# Impact of Teaching Language Learning Strategies on Learning English as Additional Language

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## Abstract

Trends in teaching and learning of English as Additional Language (EAL) have undergone a great transformation during the last century. The focus of English Language teachers is turning towards empowering their students to become independent learners beyond the classroom. Language educators have started realising the close link between language learning and content instruction. This concern has led to the adoption of content and language integrated instruction in English. It is widely believed today that content and language integrated learning (CLIL) instruction helps in improving the teaching/learning of EAL at all levels. Teaching and learning context has also gained the attention of English language researchers and teachers. Context is considered to be one of the pivotal factors in learning another language. Over the period of past three decades, researchers have developed several practical theories and models that establish links between curriculum concepts and EAL learning. Over time, teaching strategies being used in EAL classrooms have not only improved but are now given more importance in successful EAL teaching and learning. The current Literature Review focuses on the topic of teaching language learning strategies in teaching/learning EAL at Higher education level both internationally and in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** English as additional language (EAL), teaching language learning strategies, higher education, Pakistan

## Introduction

Trends in teaching and learning of English as Additional Language (EAL) have undergone a great transformation during the last century. The focus of English language teachers is turning towards empowering their students to become independent learners beyond the classroom (Troncale, 2002). Language educators have started realising the close

**Language in India** www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 17:8 August 2017**
Fareeha Javed, Ph.D.
Impact of Teaching Language Learning Strategies on Learning English as Additional
Language                                                                      33

link between language learning and content instruction (Lessow-Hurley, 2000). This concern has led to the adoption of content and language integrated learning instruction (CLIL) in English. It is widely believed today that content and language integrated learning instruction helps in improving the teaching/learning of EAL at all levels (Madrid & Sanchez, 2001).

Teaching and learning context has also gained the attention of English language researchers and teachers. Context is considered to be one of the pivotal factors in learning another language (Chapman & Pyvis, 2006). Haworth (2011) maintains that several practical theories and models have been developed during the past three decades that have created connections between EAL curriculum concepts and learning. Similarly, teaching strategies being used in EAL classrooms have not only improved but are now given more importance in successful EAL teaching and learning (Haworth, 2004). The current Literature Review focuses on the topic of teaching language learning strategies in teaching/learning EAL at Higher education level both internationally and in Pakistan and has been organised thematically.

**Background Context**

The post-modern age has witnessed a transition in the educational theories and practices across the world that have become more learner-centred now. Gujjar, Noareen and Aslam (2010) posit that successful learning now chiefly depends on addressing the interests and learning needs of learners. Abbasi, Ahmad and Khatak (2010) and Shamim (2008) report that there exists a gap between the objectives of National Language Curriculum Policy and the English language learning practices in Higher education institutions in Pakistan. Teachers have been observed mainly focusing on "doing a lesson" or "doing grammar". They concentrate on finishing the text on time as they are accountable for that at the end of an academic year (Shamim, 2008).

Moreover, English language teachers in Higher education are not trained to use teaching strategies. Therefore, once a teacher enters the teaching profession, she starts teaching the way that suits her and continue following the same teaching methods and strategies throughout her career. She focuses only on delivering the lecture and finishing the lessons. Mustafa (2005) points out that Pakistani language researchers, curriculum developers and teachers have been unable to acknowledge the close relation between language and

**Language in India** www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 17:8 August 2017**
Fareeha Javed, Ph.D.
Impact of Teaching Language Learning Strategies on Learning English as Additional
Language                                                                                              34

cognitive development. They need to focus on this theory while developing English language curriculum and teaching methods and strategies.

## Topic Identification and Rationale

Oxford (1989) points out the role good language learning strategies play in the success of language learners. Cohen (1998) also supports the effectiveness of language learning in learning second/additional language. The strategies range from metacognitive and cognitive learning strategies to performance and affective strategies. According to Chamot (2004), students of any level can use learning strategies for learning second/foreign language. The difference lies only in the way these strategies are used.  Keeping in focus the important place language learning strategies hold in second language learning, this research will address the question of:

"What impact does instruction in language learning strategies have on proficiency and achievement in second language of EAL higher education students?"

## Search Procedure and Range of Sources

Search procedure included Library and internet search. Information was collected from books, journal articles, newspaper articles, presentations and conference papers written and presented by various international language researchers and experts. All the three types of source materials as listed by Mutch (2005) were used for this research, namely human, textual and electronic sources. The main search engine used was Google. The databases used were Google Scholar, A+ Education, ERIC via EBSCOhost, Education Research Complete and Scopus.

