

**Learning Strategies and Learner
Training**

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Abstract

The subject of learning strategies and learner training have received the attention of researchers because they can make an important contribution to the learning process. This paper investigates learning strategies by analyzing reports collected from eight first year undergraduate university students who are studying English. The data were analyzed according categories of Wenden (1998). Findings show that the students have some awareness of their language abilities, knowledge of how their language abilities will guide them in using English and they are also aware of strategies they follow to improve their learning of English as a second language. The teacher plays an important role in guiding learners to use appropriate strategies to deal with specific weakness.

Keywords:

Learner training, Learning strategies, Person Knowledge, social knowledge, strategic Knowledge, Metacognition.

الخلاصة

تلقي موضوع استراتيجيات التعليم وتدريب المتعلم اهتمام الباحثين بسبب الاسهامات المهمة لهذا الموضوع في عملية التعلم. يناقش هذا البحث استراتيجيات التعليم من خلال تحليل تقارير جمعت لثمان طلاب جامعيين في المرحلة الاولى يدرسون اللغة الإنكليزية. حلت البيانات طبقاً لتصانيف وندن (١٩٩٨). تبين النتائج بأن للطلاب بعض الوعي بقدراتهم اللغوية ومعرفة بكيفية توجيه قدراتهم اللغوية لهم في استخدام اللغة الإنكليزية وهم أيضاً واعين للاستراتيجيات التي يتبعوها لتطوير تعلمهم للغة الإنكليزية كلغة ثانية. يلعب المعلم دور مهم في توجيه المتعلمين لاستخدام الاستراتيجية المناسبة لمعالجة ضعف محدد.

الكلمات الدالة

تدريب المتعلم – استراتيجيات التعليم – معرفة الشخص – المعرفة الاجتماعية – المعرفة الاستراتيجية – ما وراء المعرفة.

1. Introduction

Learner training can be simply defined as increasing the awareness of students about how they learn and, as a result, assist them to discover effective ways of working (Scrivener, 1992). Learner training helps learners to discover how they learn most effectively. It means enhancing learners to take liability in learning and helping them to improve study skills and learning strategies. The aim of learner training is to produce effective, independent language learners.

Wenden (1991: 86) defines learner training as “the learning activities organized to help learners improve their skills as learners which includes learning to use strategies; knowledge about the language learning process; and attitude and development to support autonomous use of the strategies and knowledge as well as learner education”.

Ellis and Sinclair (1989) mentions that the aims of learner training are to discover the learning strategies that suit the learners best and consider the factors that affect their learning. It concentrates their attention on the learning process. Therefore, the focus is not on what to learn but on how to learn. Oxford (1990) states that the aims of learner training are to make learning of language more meaningful; promote co-operation and collaboration between learner and teacher; facilitate practice and learning of strategies that enable self-directed learning and encourage independence; and create awareness of the choices available in language learning.

This paper investigates metacognition by analysing report data from eight students. Evidence of metacognition in the report is analysed. The learning needs of the students were then identified. Finally, recommendations are made for learner training that helps the students develop their metacognitive skills.

2. Review of literature on language learning strategies

Previous studies on language learning strategies achieved by such researchers as Stern (1975), Rubin (1975), and Frolich Naiman Stern and Todesco (1978) as cited in Dickinson (1994) shows that good learners have strong participation or involvement in language learning; that they set up the teacher's objectives in addition to their own learning objectives because they have clear ideas about the best ways for them to go about language learning. Similar findings are perceptible from the work of learner strategies undertaken by Weinstein and Mayer (1986: 315) who state that "learning strategies have learning facilitation as a goal and are intention on the part of the learner, the goal of strategy use is to affect the learner's motivation or affective state, or the way in which the learner selects, acquires, organizes, or integrates new knowledge". I can sum up, the learner who has knowledge about learning strategies and how to use them effectively will be an active and independent learner.

3. Background of learning strategies

Researchers and teachers have recognized that the success of students language learning cannot only achieved by seeking for better teaching models. Under the same language input, not all students can fulfill the same success; some students will be better than others in learning. Learning is a two-way communication. It means that both students and teachers need to collaborate because the success of the process of language learning cannot be made by neglecting one of them. Oxford (1990) mentions that the interest of research has shifted to how student gain language not to what students learn or acquire. It means the emphasis will be on the acquisition of learning or process of learning and not on the product or outcome of learning.

