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## REVIEW ARTICLE

### ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES: PERSONAL REFLECTION

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#### ABSTRACT

The number and variety of technologies used in teaching and learning has increased exponentially. One of the myriad impacts of these advances on the world is increasing interest in learning foreign languages. However, despite the importance of new technologies and learning tools, some other factors have also had a tremendous impact on teaching and learning. For example, the development of new learning strategies has been a key factor; learning strategies play a key role in learning a foreign language. In this review paper, the author has outlined a map to implement those strategies. Methodologies to define, classify, and employ language learning strategies (LLS) have been highlighted through the use of examples, as has how these strategies are affected a number of factors. Language learning strategies vary from learner to learner depending on their backgrounds, culture, and learning styles. The role of the teacher in implementing these strategies is also discussed. Finally, we examine the concerns a teacher needs to consider while teaching language-learning strategies. The author of this paper has highlighted his personal reflection on the use of language learning strategies for learning English as a foreign language in one of the Middle Eastern countries.

#### INTRODUCTION

Due to the rapid development of and access to the Internet and related technologies, the trend of learning a foreign language has been steadily increasing. Now learning a foreign language is not a major issue, where in the past it has posed a tremendous hurdle. Information communication technologies provide ample learning opportunities for language learners. It can also be argued that technological developments alone are not sufficient to facilitate the objectives of learning and teaching a foreign language. There has always been an immediate need for human agency in order to effectively implement these technologies. Alongside the use of technologies, student's own learning styles and learning strategies also play a critical role in learning. This article is intended as a critical reflection on language learning strategies. Many language learning strategy related issues are discussed in this article: for instance what are language learning strategies? What is the role of these strategies in learning a second language, what is role of a learner? What is the role of a teacher in teaching these strategies?

Many researchers have defined language learning strategies by outlining their components, such as actions, behaviours, steps and techniques that are used by learners in order to apprehend, acquire, and use a second language ((Hismanoglu, 2000; Oxford, 1990b). Language learners use a multitude of strategies, for instance meta-cognitive techniques, social strategies, cognitive strategies, and evaluating one's own learning and task based strategies (Oxford, 1989). Each of these strategies is influenced by several factors including motivation,

gender, cultural back ground, attitudes and beliefs, type of task, age and I2 stage, learning style, and tolerance of ambiguity influence the choice of language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990a). Tam (2013) argue that learners' social economic status, proficiency in a foreign language and gender are also factors which can affect the use of language learning strategies. Regarding classification, scholars in the field have worked to classify these strategies (Michael, 1997). Rubin (1987), states that there are two categories of strategies i.e. strategies that directly contribute to learning and strategies that indirectly contribute to learning. Oxford (1990) also divides learning strategies into two classes, those directly involved in language learning i.e. memory, cognitive, and compensation and those indirectly involved in language learning i.e. meta-cognitive, affective, and social which are further divided into six groups. O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Kupper & Russo (1985) mention three broad categories of learning strategies such as metacognitive, cognitive and social mediating strategies. Stern (1992) also states lists five language learning strategies: Management and Planning Strategies, Cognitive Strategies, Communicative - Experiential Strategies, Interpersonal Strategies, and Affective Strategies. Language learning strategies are used by students in order to understand and acquire a second language (Cohen, Weaver & Li, 1996) such learning as English or French as a second language. Learners, who use language learning strategies, are more successful than those who do not use language-learning strategies. For example social strategies are founded on the fact that, in the present era, learners who interact with native speakers of the target language through Skype, face book, messenger, and twitter are comparatively much more successful in their learning than those who do not use social strategies for

