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**A Study of the Reported Language Skill Development Strategies of
the Student Teachers in Pakistan**

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Abstract

This descriptive study was carried out to study the foreign language skill development of the student teachers of The Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB). Two hundred student teachers from IUB were the sample. A forty items questionnaire was administered, the reliability of which was 0.903. No significant difference was found between mean scores gender wise. It was also found that students of B.Ed. class have higher mean score on reading, writing and listening skills but the difference is not significant. Conversely, students of M.Ed. class have higher mean score on speaking skills; however, the difference is not significant.

Key words: Language Learning, Teacher Education, Reading skills, Writing, skills Speaking skills, Listening skills

Introduction

English is the language of power and prestige in most countries of the world and Pakistan is no exception. Learning English affords unending opportunities not only in the realm of careers but also in society in general. However, the way English is learnt might change with change in locale gender and the purpose for which English is learnt. English is the official language in Pakistan and thus enjoys an unparalleled status among dozens of local languages of the country.

The learners of English, consciously or unconsciously, use different strategies to develop their skills in a particular language. A lot has been said about the nature of these strategies. Different authors have come up with their definitions of LLS (Language Learning Strategies). However, “there is no consensus on what constitutes a learning strategy in second language learning or how these differ from other types of learner activities” (O’Malley et al, 1985).

For Rubin, strategies are “the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge” (1975:43). In Weinstein and Mayer’s terms, the LLS may be defined as “behaviours and thoughts that a learner engages in during learning” which are presumably “intended to influence the learner’s encoding process” (1986:315). Cohen (1998:4) added the important ingredient of choice or consciousness in defining the strategies and thus asserted that “the element of consciousness is what distinguishes strategies from those processes that are not strategic”.

A Definition of Strategy

A comprehensive definition is provided by Oxford (2001:166) who believes that the strategies are in fact

‘...operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information; specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more efficient, and more transferable to new situations’

Many of the researches on LLS suggest that the strategies which the good and successful language learners employ are different from those of the bad learners. In fact the good learners not only employ more strategies but also employ them in a more appropriate manner than the weaker ones (Chamot and Kupper 1989). There has also been a suggestion that there is a positive relationship between Language Learning Strategies and communicative competence (Stern, 1992; Lessard-Clouston, 1997 and Oxford, 1990).

Types of LLS

There has also been an extensive discussion on the types of LLS that the learners employ for successful learning. O Malley et al, Wenden and Rubin, Stern and Oxford have classified LLS in many categories. However, most of these classifications have striking similarities. Some have categorized them into Learning, communication and Social strategies, others into the cognitive and Meta cognitive and socio affective strategies (O’Malley, et al, 1985) and a few others have added the element of management, planning and interpersonal elements to the discussion (Stern, 1992).

Griffith (2004) categorized language skill development strategies in terms of the four traditional language skills i.e. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Griffith found that the use of dictionary was the most common reported strategy used for learning English. He found that dictionary use was employed by students of both the high proficiency and the low proficiency. As against it, writing a diary was the least commonly used strategy reported by the learners. Griffith also found that the speaking and listening strategies did not have a significant correlation with the end term achievements of the students. That is why Griffith concludes that the importance of the interactive strategies is not that established a phenomenon among the language learners as far as their performance in English as second or foreign language is concerned.

Inadequate Discussions on Language Skill Development Strategies

Though there has been a plethora of research on language learning strategies and language skill development strategies of English language learning, very little, if any, attention has been paid to the language skills development strategies of the student teachers. As the prospective teachers, the trainee teachers have to learn English not only to have a grasp on the pedagogy but also for communication purposes in general. They have to develop all the four language skills to optimize their performance in the classroom and also for their own career development. The student teachers at the certificate and graduation level have to learn English both as a compulsory and an elective subject.

However, no significant study has, as yet, been undertaken to estimate the language skills development strategies of the student teachers. The present study aims to fill that gap.

Objectives of the Study

This study was based on the following objectives:

1. To find out the language skill development strategies of the student teachers.
2. To compare the language skill development strategies of the student teachers gender wise and class wise.
3. To recommend suggestions to overcome weaknesses.