O'Malley & Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) put classifications of learning strategies that have led to more research in this field. Wenden (1991) outlines sketch for learning strategies which includes cognitive strategies (selecting input, comprehending input, storing input, and retrieving input) and self-management strategies (planning, monitoring, and evaluating) while Cohen (1998) recognizes that strategies consist of language use strategies and language learning strategies and mentions that the two strategies can promote students' learning through the processes consciously selected by learners which are the storage, retention, recall, and application of information.

As earlier mentioned, many scholars discuss the concept of learner training under learning strategies (Benson & Voller, 1997; Willing, 1989; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1991; Stern, 1992 and Oxford, 1990). According to Oxford (1990: 8), learning strategy is "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations". It is also seen as "specific mental steps or learners implement to learn" (Wenden 1991: 163) as well as "learners consciously engage in activities to achieve certain goals, that they exercise a choice of procedure, and that they undertake some form of long-term planning." (Stern 1992: 261). Scholars agree that it is a fundamental tenet of learner training that poor language learners can benefit from the learning strategies of successful learners with resulting increase in their learning efficiency (Rubin, 1987; Wenden, 1987). To this end, the scholars' views differ on the concept of learning strategies and their classification. Oxford (1990) classifies learning strategies as direct and indirect strategies, while in Wenden (1991), the learning strategies are classified as cognitive and self-management strategies.

Based on the two classifications of learning strategies by Oxford & Wenden, Learner training is directly linked to Oxford's indirect strategies or Wenden's self-management strategies where they placed it under metacognitive strategies, which was grouped along with social strategies and affective strategies or planning monitoring and evaluating strategies in the Wenden's classification.

The justification of scholars to place learner training under self-management strategies was born out of the principles that learners employ self-management strategies to manage and monitor the learning process. O'Malley & Chamot (1990:8) point out that "metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process, planning for the learning, monitoring of comprehension or production while it is taking place, and self-evaluation after learning activity has been completed". It can also be termed as regulatory skills of self-directed learning because of its three sub-division: (1) planning (2) monitoring and (3) evaluating (Wenden, 1991; and Stern, 1992).

Similarly, O'Malley & Chamot (1990) discuss learning strategy under social/affective strategies in their literature which relates it to redirecting negative thoughts and cooperative learning, asking for clarification. Brown (2000: 123) on his part distinguishes learning strategies as "principles that are relating to input as well as communication strategies that are relating to output in language learning".

5. Research questions

1. What do the learners know about their own ability?
2. What strategies are the learners aware of for speaking and listening skills?
3. What are the learners' needs for improving metacognition?

6. Participants

The participants in the study were eight students in the first year undergraduates at a university. They wrote eight paragraphs describing their skills in speaking at the end of the second term of speaking class.

7. Method

The method for analysis which will be used with these students will be to identify the indirect strategies which are metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. They are called indirect because they support language without being directly involved in the target language. It will apply to speaking skills.

8. Data analysis

The data will be analyzed by adopting categories from Wenden (1998) personal and strategic knowledge and strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) from Oxford (1990).

8. 1. Affective strategies

The first student which I will name A1, second B2 and the fourth student D4 share common features when they say that their excitement makes them unable to speak. A1: says "But I am very excited .That's why I don't speak fluently", B2: says "Actually, I'm not very good at speaking English. Whenever I speak English, I'll get very excited", D4: says "Also, I always nervous when I am speaking especially in exams" these are affective strategies such as identifying one's mood and anxiety level or talking about feeling.

B2 followed some strategies to calm himself when he mentions that speaking is phobia for me and he wants to get rid of his fears by increasing self-confidence. He says "I tried various way to calm myself when I speak I hope that I can beat my fear. I must increase self-confidence (affective strategies) which can be solved in this situation by breathing deeply and by encouraging himself to be more confident.

Student D4 talks about his state of being nervous during speaking "Also, I always nervous when I am speaking especially in exams" affective strategies



“identifying ones mood and anxiety level which can also be solved by breathing deeply and by relaxing.

