Evaluate the Strategies of Learning English As Second Language

Case study of Cihan University – Erbil

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Abstract

The present research studied the assessment of language learning strategies as a second language. It is also investigated the male and female university students' awareness of the importance of the use of language strategies in learning second language. For this purpose, 50 male and female learners of Cihan University were selected as the subject of this study. In this paper, Griffiths' (2007) English Language Learning Strategy Inventory (ELLSI) was selected as the questionnaire of this study. The importance of (ELLSI) by students was studied in relation to age and years of learning English. The result reveals that there were not significant references in terms of gender between students. Moreover, the findings showed that there were not statically differences between students' of the importance of LLSs and their years of learning English.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language learning strategies are among the main factors that help determine how –and how well –our students learn a second or foreign language. A second language is a language studied in a setting where that language is the main vehicle of everyday communication and where abundant input exists in that language. A foreign language is a language studied in an environment where it is not the primary vehicle for daily interaction and where input in that language is restricted.

II. Strategies VS Styles

Learning strategies are defined as "specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques , such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task -- used by students to enhance their own learning" [1] . When the learner consciously chooses strategies that fit his or her learning style and the second language task at hand, these strategies become a useful toolkit for active, conscious, and purposeful self regulation of learning. Learning strategies can be classified into six groups: cognitive, metacognitive, memory-related, compensatory, affective, and social.

Learning styles are the general approaches –for example, global or analytic, auditory or visual –that students use in acquiring a new language or in learning any other subject. These styles are "the overall patterns that give general direction to learning behavior" [2] .

III. Learning Language Strategies

As seen earlier, second language learning strategies are specific behaviors or thought processes that students use to enhance their own second language learning. A given strategy is neither good nor bad; it is essentially neutral until the context of its use is thoroughly considered. What makes a strategy positive and helpful for a given learner?

A strategy is useful if the following conditions are present [3] :

1. The strategy relates well to the second language task at hand,

2. The strategy fits the particular student's learning style preferences to one degree or another,

3. The student employs the strategy effectively and links it with other relevant strategies.

Strategies that fulfill these conditions "make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations".

Learning strategies can also enable students to become more independent, autonomous, lifelong learners [4].

Yet students are not always aware of the power of consciously using second language learning strategies for making learning quicker and more effective. Skilled teachers help their students develop an awareness of learning strategies and enable them to use a wider range of appropriate strategies.

Strategy use often relates to style preferences when left to their own devices and if not encouraged by the teacher or forced by the lesson to use a certain set of strategies, students typically use learning strategies that reflect their basic learning styles [5]. However, teachers can actively help students "stretch" their learning styles by trying out some strategies that are outside of their primary style preferences. This can happen through strategy instruction.

Conscious movement toward goals learning strategies are intentionally used and consciously controlled by the learner . In our field, virtually all definitions of strategies imply conscious movement toward a language goal .

IV. Positive Outcomes from Strategy Use

In subject areas outside of second language learning, the use of learning strategies is demonstrably related to student achievement and proficiency. Research has repeatedly shown this relationship in content fields ranging from physics to reading and from social studies to science. In light of this remarkable association between learning strategy use and positive learning outcomes, it is not surprising that students who frequently employ learning strategies enjoy a high level of self-efficacy, i.e., a perception of being effective as learners.

In the second language arena, early studies of so-called "good language learners" [3] determined that such learners consistently used certain types of learning strategies, such as guessing meaning from the context. Later studies found that there was no single set of strategies always used by "good language learners," however. Those studies found that less able learners used strategies in a random, unconnected, and uncontrolled manner [6] , while more effective learners showed careful orchestration of strategies, targeted in a relevant, systematic way at specific second language tasks. In an investigation by Nunan (1991), more effective learners differed from less effective learners in their greater ability to reflect on and articulate their own language learning processes. In a study of learners of English in Puerto Rico, more successful students used strategies for active involvement more frequently than did less successful learners, according to Green and Oxford (1995). The same researchers also commented that the number and type of learning strategies differed according to whether the learner was in a foreign language environment or a second language setting. In their review of the research literature, Green and Oxford discovered that second language learners generally employed more strategies (with a higher frequency) than did foreign language learners. Strategy instruction research to increase second language proficiency, some researchers and teachers have provided instruction that helped students learn how to use more relevant and more powerful learning strategies.

The most effective strategy instruction appears to include demonstrating when a given strategy might be useful, as well as how to use and evaluate it, and how to transfer it to other related tasks and situations. So far, research has shown the most beneficial strategy instruction to be woven into regular, everyday second language teaching, although other ways of doing strategy instruction are possible .

V. Six main categories of second language learning strategies

Six major groups of second language learning strategies have been identified by Oxford (1990). Alternative taxonomies have been offered by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and others [3] :

Cognitive strategies enable the learner to manipulate the language material in direct ways, e.g., through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, reorganizing information to develop stronger schemas (knowledge structures), practicing in naturalistic settings, and practicing structures and sounds formally. Cognitive strategies were significantly related to second language proficiency in studies by Kato (1996), Ku (1995), Oxford and Ehrman (1995), Oxford, Judd, and Giesen (1998), and Park (1994), among others. Of these studies, three were specifically in EFL settings: Ku (Taiwan), Oxford, Judd, and Giesen (Turkey), and Park (Korea). The other two studies involved the learning of Kanji by native English speakers (Kato, 1996) and the learning of various foreign languages by native English speakers [7].