Research Methodology

The research method adopted in this research is descriptive in nature.

Population and Sampling

The population of the study consisted of all the students of B.Ed and M.Ed level of the Islamia University of Bahawalpur. Two hundred students from department of educational training of the university were considered as sample for the study.

Research Tool Development and Data Collection

Since the study was descriptive in nature, survey approach was considered appropriate to collect the data. For the purpose, questionnaire on five-point (Likert) scale was developed. The questionnaire was validated through pilot testing on 50 students and reliability of the questionnaire was 0.903.

Administration of Research Tool

The finalized questionnaire was administered to the students personally as well as by mail. All the students responded.

Data Analysis

The data collected through questionnaire was coded and analyzed through SPSS XII, mean scores and independent sample t- test were run.

Findings

Data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed in terms of percentage and mean score. The findings drawn out from the data analysis are given below.

Table 1: Showing the mean score on all the four skills of English language

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Std Deviation</i>
Speaking	200	30.7700	.39879	5.63969
Reading	200	30.1150	.41699	5.89709
Listening	200	29.8650	.43823	6.19748
Writing	200	29.6100	.42247	5.97464

Above table reveals mean scores on four dimensions of language skills development strategies in descending order highest mean score is in favour of speaking skill, then on reading skill, then on listening skills and on writing skills there is lowest mean score. It further shows that student teachers emphasize more on speaking and reading skills and less on listening and writing skills.

Table 2: Showing the mean difference on all the four skills of English language between male and female student teachers

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Gender of Students</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Reading	Male	100	30.7400	5.41159	.54116	198	1.504	0.134
	Female	100	29.4900	6.31096	.63110			
Writing	Male	100	29.6600	5.74583	.57458	198	0.118	0.906
	Female	100	29.5600	6.22364	.62236			
Listening	Male	100	29.7200	5.84320	.58432	198	0.330	0.742
	Female	100	30.0100	6.55897	.65590			
Speaking	Male	100	30.9400	5.45101	.54510	198	0.425	0.671
	Female	100	30.6000	5.84479	.58448			
Over All	Male	100	121.0600	19.69608	1.96961	198	0.462	0.644
	Female	100	119.6600	23.00163	2.30016			

It is evident from table: 2 that male student teachers have higher mean score on reading skills, writing skills, speaking skills and over all skills but that difference is not statistically significant. On the other hand, female student teachers have higher mean score on listening skills but that difference is also not statistically significant. It is quite clear from the table that male student teachers have higher mean score on all the dimensions except on listening skills but the difference in mean scores is not significant, so it can be concluded from the above table that male and female student teachers have adopted the same language skill development strategies.

Table 3: Showing the mean difference on all the four skills of English language between male and female student teachers qualification wise

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Class of Students</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Std. Error Mean</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Reading	B.Ed	160	30.2375	5.71271	.45163	198	0.587	0.558
	M.Ed	40	29.6250	6.63977	1.04984			
writing	B.Ed	160	29.8375	6.04271	.47772	198	1.077	0.283
	M.Ed	40	28.7000	5.67586	.89743			
Listening	B.Ed	160	29.9813	6.00469	.47471	198	0.530	0.597
	M.Ed	40	29.4000	6.97909	1.10349			
Speaking	B.Ed	160	30.7000	5.56471	.43993	198	0.350	0.726
	M.Ed	40	31.0500	5.99551	.94797			
Over All	B.Ed	160	120.7563	21.05093	1.66422	198	0.523	0.601
	M.Ed	40	118.7750	22.81305	3.60706			

Table: 3 reveals that student teachers of B.Ed class have higher mean score on reading skills, writing skills, listening skills and over all skills but that difference is not significant on the other hand student teachers of M.Ed class have higher mean score on speaking skills but again that difference is not significant. It is quite clear from the table that student teachers of B.Ed have higher mean score on all the dimensions except on speaking skills but the difference in mean scores is not significant, so it can be concluded from the above table that student teachers from B.Ed. and M.Ed. classes have adopted the same language skill development strategies.