8.2. Person knowledge

Students A1, C3, E5, G7, and H8 say that this term of learning is better than the last one because they develop their ability in speaking. They say that their English has improved in comparison with the first term. A1: says “I wrote a report to you at the beginning of the year. Now I am writing. Firstly, my English is improving”, C3: says “I don’t say I am perfect but I am better than the first term now”, E5: says “Firstly, I want to emphasis that my speaking skills significantly improved in this education term. Classes help me to add extra improvement to my speaking”, G7: says “My speaking is getting well if I compare it with last year. For instance, last year if somebody asked me about anything about daily life situation I couldn’t talk. And now I can enter without prepared into conversation which related to daily life”, and H8: says “firstly, I mention that my speaking. At the start of the year I send you writing about my speaking. I said my speaking is bad for me but now I control my excitement. It is an important thing for me”. All these are instances of personal knowledge which relates to what learners believe about their effectiveness as learners when they describe their improvement in speaking in comparison with last year, they know how much development they reach and gain.

Student A1 says that he can ask and answer questions, and narrate story. He has followed some strategies to be in this level for example watching films, listening to music, practicing very much, and communicate with a foreign student. A1: says “I can introduce myself, my hobbies, my experiment easily. Also, I can ask a question other people about a subject. Sometimes, when someone asks a question to me, I don't understand and it is hard to me. As I don’t understand, I can't respond to them. I can connect phrases in a simple way” (all these are instances of personal knowledge he talks about his proficiency and what he believes about his effectiveness as a learner when he makes self-assessment about his ability, what he can do and what he cannot do).

B2: says “My English grammar is very good”, personal knowledge (knowledge about their proficiency, how will they read write, how much grammar they know) but he mentions that his speaking is very bad, “But, I have to say, my speaking is very bad, not fluency” here it is also personal knowledge (what learner believe about their effectiveness as learners, here he is aware of points of weakness and strength, he is weak in speaking but strong in grammar).

Student F6 says that he has difficulties in understanding and he has followed some strategies like reading books and talking with his friend to

improve his learning “I have difficulties to understand person whose speaking is fast and his/her pronunciation is bad” while C3: says “I have a good understanding capacity in my opinion. If I practice about the listening I believe I will be better on listening”, these are examples of personal knowledge (human factors that facilitate or inhibit learning), some students have good understanding while others not.

G7 in line 21 says “I can figure out the main points of a speech on common subjects in school at the lessons. I can understand television programs and films without much effort. My understanding and speaking are getting well, too” and E5 says “I can easily express myself on daily conversations. Without thinking too much I able to talk on familiar topics by using correct grammar structures”, it is personal knowledge (knowledge about their proficiency, how will they read write, how much grammar they know and knowledge about their effectiveness as learners, the student can make judgment about his knowledge whether it is good or not).

8. 3. Strategic knowledge

All students have improved their weakness in speaking and learning English by following some strategies to overcome it. For example, A1: says “Watching film is benefit. I improve this way. I watch film as English subtitle. Therefore I see different word. As days pass, I believe to improve my English. Especially, I must practice very much and also communicate foreign student”. B2: says “I think, I will work at hotel for improving my speaking this summer. I hope that I can beat my fear. I must increase self-confidence. Finally, I will make every effort to improve my English”. C3: says “And I want to talk about how I can improve my speaking. I can listen some videos about speaking from language sites or I can read books about learning English and vocabulary. I can have exams by myself. Or I can watch films with their English subtitles to understand and for improving my speaking”. D4: says “Watching English films are helpful for improving speaking and listening, as well. Actually, I wish I could work in a touristic place. I'm sure I could be better about speaking and listening”. F6: says “Besides I bought a lot of books, such as Virginia Woolf, Charles Dickens and so on. Even if I do not understand very well, I will analyze them”. All these are instances of strategic knowledge, it means all these students have knowledge about these strategies, what they are, why they are useful and how can they use it in best way to help to develop their learning.

8. 4. Social strategies

Social strategies enable the learner to learn by interaction with others. Some students in this data analysis use this strategy to understand the target language. A: says “As days pass, I believe to improve my English. Especially, I must practice very much and also communicate foreign student”, E5: says

“Vocabulary lackness makes me fail to speak variety of topics. As a result, generally I manage to speak with a foreigner and transpose my ideas clearly. By using range of vocabulary I want to talk to a native speaker clearly and fluently on different topics such as politics, economy, sports etc. In order to achieve my aims I know I have to practice more than I need. And I should talk to people as well as possible”, G7: says “If I don’t understand something I ask about it and want to explain it again”, and F6: says “Because we always practiced speaking with our friends, knowledge about the social strategies whether they involve asking questions for clarification or talking with partners or native speakers or other social strategies which help to get benefit from it to reach their aims at learning.

