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English as a Second Language Learning
Strategies and Teachability

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Abstract

This study explores English as Second Language Teaching and Learning strategies at the secondary level of education. The study hypothesizes that there is no correlation between English as Second Language teaching and learning strategies.

A sample of 100 ESL learners of grade IX and X was drawn to administer Strategy Inventory Language Learning. A sample of 40 teachers, teaching English as Second Language was also chosen to seek their responses on SILL. Mean Average was calculated to draw comparison between teachability and learnability.

The study reveals that the balance is off-centered between language teaching and learning strategies. The study suggests that the teachers should develop language strategies cohesion and positive supportive learning environment to improve the learners' fluency and competence.

Keywords: ESL, Learnability and Teachability

Introduction

Many different methods and approaches for teaching English as Second Language (ESL) came in and became out of fashion. For example, Grammar and Translation Method (GTM), Audio Lingual Method (ALM), Communicative Approach (CA), etc., have used to teaching ESL over the years.

However, researchers such as (Richards, 1990; Kumaravadivelu, 1994, Larsen-Freeman, 2001, Brown, 2002 and Bell, 2003) proclaimed the death of methods. According to Krashen and Terrell, the major problem with these methods was that they were built not around actual theory of language acquisition, but theories of something else; for example, the structure of language (Richards and Rodgers, 2000). Thus, the concept of post-methodology became an important theme.

Eclectic approach to language teaching (a method that has been practiced for centuries) became an outcome of the post-methodology period. Ignoring the learning strategies, teachers began to blend the methods and approaches to improve their ESL teaching. However, the entire language teaching process remained teacher-centered.

A paradigm shift from teacher-centered to teaching-centered made the proponents of eclectic approach to review language teaching methods and approaches. As a result of this, learning strategies gained importance in the language teaching process. As noted by Griffiths (2007), Language Learning Strategies (LLS), although still fuzzily defined and controversially classified, are increasingly attracting the interest of contemporary language educators because of their potential to enhance learning. Rubin (1975) provides a broad definition of learning strategies as the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire language competence.

This study presumes that there is a gap between language teaching and learning strategies, which inhibits ESL learning process. In order to explore learning styles, the study draws on Oxford's taxonomy of learning strategies: *memory strategies* (how students remember language), *cognitive strategies* (how students think about their learning), *compensation strategies* (which enable students to make up for their limited knowledge), *metacognitive strategies* (relating to how students manage their own learning), *affective strategies* (relating to students' feelings) and *social strategies* (learning by interaction with others).

Theoretical Assumptions

It is observed that some students are more successful than others on the assumption that some of their success may be as a result of more effective Language Learning Strategies (LLS). It is assumed that the strategies employed by the more successful learners may be learnt by those who are less successful, and that the teacher can facilitate the language learning process by promoting awareness of these strategies, and encouraging their use. The position that language learners are the individuals who take charge of their own learning and achieve autonomy by the use of learning strategies has been researched and promoted by educators such as Oxford (1990), O'Malley (1990), Bialystok (1991), Cohen (1998), Wenden (1991), and Green and Oxford (1995).

Learnability and Teachability

As Oxford (1990) emphasizes, language learning strategies are especially important for language learners because they are tools for active, self-directed movement, which is essential for developing communicative competence. Besides developing the communicative competence of the learners, teachers who train them to use LLS (Language Learning Strategies) can help them to become better language learners. Helping learners to understand LLS and training them to streamline them can be considered characteristics of a good language teacher (Lessard, 1997).

Garden and Miller (1996) supports the fact that if a teacher tends to be learner-centered, then he may use a specific number of tasks appropriate for his students in order to provide them with opportunities to use and develop LLS, and to encourage them for more independent language learning both in class and out of class activities. As Graham (1997) declares, LLS training needs to be integrated into students' regular classes because they help to appreciate their relevance for language learning tasks. The students need to constantly monitor and evaluate the strategies they develop and use; and they need to be aware of the nature, function and importance of such strategies. Griffiths (2007) makes the point that contemporary language educators and researchers are increasingly keen to harness the potential which LLS seem to have for enhancing an individual's ability to learn language.

Underlying Assumption

Individual language processing faculty differentiates mixed ability learners. This study assumes that language learning strategies facilitate acquisition process, if the teachers and the learners have common language teaching and learning strategies. Differentiation among these strategies causes a gap between teachability and learnability, which is the prime focus of this study.