Keywords and phrases used were: English as Additional language; integrated content and language instruction; cognitive academic language learning approach (CALLA); language learning strategies; cognitive academic learning proficiency. There were three major limitations faced during searching for relevant literature. First, major literature on learning strategies and CALLA has been written by Chamot. Second, no relevant literature on CALLA and learning strategies written by a Pakistani researcher could be located. Third, no significant literature could be found specifically targeting language learning strategies instruction in Higher education. Therefore, the current literature review has been based on the

**Language in India** www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 17:8 August 2017**
Fareeha Javed, Ph.D.
Impact of Teaching Language Learning Strategies on Learning English as Additional
Language                                                                                  35

best relevant international literature on language learning strategies available through the accessible research sources.

## Identification and Discussion of Relevant Theories and Research

The concept of integration of language and content in an EAL classroom is a modern trend which demands the language practitioners to shun the traditional EAL teaching practices (Rodríguez Torras, 1991). In a content and language integrated class, language is taught through content/curriculum. Cummins (1984a, 1984b, 2000b cited in Baker, 2006) and Reyes and Vallone (2008), describe this distinction as: basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP). BICS takes place in the presence of contextual supports and props for language delivery in a 'context embedded situation'. Whereas, CALP occurs in 'context reduced' academic situations and in the presence of high order thinking skills in the curriculum.

## Language Learning Strategies

Patricia, Richard-Amato and Snow (1992) posit that teachers find certain instructional strategies quite effective while the EAL teaching/learning is taking place. Brown and Douglas (2000) defines strategies as 'specific methods of approaching a problem or task, modes of operation for achieving a particular end, planned designs for controlling or manipulating certain information' (p.113). Chamot (2004) refers to learning strategies as 'the techniques or procedures that facilitate a learning task' (p.25). Chamot (2004) further elucidates that 'learning strategies are directed towards a goal and, as mental procedures, are not directly observable, though some learning strategies may result in specific behaviours' (p.25).

Learning strategies are moves which can either be thoughts or actions that language learners take for monitoring or assisting with their own learning. Strategies used by students include ways to understand, remember and recall information and evaluate themselves at the completion of the task. Teaching students language learning strategies is an effective means of improving their EAL learning (Chamot & O'Malley, 1987, 1996; Chamot & Kupper, 1989; Cohen, 1998; Chamot, 2001, 2004; Chamot & Robbins, 2006a, 2006b; Chamot, 2008). Oxford and Crookall (1989) contend that CALLA has offered an effective framework for teaching language learning strategies to EAL students at all levels including higher education.

**Language in India** www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 17:8 August 2017**
Fareeha Javed, Ph.D.
Impact of Teaching Language Learning Strategies on Learning English as Additional
Language                                                                                   36

Chamot and O'Malley (1987) posit that in CALLA, EAL learners are instructed how to apply language learning strategies drawn from a cognitive model of learning. These language learning strategies help EAL learners in not only comprehension but also retention of both language concepts and skills entrenched in the content or curriculum spheres.

Chamot (2001) highlights two main reasons that render learning strategies an important place in EAL learning. Firstly, learning strategies help to gain an insight into the cognitive, social and affective processes entailed in language learning. Secondly, they help weak EAL learners in becoming better language learners. Chamot (2001) further points out that there are two major goals in language learning strategy research: the first goal is to identify and compare the learning strategies that ae used by successful language learners. Whereas the second goal is to provide learning strategies instruction to less successful EAL learners for helping them to be more successful in language learning. Chamot (2001) postulates that English language teachers' training in teaching language learning strategies is a neglected area. She emphasises the need to develop effective procedures for helping EAL teachers in making language learning strategies an integral part of their teaching practice.

**Components of CALLA**

Chamot and O'Malley (1987) point out three components of CALLA: English language development integrated with content subjects, a curriculum correlated with mainstream content areas, and instruction in the use of learning strategies.

*The Content-based Curriculum*

According to Chamot and O'Malley (1979, 1996) and Chamot (2001), one of the major purposes of CALLA is to present a descriptive framework for helping EAL students to learn English language through CLIL curriculum. It does not only help in developing academic language skills but it also attracts more student interest than those English language classes where focus is given to language only.

