates an active atmosphere without fear and embarrassment. Teachers should regard learning as an individually-directed development and channel learners towards autonomous learning approach (Sercu, Lies, Garcia, Maria Del, Carmen Mendez, Prieto, Paloma, Castro 2005).

Techniques of Positive Teaching

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Storytelling + surprises

Use reasoning

Use communications

Relevancy

Use left-right brain

Connections

Presentations

Using fewer facts

Media integration

Emphasize concepts

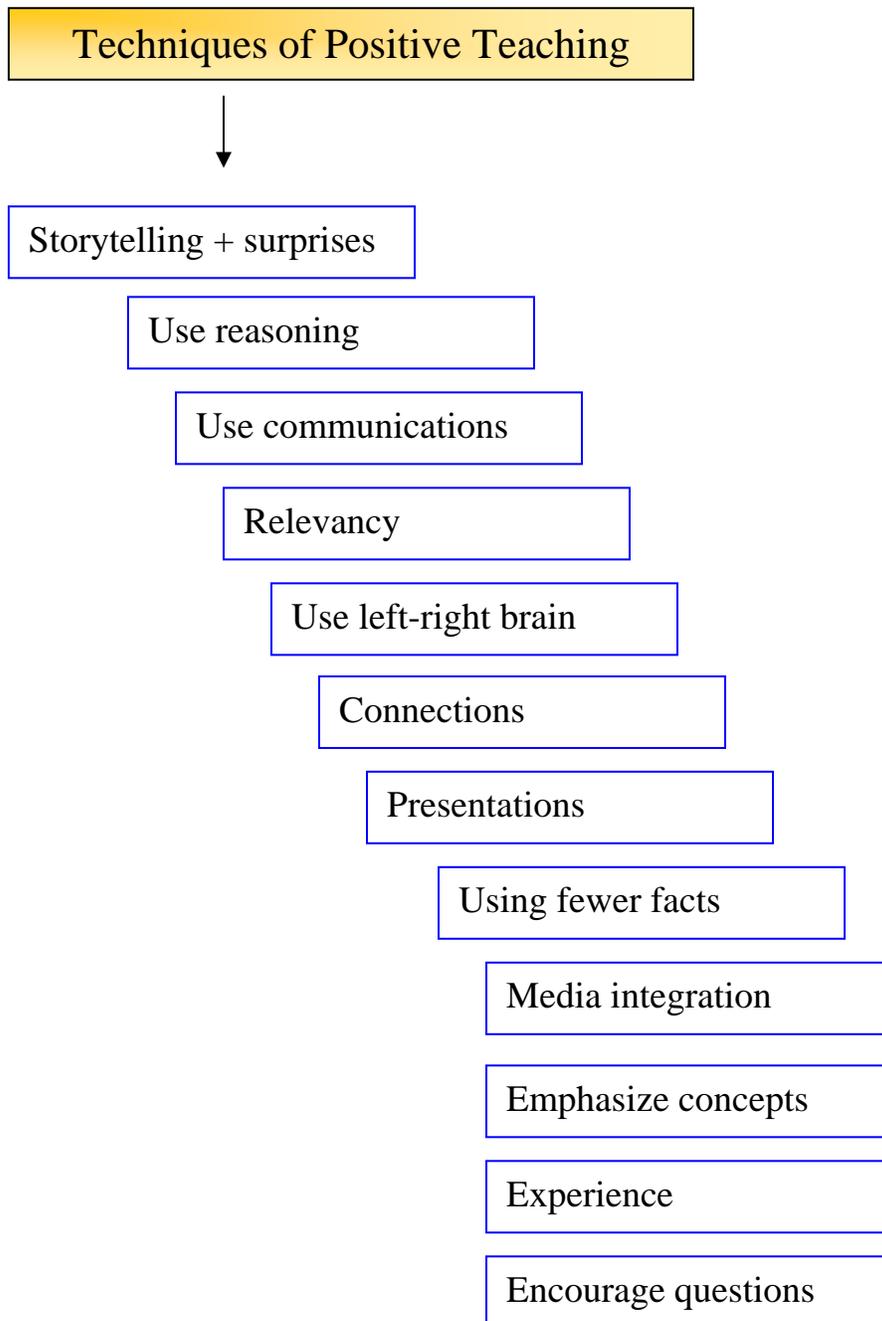| Experience |
|---|

Encourage questions

Table 3: Positive teaching techniques

Teaching is an art. A creative and thoughtful teacher tries to develop his or her students into artists exploring their unseen capabilities. This can be achieved through the systematic education of instructors regarding the teaching and learning processes (Colleen M. Fairbanks,Diane LaGrone 2006). Educators and the ones being educated equally benefit when implementing the integration of technology into their classrooms. Research has found that students felt centered in the class by utilizing the educational technology while instructors felt that educational technology has changed the way they perceived the teaching profession (Jamilin Jais, Zarina Abdul Rahman, Hanafizan Hussain 2003).

Apart from being innovative, creative, imaginative and artistic, the nature of good instructors (Carolyn Bunting 2006) are those whom utilize field-tested theories of instruction in order to achieve intended goals and objectives. As such, the concept of learning is perceived differently by diverse schools of thoughts.

For the constructivists, learning happens when students are engaged in a meaningful discussion in their learning surroundings (Douglas A. Guiffrida 2006). Constructivists explain that, learners remember things with the visual meanings in their minds not just facts. To the constructivists, education is a method of discovery. Information is retrieved when a learner makes a personal discovery. (Bruner, J. 1996). In constructivist classroom, teachers promote diverse thinking and problem solving skills as a means of useful learning. Instructors in constructivist setting encourage learners to learn cooperatively and think creatively to achieve better results (Katsuko Hara 2006).