Metacognitive strategies (e.g., identifying one's own learning style preferences and needs, planning for an second language task, gathering and organizing materials, arranging a study space and a schedule, monitoring mistakes, and evaluating task success, and evaluating the success of any type of learning strategy) are employed for managing the learning process overall. Among native English speakers learning foreign languages, Purpura (1999) found that metacognitive strategies had "a significant, positive, direct effect on cognitive strategy use, providing clear evidence that metacognitive strategy use has an executive function over cognitive strategy use in task completion" (p. 61). Studies of EFL learners in various countries (e.g., in South Africa, Dreyer & Oxford, 1996; and in Turkey, Oxford, Judd, & Giesen, 1998) uncovered evidence that metacognitive strategies are often strong predictors of second language proficiency [8].

Memory-related strategies help learners to link one second language item or concept with another but do not necessarily involve deep understanding. Various memory-related strategies enable learners to learn and retrieve information in an orderly string (e.g., acronyms), while other techniques create learning and retrieval via sounds (e.g., rhyming), images (e.g., a mental picture of the word itself or the meaning of the word), a combination of sounds and images (e.g., the keyword method), body movement (e.g., total physical response), mechanical means (e.g., flashcards), or location (e.g., on a page or blackboard) (see Oxford, 1990 for details and multiple examples). Memory-related strategies have been shown to relate to second language proficiency in a course devoted to memorizing large numbers of Kanji characters (Kato, 1996) and in second language courses designed for native-English speaking learners of foreign languages (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). However, memory-related strategies do not always positively relate to second language proficiency. In fact, the use of memory strategies in a test-taking situation had a significant *negative* relationship to learners' test performance in grammar and vocabulary (Purpura, 1997). The probable reason for this is that memory strategies are often used for memorizing vocabulary and structures in initial stages of language learning, but that learners need such strategies much less when their arsenal of vocabulary and structures has become larger [9].

Compensatory strategies (e.g., guessing from the context in listening and reading; using synonyms and "talking around" the missing word to aid speaking and writing; and strictly for speaking, using gestures or pause words) help the learner make up for missing knowledge. Cohen (1998) asserted that compensatory strategies that are used for speaking and writing (often known as a form of communication strategies) are intended only for language use and must not be considered to be language learning strategies. However, Little (personal communication, January, 1999) and Oxford (1990, 1999a) contend that compensation strategies of any kind, even though they might be used for language use, nevertheless aid in language learning as well. After all, each instance of second language use is an opportunity for more second language learning. Oxford and Ehrman (1995) demonstrated that compensatory strategies are significantly related to second language proficiency in their study of native-English-speaking learners of foreign languages [7] .

Affective strategies, such as identifying one's mood and anxiety level, talking about feelings, rewarding oneself for good performance, and using deep breathing or positive selftalk, have been shown to be significantly related to second language proficiency in research by Dreyer and Oxford (1996) among South African EFL learners and by Oxford and Ehrman (1995) among native English speakers learning foreign languages. However, in other studies, such as that of Mullins (1992) with EFL learners in Thailand, affective strategies showed a negative link with some measures of second language proficiency. One reason might be that as some students progress toward proficiency, they no longer need affective strategies as much as before. Perhaps because learners' use of cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies is related to greater second language proficiency and self-efficacy, over time there might be less need for affective strategies as learners progress to higher proficiency [10] .

Social strategies (e.g., asking questions to get verification, asking for clarification of a confusing point, asking for help in doing a language task, talking with a native speaking conversation partner, and exploring cultural and social norms) help the learner work with others and understand the target culture as well as the language. Social strategies were significantly associated with second language proficiency in studies by the South African EFL study by Dreyer and Oxford (1996) and the investigation of native-English-speaking foreign language learners by Oxford and Ehrman (1995) [8] .

VI. Methodology

This part provides a thorough description of the research methodology used in this study. For the sake of establishing a relationship between the various subparts of this section, the researchers will first describe the educational context in which the research was done is described and then the idea behind the employed study method will be explained in detail. Secondly, the study questions will be discussed. At last the researcher will elaborate on the methodology details including participants, instruments, and data collection as well as data analysis procedures.

A. Educational Context

The study was done in the Erbil province. Its population is nearly 2 million and it is the fourth largest city in Iraq after Baghdad, Basra and Mosul. It is located in the Northern part of Iraq. It is the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The Kurdish language is the formal language of the Kurdistan region. In the educational setting of the Kurdistan region, the Kurdish language is the language used in schools and universities and English is taught as a foreign language. In the last two decades, several local and international universities have been established in the Erbil province. The data was collected from one of the most important University in Erbil , Cihan University .