*English Language Development*

Chamot and O'Malley (1987, 1996) state that the second component of CALLA is to develop the academic language skills of EAL learners. Cummins (1982, 1983, cited in Chamot, 1987) indicates two dimensions that help in better describing the language learning

demands of EAL learners. The first dimension is concerned with the application of nonverbal contextual cues which assist English language learners in comprehension, while the second is concerned with the complexity of the cognitive demands of language comprehension where context cues have been reduced. Nonverbal contextual cues include gestures, visual aids, concrete objects, and facial expressions. Whereas, contextual cues reduced language tasks include grammar drills, vocabulary, and following directions. Hence, cognitively demanding tasks invoke 'higher level reasoning and integrative language skills' (Chamot & O'Malley,1987, p. 237). Chamot and O' Malley (1987) combine the two dimensions to classify language use task into four categories: easy and contextualised (cognitively undemanding), difficult but contextualised (context embedded), context reduced but easy, and context reduced and difficult.

In EAL teaching in higher education in Pakistan, students' language use in EAL classroom is context embedded and cognitively demanding. Students are provided with a wide practice in using the tools for developing academic writing through essay writing, critical appreciation of texts and reading comprehension exercises. EAL learners not only develop content-area reading skills but also listening, writing and speaking skills in the subject. Hence, EAL learners develop both conceptual knowledge and language skills through instruction in curriculum correlated with English content.

***Learning Strategy Instruction***

According to Chamot and O'Malley (1987, 1996), in CALLA model, learning strategies instruction is used for CLIL. Learning strategy instruction is a cognitive approach to teaching which helps EAL learners in learning conscious techniques and processes which enhance the comprehension, acquisition and retention of new concepts and skills learned in the CLIL focused EAL classroom. Rubin (1975, cited in Rucynski, Engler & Copeland, 2006) stresses that using a variety of learning strategies aids language learners to develop the traits required for effective language learning. Several researchers (e.g. Chamot & O' Malley, 1987, 1996; Chamot and Kupper, 1989) have categorised learning strategies into three types: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social/affective strategies. These strategies help teachers in identifying the ways to integrate strategy instruction into English language teaching.

**Language in India** www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 17:8 August 2017**
Fareeha Javed, Ph.D.
Impact of Teaching Language Learning Strategies on Learning English as Additional
Language                                                                                    38

Metacognitive strategies aid English language learners in planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning tasks for the successful achievement of their English language learning goals. These are self-regulatory strategies which help an English language learner in reflecting on their own learning and thinking and identifying their own abilities and approaches for successful English language learning. Cognitive strategies aid students in manipulating the learning tasks themselves and accomplishing them successfully. Cognitive strategies work in correlation with the metacognitive strategies. Some of the most noteworthy cognitive strategies include: making inferences, elaboration of prior knowledge, linguistic transfer, and imagery. Social/affective strategies are utilised for completing a comprehension and learning task. To use social/affective strategy in an effective manner, English language learners are required to either interact and cooperate with their peers and teacher, use positive self-talk and self-dialogue or ask questions for clarification to help them in successful English language learning (Chamot & O'Malley, 1987, 1996; Chamot & Kupper, 1989). In EAL learning in higher education in Pakistan, English language learners use all the three categories of English language learning strategies in one way or another to assist them in effective language learning.

**Explicit and Integrated LLS Instruction**

Chamot (2004) stresses that a number of aspects are associated with explicit language learning strategies instruction. It encompasses 'the development of students' awareness of the strategies they use, teacher modelling of strategic thinking, student practice with new strategies, student self-evaluation of the strategies used, and practice in transferring strategies to new tasks' (p.19). Chamot reports after her research on explicit use of language learning strategies that most of the second language context researchers agree on the explicit strategy being an important aspect in learning strategy instruction. Snow and Briton (1997, cited in Haworth, 2011) identify the need of explicit strategy training along with language development and content-area instruction as integral parts of CALLA.

On the other hand, Chamot (2004) reports that there is very little consensus of researchers on the decision to make strategies instruction either an integrated part of language curriculum or teach them separately. She stresses on the need of creating an ideal situation of strategies instruction in which all the teachers in an institution could teach learning strategies. This practice will help students to transfer learning strategies learned in one subject class to

Fareeha Javed, Ph.D.
Impact of Teaching Language Learning Strategies on Learning English as Additional Language 39

another. Unfortunately, in higher education in Pakistan, teachers carry on with their classroom instruction individually without any peer consultation. Majority of them do not even teach learning strategies to their students. They seem to be working in their own air tight compartments with no chance of letting a collaborative teaching/learning environment take place. There is a dire need of awakening the higher education teachers in Pakistan to the importance of working in a collaborative teaching/learning environment for the successful achievement of teaching/learning goals.

