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Strategy Instruction in University Language Courses

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One challenge many university language instructors face is to develop effective language learners who will be communicatively competent in the target language they are learning. Pedagogically, this means pursuing two teaching objectives: to expose learners to language-learning processes that are efficient and systematic; and to develop the language proficiency of their learners. In this article, Strategy Based Instruction (Cohen, 1999) is promoted as an approach to achieve these objectives. After a brief review of the role of strategies in the learning process and learner variables in strategy use, options and guidelines for strategies-based instruction are presented.

多くの大学の言語担当の講師が直面する一つの挑戦は効果的な学習者を発展させることであり、学習者達が学んでいる目的言語でコミュニケーションが出来ることである。教育学上、これは二つの教育目的を追求することを意味する。一つは効率的で系統的な言語学習過程に学習者を引き込むこと、もう一つは学習者に言語の発達を教えること。この論説では ストラテジ ベイスト インストラクション の指示がこれらの目的を達成するためのアプローチとして促進される。学習過程における理論の役割の簡潔な調査と理論を習得程度、思考等各位異なる 学習者が実践したあと 理論に基づいた指示にたいするオプション及びストラテジ ベイスト インストラクションに基づくガイドラインが示されます。

Language learning strategies and their role in the language learning process

The literature on learning strategies instruction (Rubin, 1987; Cook, 1991; Oxford, 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1995; Cohen, 1999; Nunan, 1999; Macaro, 2001) reports that instruction is important for effective and successful language learning and language proficiency. These writers have reported that knowledge, awareness, and practice of language learning strategies provide learners with 1) skills to take responsibility for their own success as language learners, 2) the ability to diagnose their own learning strengths and weaknesses, and 3) more autonomy in their learning habits (Cohen, 1999).

Although strategy instruction and discussion of its pedagogical and linguistic outcomes are not new to foreign language teaching, with the recent increase of content and

ESP courses in university curriculums, and increasing number of learner variables in general English programs, there is a need for course instructors to teach learners how to develop skills to learn effectively and efficiently.

Language learning strategies are important skills to teach in university language programs for a number of reasons. First of all, language-learning strategies have a role to play in self-directed learning and learner autonomy. For example, the intentional and appropriate use (Oxford, 2001) of strategies such as self-management, functional planning (Chaudron, 1995), resourcing, note taking, and asking for clarification are some of the ways learners can take the initiative to perform language tasks without assistance. With repeated and contextualized practice of these (and other targeted) strategies, learners can gradually develop an ability to direct their own learning and attend to learning tasks independently as they decrease their dependence on others in the learning process. A second reason for including strategy instruction regularly into lesson plans is to expose learners to language-learning processes that are efficient and systematic. To be efficient and systematic is equally important for those students enrolled in content, ESP, and general English courses. In all these contexts, the ability to instinctively plan, monitor, and evaluate a learning task; to naturally interact and manipulate what has been learned; and to actively make up for missing knowledge are important skills to be deployed when interacting with either the content or the language of learning activities.

Strategies and learner variables

In university language classrooms, learners will invariably have different repertoires, preferences, and knowledge of language

learning strategies. For example, there may be learners who will rely on a limited repertoire of cognitive strategies such as translation, memorization, practice, and repetition. These study skills are often predominant in students who have just started their university studies. For many of these students, these basic cognitive strategies were appropriate and successfully applied in their previous learning contexts. There may also be learners who will have more of an awareness (knowledge) of language learning strategies and use a variety of cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. Perhaps resulting from language learning experience, these students have acquired a variety of strategies to use when attending to the tasks assigned to them. The gap between different learners and their knowledge, use of, and awareness of learning strategies is partially developmental. For example, in the initial stages of (language or content) learning, receptive strategies such as memorization, repetition, and the use of formulaic language seem to be acquired first (Skehan, 1989). The more complex strategies such as monitoring, elaboration, awareness, self-direction, etc., emerge later (Chesterfield & Chesterfield, 1985; Bialystock & Frolich, 1978), and “their use may have to be explicitly taught to some students” (Skehan, 1989, p. 95).

In a university learning environment, with only 15 lessons per semester, it is an unrealistic option to wait for strategies to *emerge*. Recognizing that strategies can be identified and taught, one way to accelerate the development and acquisition of learning strategies is to integrate explicit strategy instruction into content and language classes (strategies-based instruction).

Strategies-based instruction (SBI)

“Strategies-based instruction is a learner centered approach to teaching that extends classroom strategy training to include

both explicit and implicit integration of strategies into the course content” (Cohen, 1999, p. 81).

The first step in SBI is to decide which strategies to focus on and how instruction should take place. Cohen (1999) presents three options for strategy selection and instruction:

1. Start with course materials and decide which strategies to focus on and where to insert their instruction.
2. Start with selected (desired) strategies that are relevant to course objectives and focus on and design activities around them.
3. Insert strategies spontaneously into lessons whenever appropriate – i.e. when there is a need to help students to overcome problems in attending to the tasks or material.

The first option is practical for instructors who self-select their course books or have them assigned. Since most course books contain a variety of cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies, selection of strategies will be easy. Additionally, instructional support can be found in most in teacher’s manuals. For instructors who design their own materials for a specific course or modality, the second option is a way to focus on key strategies deemed appropriate for meeting course objectives and specific groups of learners. The third option is excellent for instructors who may prefer to spend class time on strategy instruction only when necessary.

The next step of SBI is to follow steps 2 through 6 of the framework (adapted from O’Malley & Chamot, 1995) presented below:

1. Identify strategies for instruction.
2. Present strategies by naming them and explaining when and why to use them.
3. Model the strategies.
4. Provide opportunities to practice the strategies with various activities/tasks.
5. Develop students’ ability to evaluate strategy use.
6. Develop skills to transfer strategy use to new tasks.

Conclusion

The above set of options and framework for strategy instruction has presented an approach for course instructors to systematically introduce, practice, and reinforce strategy instruction into their classrooms. The key points to remember during instruction are name the strategy, tell what it is doing, practice it, and reinforce it later with more practice. Through explicit and informed instruction, learners will have opportunities to: increase awareness, practice, use, and monitoring of language learning strategies; develop skills to organize and conduct their own learning events; and transfer strategy use to new tasks.

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