8. 5. Metacognitive strategies

Metacognitive strategies are used to manage the learning process overall. Metacognitive strategies include the student's thinking as well as their physical actions. In this data some of students are aware about metacognitive strategies. C3: says “I want to be the best in the future. I have some problems now and I am unlucky about school and lessons, but I am hopeful about my future. I should study very much, because I have some dreams for my future career” here he is talking about metacognitive strategies (identifying one’s own preference and needs, he wants to be the best in the future). E5: says “classes helps me to add extra improvement to my speaking” metacognitive strategies (evaluating task success, the student knew that class has helped him and he can evaluate the success of the task). H8: says “To do better my speaking in future, I want to go abroad. I know that it is expensive for a student. But if I pass Erasmus exam I can go abroad”, here we are concerned with planning, he has a plan to go abroad to be better at speaking. Metacognitive strategies whether they are identifying one’s own preference and needs, planning, monitoring mistakes or evaluating task success all of them are used to manage the learning process overall, here the students know about these strategies and the result of applying them in their learning therefore they want to apply it.

According to the analysis of data depending on categories of Wenden (1998) and Strategies of Oxford (1990), I can conclude that the students are aware of their levels at learning and they can make self-assessment about it. They describe their personal and strategic knowledge and the strategies that they must do to develop their learning.

9. Discussion and needs analysis

This paper has identified the strategies and knowledge used by students to their speaking skills and learning of second language. In this paper, I have analyzed the data according to categories of Wenden (1998), personal, task, and strategic knowledge and also according to the strategies of

Oxford (1990). Some students have common needs which resemble other students. According to Wenden, we see almost all students share common personal knowledge which is what the learner knows about their proficiency as learners and the second point is that all students share is that each student has special strategies to improve his learning of second language. The student takes various actions to improve their knowledge and skills but sometimes he needs guidance for improvement. Students are motivated in improving speaking skills due to continuous difficulty they experience whenever they met foreigner in any spheres of their lives. Motivation is one important aspects of learning process therefore teachers can increase the motivation of student to learn for example by providing them with the material in the form of short stories, and providing the student with more opportunities to practice in the classroom interaction enable the student to focus on specific weakness and to encourage him to deal with it right way.

10. Recommendations

1. The student can get rid of the obstacles in his learning through adopting indirect strategies. For example, when he knows that he always feels excited when he wants to speak “Actually, I’m not very good at speaking English. Whenever I speak English, I’ll get very excited” by adopting affective strategies to lower his anxiety through the technique of deep breathing or listening to music or the technique of meditating on mental image or sound. By adopting social strategies, student can develop his learning by asking questions, cooperating, and empathizing with others (Oxford: 1990).

2. Metacognitive strategies are active strategies if the student follows them. For example, without suitable strategies for centering his learning which include paying attention language learning will be useless. Another strategy concerning metacognitive strategies are arranging and planning student learning, and evaluating learning. Arranging and planning contains six strategies which can help learners to organize and plan in order to get the most out of language learning. These strategies are finding out about language learning (reading books and talking with other people can help to find out how language learning works and improves one’s own language learning), organizing (using conditions related to the best learning of the new language for example organizing ones schedule, physical environment and language learning notebook), setting goals and objectives (setting goals of language learning as being able to use the language for informal conversation), identifying the purpose of a language task (deciding on the purpose of language task for example listening to the radio to get the last news, reading a play for enjoyment, speaking with a friend to solve problem, writing letter to convince a friend not to do something rash), planning for a language task (anticipating language task or situation can be done through planning for

language elements and functions which involve describing the task or situation, deciding on its demands and checking one's own linguistic resources), and seeking practice opportunities (going to a foreign language cinema or joining an international social club, etc.). Evaluating strategies involve self-monitoring (noticing and learning from errors) and self-evaluating (checking to see whether one understands more than six months ago).

11. Conclusion

I can conclude that an effective way to influence individual learning differences in the acquisition of second language is through learning strategies. There are many factors that can help to make learner an active learner in the learning process some of them are:

- 1- Learner training helps learners to find more effective ways of working, so that they can continue working efficiently.
- 2- The learner who has knowledge about learning strategies and how to use them in the best way will be an active learner.
- 3- Metacognitive strategies are very important in regulating the learning process. For learners, social strategies can help them learn and practice language.
- 4- Person knowledge, task knowledge and strategy knowledge will guide the learner in his learning.
- 5- The role of teachers are very important in helping learners use appropriate strategy and the teacher can enhance student to learn through enabling him to focus to specific weakness and to encourage him to deal with it in right way.

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