The ‘Teachability’ of English Language Learning Strategies:
A Concise Review of Empirical and Theoretical Views

by:

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إمكانيات تدريس استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية:
استعراض موجز للدراسات التطبيقيَّة والنظرية

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ملخص الدراسة:
تتطرق هذه الدراسة إلى استراتيجيات التعلم الموجهة في مجال تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية"، وتحديداً في باب استراتيجيات التعلم، وتصنيفاتها المختلفة، وأهدافها من حيث علاقة استخدامها بشكل صحيح لتحقيق عملية تعلم ناجحة. ثم يتبع الباحث بالقراءة والوصف والتحليل أهم الدراسات النظرية والتطبيقية السابقة حول استراتيجيات التعلم في محاولة للوصول إلى إجابة شافية عن مدى إمكانية تدريس هذه الدراسات لطلاب اللغة العربية من حيث ملاءمة البرنامج التعليمي.

وتقرر هذه الدراسة اتخاذ أغلب الدراسات النظرية والتطبيقية السابقة في التوصية بأن تدريس استراتيجيات التعلم مهم وممكن بهدف نقل الدراسات المفيدة التي يستخدمها الطلاب المتقدمون إلى الطلاب الأقل كفاءة. كما خلصت إلى أن يشترط لنجاح أي برنامج تعليم الاستراتيجيات أن يكون الطلاب على علم مسبق بأهداف البرنامج وطريقة. وتجدر الإشارة أن بعض الدراسات تتعلق ببرنامج تعلم اللغة بحيث يتعلم الطلاب الاستراتيجيات بشكل غير مباشر أثناء تعلمهم للمواد اللغة عن طريق استخدام المقررات العلمية الحديثة التي تلتقى التمارين والتدريبات اللغوية وتعرض محتواها بأسلوب يأخذ هدف تعلم استراتيجيات التعلم في الاعتبار. وتبني هذه الدراسة في خاتمها إلى ضرورة أن يلحق أي برنامج تعليمي يتضمن تدريس استراتيجيات التعلم دراسة تبعية لقياس مدى استفادة الطلاب من هذه الدراسات في تحقيق عملية تعلم ناجحة.

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Abstract:

This analytical research paper studies the teaching of language learning strategies to language learners. It starts with providing a thorough grounding in learning strategies’ definitions, classifications, and significance for achieving a successful learning process. Then the researcher follows up, reads over, and reports the most salient empirical and theoretical previous studies in order to reach a well-established answer to the question: “Can teachers help their students to develop appropriate language learning strategies and to use these strategies effectively?” This study reports that learning strategies are not only important but also teachable when the intention is to teach the learners to choose and effectively use the good strategies usually used by the more successful learners. However, it is emphasized that for a strategy training course to be successful, it should inform its students in advance about its goals and methodology. It also needs to integrate strategy training into the language skills learning programme so that the students would learn strategies implicitly while using purposeful well-presented language coursebooks. This paper concludes that any proposed strategy training course should immediately be followed by investigation into its effectiveness.
Introduction

The study of Language Learning Strategies (LLS henceforth) is to some extent a recent development in the field of second or foreign language learning or acquisition. This, of course, does not mean that they have not been used or employed by EFL learners before. In fact, they have not been investigated until the late 1970s and thus, this sort of research is still in its infancy.

To start with, good language learners are thought to have certain learning behaviors which enable them to achieve effective learning, or at least contribute to their success. Hence these characteristics can distinguish them from less successful learners. Rubin (1975) (see also Stern, 1975) tried through mere observation to identify and sort out a list of these qualities. The strategy list was not meant to be exhaustive. She also tried to broadly explain the manner in which these strategies are being used or employed by language learners to achieve effective learning. Ever since, researchers started to note and study more of these techniques using other research instruments such as questionnaires, interviews, and ‘think aloud’ protocol. They described and classified these ‘strategies’ into different groups of LLS. However, there was indeed a wide diversity in how writers approached and defined learning strategies. As a result, we may well assume the
existence of other debatable areas in the relevant literature about the directly related issues of strategy identification, classification, and ‘teachability’\textsuperscript{1}.

**Definitions and Taxonomies of LLS**

**What are learning strategies?**

LLS can be defined as the *techniques used by learners either consciously or unconsciously\textsuperscript{2} to facilitate language learning*. This does not necessarily mean that all researchers perceive these strategies similarly. Oxford (1990:8) defines them as the “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations.” This definition considers strategies as *actions* taken by the learner *consciously*. Obviously, the word ‘actions’ implies that ‘strategies’ are more behavioral than mental. Jordan (1997:95) thinks of LLS as mainly mental techniques (see also Chamot and Rubin, 1994:773). He defines them as the 'ways' adopted by learners in order to comprehend, store, and recall new language input. Ellis (1997:76) considers LLS as both behavioral and mental. Hedge (2000:19) also prefers adopting a comprehensive definition in which LLS are generally taken to refer to both mental and behavioral *techniques*. She adds, “these are techniques used by learners to deal with input,
assimilate new language, store, retrieve, and practice using it.” Cook (1996:103) points out that strategies are all conscious choices made by the language learner in order to learn or use a second language effectively. Cohen (1998:4) agrees that LLS are conscious processes and defines them as “processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning or use of a second or foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about that language.”