Being so, learning according to constructivism is an active progression in which students construct their own meanings and use their critical thinking abilities to solve complex problems (Thomas M. Cannolly, Carolyn E. Begg 2006). Study indicated that student-centered learning gives opportunity to the learner to be more responsible and gives him or her, the freedom of choice to choose how to learn, what to learn, when to learn and also to become an active member of the community of learners (Ka-Ming Yuen, Kit-Tai-Hau 2006).

In constructivism learning, when students are allowed to make their own investigations, they usually gain a better understanding (Insook Chuang 2004). The teacher's job is to engage the students into meaningful dialogues and guide them when it is necessary so much so that students can positively progress (Bruner, J.1973).

Discussion

Instructors should bear in mind that learning occurs when students are motivated (John E. Barbuto, Jr. 2006). Students must be given the choice to learn cooperatively and at the same time they must be encouraged to participate in class activities without fear and humiliation (Bruner, Jerome 1996). Furthermore, instructors must integrate technology to aid them while teaching their lessons in order to achieve effective and creative ways of knowledge transfer. Learners should be persuaded to use critical thinking and reasoning in the classrooms to help improve their learning skills (G Martin Izzo, Barry E Langford, Scott Vitell 2006). The job of the teacher in the classroom is to promote the concept of cooperation among the learners and to be helpful towards each other.
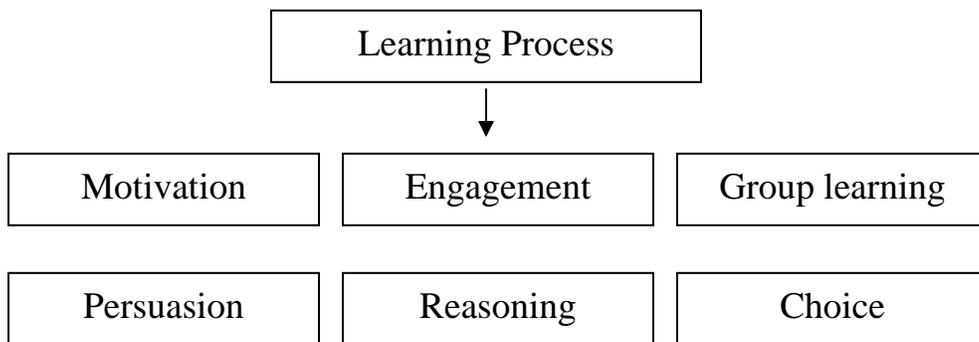
Learning Process		
Motivation	Engagement	Group learning
Persuasion	Reasoning	Choice

Table 4: Learning process

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