Discussion

Every language comprises four basic principles in the world. Type of language does not matter at all, where it comes from and how it was structured – they are all made up of four skills, reading, writing, speaking and listening. These four skills are very different and interrelated also. Student teacher must also be master in language skills. Every individual can use good language skill development strategies but all have different traits. Some student teachers can be good in one or two or the others may be better in developing other skills and using better strategies to learn them.

Mean scores on four dimensions of language skills development strategies in descending order, highest mean score is in favor of speaking skill, then reading skill, then listening skills and on writing skills there is

lowest mean score. It further shows that student teachers emphasize more on speaking and reading skills and less on listening and writing skills.

In other words it can be said that they use better strategies to improve their speaking or reading skills as compared to listening and writing. It also depends on the interest and attitude of the individual towards learning a language and motivation of students towards learning language and quality of instruction as well. Table: 1 indicates that students are more interested in learning speaking and reading skills and use different strategies to enhance these skills contrary to others.

A person can be proficient in language if focuses on all skills not only one or two because all skills are source of aid for one another. All the individuals are different in learning different types of skills in different ways and it depends on their concentration towards them. Table.2 indicates that male student teachers have higher mean score on all the dimensions except on listening skills but the difference in mean scores is not significant, female student teachers have higher mean score on listening skills but that difference is also not statistically significant. So it can be concluded from the table that male and female student teachers have adopted almost same language skill development strategies.

All these four skills need practice and suitable strategies to learn. The more important is, how do they organize practicing these skills and teachers are also motivating factors to them guiding better strategies to be adopted for skills development of any language. This analysis reveals that male and female both types of students consider all the skills almost equally important but females are more interested increasing their listening skills and use better strategies to enhance their listening skills.

If some one is willing to learn another language, in most cases, it is an indication that a person has the great desire to learn about another region/ country and its culture that is the primary prerequisite for success in everyday life. Presently it is the need of the global world that a person must be able to speak, read, write and listen thoughts and texts of other cultures. Student teachers especially need to know all these things as they are going to prepare future generation for facing modern world, how others are different in their speaking, reading and other skills and how they use these skills in varying circumstances. In that case each individual or student can be different to use different strategies to learn language skills. Their degree of qualification, their competency and capability in other activities is also indicator of learning skills.

Table: 3 indicates that student teachers of B.Ed. have higher mean score on all the dimensions except on speaking skills but the difference in mean scores is not significant, on the other hand student teachers of M.Ed class have higher mean score on speaking skills but again that difference is not significant. It can be said that B.Ed student teachers are using good learning strategies of all skill except speaking and student teachers of M.Ed are opposite to them. It seems that there is not any middle ground with languages. All the skills go side by side. Student teachers must focus their attention towards not only a single skill but it is necessary in this global that if a person is efficient in one skill he/ she must be able to learn others as well. And use proper learning strategies to enhance them.

Conclusion

- Student teachers emphasize more on speaking and reading skills and less on listening and writing skills.

- Student teachers use proper strategies to improve their speaking and reading skills as compared to other skills.
- Male student teachers are better using proper language learning strategies to improve language skills but they are not good in listening skills. On the other hand analysis also indicates that female student teachers are better in listening skills. It can be said that female student teachers are focusing more on listening strategies.
- B.Ed. student teachers are using good learning strategies of all skill except speaking. On the other hand M.Ed. student teachers are better using proper learning strategies of speaking skills.
- Overall mean score of male and female student teachers is not significantly different on language skill development strategies.
- There is no significant difference between the overall mean score of male and female student teachers of B.Ed. and M.Ed. class on language skill development strategies.

Suggestions

- Student teachers should be involved in listening practices (audio cassettes/ dialogues/ talks of experts/poems/ song and conversations etc) and writing exercises (essay/ story/ any text writing activity) during their class or there should be a specific session for them.
- Especially male student teachers should be involved in listening activities as the results show that mean score of male students is lower than female student teachers.
- Special speaking class or speaking practice in classroom is the need of the B.Ed students. They must also follow the strategies adopted by the M.Ed student teachers as analysis indicates that they are better in speaking skills.
- Teachers should also be competent enough to improve student teachers' language learning skills. They should properly guide them what to do and how to do to tackle with language.

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