Methodology

Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was adapted for collection of data. The SILL consisted of 50 items which were distributed over six categories: Memory, Cognitive, Compensation, Metacognitive, Affective and Social strategies. Learners were asked to respond to each of the strategy description based on the 2 options: yes or no. Oxford (1990) commented that the SILL was the most often used strategy scale around the world, and the only language learning strategy instrument that had been extensively field-tested for reliability and validated in multiple ways.

A sample of 100 participants was taken from six public (schools that are run by the government agencies) and private schools (schools run by non-official organizations but within the superintendence of government school authority) of secondary level located in Lahore, Pakistan for the administration of SILL. The questionnaire was administered among 50 each from public and private sector school learners between 15-17 years of age. A sample of 40 ESL

teachers was also taken to compute their responses on SILL. Mean Average was calculated to draw comparison between learnability and teachability.

Learners' Background

The learners were teacher-dependent in the public schools. The teachers asked students to orally translate the reading material in English into their home language such as Urdu. The learners were taught grammar deductively. That is; they were given the grammar rules to memorize and to apply them in isolation. Eventually they were observed memorizing native language equivalents for foreign language. In the private schools, the teachers were facilitators of their students' learning. And one of their major responsibilities was to create a situation to promote communication. They were found more tolerant to the learners' errors in ESL learning as compared to their counterparts in the public schools. They used students' errors as an index of learning the language.

Data Analysis

Table 1 reveals the difference between teachability and learnability in public schools. A slight difference (1%) was found on the usage of memory strategies; however; a mark difference (13%) was measured between the teachers and the learners on the usage of cognitive

| Comparison between Language Teaching and Learning Strategies in Public Schools | | |
|---|----------|----------|
| | Teachers | Learners |
| Memory | 53% | 52% |
| Cognitive | 40% | 53% |
| Compensation | 54% | 77% |
| Metacognitive | 73% | 68% |
| Affective | 31% | 65% |
| Social | 54% | 51% |

Table 1

strategies. Similarly, a significant difference (23%) was computed on the usage of compensational strategies; whereas a small difference (5%) was measured between the teachers and the learners on the usage of metacognitive strategies. A noteworthy difference (34%) was found on the usage of affective strategies. Nevertheless, a minor difference (3%) was calculated between the teachers and the learners on the usage of social strategies.

Table 2 shows the difference between language teaching and learning strategies in private schools. There was a slight difference (3%, 2%, 4% and 6%) between the teachers and the learners on the usage of memory, metacognitive, social and cognitive strategies. However, there was no difference in the usage of compensation strategies among the teachers and the learners. There was a significant difference (14%) between the teachers and the learners in the usage of affective strategies.

| Comparison between Language Teaching and Learning Strategies in Private Schools | | |
|--|----------|----------|
| | Teachers | Learners |
| Memory | 85% | 82% |
| Cognitive | 87% | 81% |
| Compensation | 85% | 85% |
| Metacognitive | 98% | 96% |
| Affective | 60% | 74% |
| Social | 85% | 89% |

Table 2

Discussion

In the public schools, the teachers demonstrated lack of compensation and affective strategies; whereas the learners emphasized on these strategies more than their teachers in the process of ESL acquisition. The proportion between the teachers and the learners on the use of other LLS had a marginal deviation. In the private schools, the teachers use less affective strategies as compared to their learners, whereas a slight deviation was found between the teachers and the learners on the use of other LLS.

How can teachers make use of learning strategies? Firstly, the teachers ought to harmonize their teaching strategies with learning strategies. Secondly, the learners may be encouraged to develop autonomy inside and outside the classroom. Partly this can be achieved through 'learner training': equipping them with the means to guide themselves by exploring strategies to them.

The idea of learner training leads to autonomous, self-directed learning, in which the students take on responsibility for their own learning. They choose their goals; they control teaching methods and material; they assess how well they are doing themselves.

This independence of the learner from the teacher has been recognized by the tradition of strategies research, which tries to discover the choices that students are making and to recognize them in language teaching.

Conclusion

The study examined Language Teaching and Learning Strategies at the secondary level of education. A significant deviation was found over affective and compensation strategies between practices followed in government-run public schools and private schools. However, a marginal difference was found over memory, cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies between teachability and learnability. Language Teaching and Learning Strategies need to be reconsidered in order to bridge the gap between learnability and teachability. The teachers should attempt to strengthen language learning strategies and offer positive, supportive responses to learners' needs and interests. Classrooms that combine these elements offer affective learning experiences to language learners.

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