B. Research Questions

The current study investigated on the perceptions of Cihan University instructors and learners regarding the importance of learning language strategies including cognitive, affective and meta-cognitive strategies. Moreover, independent variables including on the one hand the students' gender, and on the other hand university instructors' gender and the number of years of English teaching experience, are issues that the research will deal with in order to answer the research questions of this study involving instructors' and learners' beliefs on the importance of learning language strategies.

C. Participants

The participants of the current study are the students of Cihan University , they are different from each other in terms of age, gender and number of years of studying English at university level. As a whole there are 50 students. As a result, the participants were selected from first, second, third and fourth grade of the program. The table 1 below indicates the number of male and female students in all university.

Participants	Male Participants	Female Participants	Total
	30	20	50

TABLE 1: THE NUMBER OF MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS

VII. Designing and Analyzing the questionnaire

In this study , the researchers determine 10 strategies to be the base of the questionnaire according to the six major groups of second language learning strategies . The table 2 below showed them.

	Strategy	Definition
1	Listening to the songs in English	This strategy would help English language learner to improve their language proficiency. Learners can listen and repeat English songs in order to enhance their listening skills.
2	Writing letter in English	Writing letters and messages in English language may direct students to learn new vocabulary and develop their academic writing. In addition, students will be more aware of grammar and spelling by learning from their mistakes.
3	Using dictionary	Many researchers accentuate that students can enrich their vocabulary competence though the use of dictionary. Since dictionary regards as a bank of words, students would easily learn and memorize new words in the target language.
4	Reading newspaper in English	Newspaper can be used to improve reading skills. Another benefit of reading newspapers is that make students to think critically. Moreover, learners would be able to comprehend the ideas in English language.
5	Talking to native speakers of English	Talking to a native speaker of English may foster the process of the learning the target language. A number of studies argued that English language learners improve their intonation and fluency while they talk to native speakers. Moreover, students may acquire the way of thought of native speakers when they communicate regularly English people.
6	Revising regularly	This strategy affixes the knowledge that students gain. Learners need to revise what they have studied regularly in order wide their knowledge and compare between sources.
7	Taking note of language used in the environment	This strategy has been frequently advocated by many researchers as a way for controlling learning vocabulary by students. Students

8	Using library	can note down new vocabularies and memorizing them every day. This would improve their vocabulary competence. Since libraries considered to be one of the main sources of knowledge and sciences, so that it has an important impact on developing researches and studies. Therefore, English language learners can use libraries to foster their learning process by using a various kinds of books and journals.
9	Watching movies in English	This strategy regarded to be one of the most important strategies that would promote second language learners' ability in listening skills as well as it would construct students' mind in understanding the customs and norms of the English society.
10	Learning about the culture of English speakers	Most of English language learners face difficulties while they talk to a native speaker of the target language due to the lake of the knowledge of the culture or norms of the second language society. Hence, second language teachers have to raise their students' awareness in the target language culture in order not to misunderstandings between listeners and speakers.

TABLE 2 : THE 10 STRATEGIES

The results of above questionnaire were processed and analyzed by Fuzzy logic tools, the results of analyzing are shown in Table 3

	Female %	Male %	Total %
S1	35%	44%	40%
S2	40%	45%	43%
S3	30%	18%	23%
S4	12%	20%	17%
S5	22%	33%	29%
S6	23%	20%	21%
S7	40%	25%	31%
S8	44%	12%	25%
S9	23%	50%	39%
S10	34%	30%	32%

Table 3 : The Analyzed results by Fuzzy Logic tools

Fig. 1 shows the analyzed results of the 50 questionnaires in linear charts in three colors (bleu for female, red for male, and green for total).
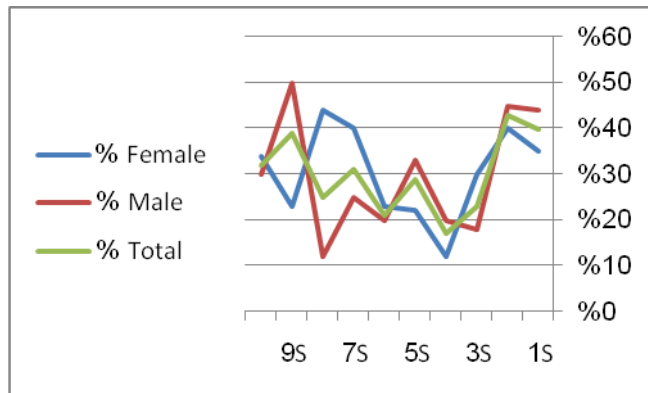
Fig. 1: The linear chart of results

VIII. Conclusions

The findings of this paper showed that 44% of male students of Cihan University were chose strategy No.8 (Using library) as the most importance strategies for learning second language. On the other hand, female students were chose strategy No. 2 (Writing letter in English) as the most important strategy. However, strategy No.4 (Reading newspaper in English) regarded to be the least importance strategy according to male students. Strategy No. 8(Using library) were chosen as least important strategy by female students in particular university.

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