**Models of Language Learning Strategies Instruction**

Although there are a number of models being used for learning strategies instruction, Chamot (1998, cited in Chamot, 2004) identifies three significant models of strategy instruction which are currently in use: CALLA, Styles and Strategies-Based Instruction (SSBI) and the Gremfell and Harris model. All the three models focus on developing English language learners' knowledge about their own strategic processes and thinking for language learning and encouraging and supporting them to adopt such strategies which help them enhance their English language learning and proficiency. Chamot (2004) stresses on the need for language learning strategies researchers to determine the most effective model and type of instruction which helps English language learners to improve their language proficiency and achievement.

Comparing the three models, Chamot (2004) points out the recursive nature of the CALLA model. This model offers teachers and learners the option of revisiting an instructional phase whenever need arises during a teaching and learning process. CALLA helps students in reflecting on their use of and skill in strategies before applying them to other tasks. SSBI which was developed by Cohen (1998, cited in Chamot, 2004) focuses on teachers to take up a variety of roles to help and guide students to learn the most appropriate strategies related to their learning styles. On the contrary, the Grenfell and Harris model stresses on the students to work through a six-step cycle and then begin a fresh cycle. It helps students to become familiar with new learning strategies and make independent plans for their own language development. All the three models of language learning strategies instruction are implicitly used in higher education in Pakistan.

**Language in India** www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 17:8 August 2017**
Fareeha Javed, Ph.D.
Impact of Teaching Language Learning Strategies on Learning English as Additional
Language 40

Oxford (1989) argues that there exists a visible difference between the students who have and those who have not received a formal instruction in language learning strategies. The students trained in language learning strategies do not find difficulty in deciding which strategies to employ in their learning. Oxford further elaborates that some strategies are effective and useful only for particular tasks. Cohen (1998) states that it is the classroom teacher's responsibility to encourage English language learners to learn language learning strategies and apply them to their English language learning. The teacher's encouraging attitude enhances English language learners' learning of language learning strategies. Chamot (2008) explains that language learning strategies instruction accelerates students' language acquisition/learning. Thus, language learning strategies instruction in EAL classes in higher education forebodes many advantages for language learners which enhance their language learning.

**Language Learning Strategies Instruction in Higher Education in Pakistan**

All the three major language learning strategies are used in EAL classes in higher education in Pakistan, namely Cognitive, Metacognitive and Social/Affective strategies. In Cognitive strategies, the students are instructed in strategies like resourcing, translating, note-taking, elaboration of prior knowledge, summarising and deduction/induction. Metacognitive strategies instruction includes both Planning (advance organisation, selective attention and self-management), and Monitoring (monitoring comprehension and monitoring production). Lastly, Social/Affective strategies instruction includes questioning and discussion. All these strategies are taught implicitly in CLIL classrooms to EAL learners. Hence, English language learners learn and benefit from these strategies according to their individual abilities.

**Conclusion**

This paper has reviewed the literature available on language learning strategies instruction of EAL students. Language learning strategies are vital to the acquisition of EAL. They help to enhance the language learning and make it more effective and efficient. Current trends and research in language learning strategies call for including language learning strategies instruction training as a part of teachers' training programmes. Teachers also need to awaken to the importance of language learning strategies for the achievement of teaching/learning goals. The current situation of language learning strategies practice in Pakistan calls for using language learning strategies explicitly and making teachers aware of

**Language in India** www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 17:8 August 2017**
Fareeha Javed, Ph.D.
Impact of Teaching Language Learning Strategies on Learning English as Additional
Language                                                                                          41

the importance of language learning strategies in teaching/learning EAL. The literature studied points out the importance of language learning strategies and the weaknesses and strengths of existing language learning strategies. Hence, effective and planned instruction of language learning strategies in CLIL focused classrooms of EAL learners at higher education level will result in effective and efficient teaching and learning.

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**Language in India** www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 17:8 August 2017**
Fareeha Javed, Ph.D.
Impact of Teaching Language Learning Strategies on Learning English as Additional
Language                                                                             42

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**Language in India** www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 17:8 August 2017**
Fareeha Javed, Ph.D.
Impact of Teaching Language Learning Strategies on Learning English as Additional
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**Language in India** www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 17:8 August 2017**
Fareeha Javed, Ph.D.
Impact of Teaching Language Learning Strategies on Learning English as Additional
Language                                                                          44