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language learning. Similarly, language learning strategies can prepare learners for further learning. For example Meta cognitive strategies prepare learners to think about thinking (Anderson, 2002). In everyday life we observe that learners who plan and evaluate their language learning are more successful. Various studies support the effectiveness of language learning strategies and show that second language (L2) learners always use learning strategies. According to Cohen (2003), second language learners use numerous language learning strategies. Indeed every learner has different learning strategy (Hismnaoglu, 2000). Oxford (1989) states that learning strategies vary from learner to learner. According to Thompson and Rubin (1993), selecting suitable language learning strategies improves learners' proficiency and skills. Rubin (2014) also argues that teaching students to use learning strategies improves language learning and increase motivation. Successful language learners always use language strategies according to their needs and tasks (Chamot & Kupper, 1989). Ideally, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies are used together by the learners. In many Asian countries, including Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh students learn the vocabulary of the target language through memorization, preferring rote learning because of their culture. Similarly, females are more inclined to learn a second language than males and subsequently girls learn second languages faster than boys. Similarly, children learn languages faster than adults. Meanwhile those students who want to go abroad for higher studies or workers who want work abroad are motivated to learn a second language very quickly. According to Cohen (1998), several factors including cultural back ground, educational experiences, language learning goals, motivation, age, and gender influence language learning strategies.

Many educators accept language learning strategies as an effective tool for learning a second language (Fewell, 2010), as they have been proven to help to develop communicative competence in learners (Michael, 1997). Cohen (2003) indicates that strategy training enables students to find out their weaknesses, to evaluate themselves, and to develop problem solving skills. When learners use Meta cognitive strategies, they evaluate their own language learning. According to Anderson (2002), students can benefit from a vast variety of learning strategies; for example word analysis. Cohen divides language learning strategies into two types of strategies i.e. language learning strategies, language using strategies. Hismanoglu (2000) also states that language learning strategies help teachers to assess their students' level of learning a second language. Horwitz (2014) states that all type of teachers including novice and experienced teachers seek to improve their teaching. As teachers of second language education, we should take special interest in language learning strategies. We should develop LLS for our students and consider every aspect of their lives. The main goal when teaching a strategy is to consider learners' objectives (Murayama, 1995). Teachers who teach language-learning strategies to their students make them better learners (Hismanoglu, 2000). Of course, the students themselves use learning strategies; however, if the teacher helps them throughout the language learning process, these strategies develop in a better way (Anderson). Cohen (2003) suggests that teachers should keep in mind learners' needs, motivational issues, preparation of material, evaluation, and the benefits of any given strategy while designing strategy training. Michael (1997) also advises a three step plan for language learning

strategies training. He advises that teachers study their teaching context, focus on LLS in your teaching, and reflect and encourage learners' reflection. In fact, every learner has his/her own needs and learning styles. Oxford (1994) mentions some implications i.e. teachers should help their students in developing learning strategies according to their needs, L2 teachers should carry out research with their students, and teachers should take care of student's learning styles during research. Language learning is a whole process which consists of reading skills, writing skills, listening skills, speaking skills and sentence structure. All these areas need further research regarding using language-learning strategies. Much research has been carried out about improving language-learning strategies, though some results are vivid and some are not. Therefore, further research is needed in the area of the effectiveness of language learning strategies. Research is also needed regarding how to teach students to use learning strategies (Oxford, 1989). Cohen, Weaver and Li (1996) argue in favour of further study for using speaking skill strategies. The author of this paper has been teaching English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia for more than ten years, and has implemented several strategies while teaching English as a foreign language. However, the author could not teach students to use language-learning strategies. One reason is that the author was not trained to teach the language learning strategies, but the researcher also noticed that the students did use these strategies without knowing their names, for example some students memorised vocabulary through rote learning and reading strategies such as basic coding. Some programs also require the use of some kinds of strategies such as the Intel program introduced in Saudi Arabia during 2007 requires project-based learning strategy and collaborative learning. Therefore, the researcher recommends continued training for novice teachers, in-service teachers and for students in order to use language learning strategies effectively, especially through the integration of technology. The researcher also calls for additional research in the area of the effectiveness of language learning strategies and blended language learning strategies on students in a Saudi context.

Globalization has changed the landscape of learning and teaching foreign languages and subsequently, interest in learning a foreign language has been increasing. Of course, information communication technologies are playing a major role in providing access to the learners. However, student's learning styles and learning strategies are also extremely important. To be sure, learning strategies vary from person to person in terms of both effective learning and effective teaching. It is clear that suitable learning strategies improve learning, and that there is an immense need to encourage teachers to teach students effective learning strategies.

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