A broader definition which will include both learning and Communication Strategies (CS henceforth) is suggested by Nunan (1999). Nevertheless, researchers tend to make distinction between LLS and CS. Hawkins (1998:195) claims that “in principle, learning strategies should be distinguished from another kind of strategy: communication strategies. Communication strategies are techniques for maintaining or repairing a dialogue with an interlocutor when it is in danger of breaking down.” Cohen (1998:7) notes that CS have more ‘impact’ on language use than on language learning. Thus, CS are defined by Canale and Swain (1980:30) as the “verbal and nonverbal strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence.” However, the ‘compensatory factor’ in such a definition
demonstrates that the distinction between LLS and CS is sometimes difficult to maintain. Oxford (1990), for instance, believes that ‘compensation strategies’ constitute one type of LLS (forthcoming below). That is to say, some CS can be used by learners in classrooms for purposes of learning, particularly in speaking and writing. Johnson (2001:153) explains, “the problem of definition comes about because communication strategies can also be learning strategies.” Dornyei (1995:60) agrees that “a great deal of language attainment takes place through taking an active part in actual communication, and CSs help learners to do so and thus (a) to obtain practice, and (b) to gain new information by testing what is permissible or appropriate.”

Such multiplicity in viewing and defining strategies should normally lead us to expect the development of different strategy-taxonomies.

**How are learning strategies classified?**

In the literature of LLS, two basic categories of strategies could be distinguished; ‘cognitive’ and ‘metacognitive’ strategies (a.k.a. ‘specific’ and ‘general learning skills’ respectively (Wenden, 1987)). A much more recent division recognizes the ‘social/affective’ strategies (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990). Still, some researchers propose
that this recent category can, theoretically speaking, be subsumed under the two major types of cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Macaro, 2006:328).

Cognitive strategies have to do with the mental aspects of the language learning process. They include all mental techniques utilized and purposefully applied by learners to learn, store, or retrieve a piece of language information. They, according to O’Malley and Chamot (1990:44), “operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning.” Memorization, repetition, translation, and inference are examples of cognitive strategies. Metacognitive strategies have to do rather with the management of the language learning process. They include all skills employed by learners themselves in order to plan, organize, and assess their language learning. Self-monitoring, self-evaluation, direct attention, and self-management are some examples of metacognitive strategies. Social/affective strategies have to do with both the interaction with other users of the language like learners or native speakers, and the regulation of one’s attitudes and emotions while learning. Self-encouragement, asking for clarification, and cooperating with others are examples of this type.

**LLS could also be preferably classified into the two major categories of direct and indirect strategies.** Direct strategies, on the one hand, include ‘memory’, ‘cognitive’ and

It is worth mentioning here that many writers on learner training (e. g., O’Malley and Chamot, 1990:45) would admit the fact that a certain amount of overlapping may well be noticed in any suggested classification for learning strategies. Oxford (1990:16), for instance, believes that “a large overlap naturally exists among the strategies groups in the system presented here.” She proclaims, “classification conflicts are inevitable.” Cohen (1998:12) states, “The problem is that the distinctions are not so clear-cut. In other words, the same strategies of ongoing text summarization may be interpretable as either cognitive or metacognitive.” He adds, “In fact, the same strategy may function at different levels of abstraction.” Our ability to draw dividing lines between different LLS will presumably make the notion of strategy teaching much more acceptable and appealing. Nevertheless, we might rightfully ask, what is it, in the first place, that attracts us to the study of LLS?

**Teaching of LLS**

**Why teach learning strategies?**

On the face of it, we can, using common sense, *hypothesize* that the development and enhancement of learning
strategies in language learners should lead to a more successful learning process. The study of LLS, albeit recent, has provided valuable information of great help in achieving effective learning. Different aspects of language learning proficiency have been positively affected by research in learning strategies. In a large-scale quantitative study, Green and Oxford (1995:285), for example, researched the relationship between LLS and L2 proficiency and “found significantly greater overall use of language learning strategies among more successful learners”. According to Macaro (2006:320), “The body of work to date suggests a possible relationship between strategy use and second language learning success.” Ellis (1994:529) emphasizes the reversible influence of language proficiency on learning strategies, “the success that learners experience and their level of L2 proficiency can also affect their choice of strategies.” Oxford (1990:1) draws attention to the important role which these strategies play in connection with the achievement of ‘communicative competence’ through learners’ direct involvement in learning activities. Nunan (1999:171) advocates this view and points out that the study of LLS will eventually result in effective language learning, “the greater awareness you have of what you are doing, if you are conscious of the process underlying the learning that you are involved in, then learning will be more effective.” Griffiths and Parr (2001:253) assert that “in theory, LLS have great
potential to enhance language-learning ability and, in practice, students have been shown to use a wide range of LLS, some of them quite frequently.” Weaver and Cohen (1998:68) explain the twofold role that LLS play in the learning process, “these strategies will facilitate the language learning process by promoting successful and efficient completion of language learning tasks, as well as by allowing the learners to develop their own individualized approach to learning.”

Proponents of strategy teaching insist that it may well make learners aware of the strategies they are using and then they will be able to reinforce the ones which help them achieve successful learning. In broad terms, research has indicated that learners who are taught strategy employment usually achieve higher proficiency in language learning than learners who do not receive such training. Oxford (1990:12) justifies that this training “helps guide learners to become more conscious of strategy use and more adept at employing appropriate strategies.” Similarly, Ellis and Sinclair (1989:2) emphasise that strategy teaching will “help learners consider the factors that affect their learning and discover the strategies that suit them best.”

Strategy teaching is also believed to help learners and lead them to autonomous learning. Hedge (2000:86), for
example, points out that “learner training, then, can lead to more effective classroom learning, self-access learning, and independent learning at home.” Weaver and Cohen (1998:68) agree to Hedge’s inference as strategy training “can enhance students’ efforts to reach language program goals because it encourages students to find their own pathways to success, and thus it promotes learners autonomy and self-direction.” This can be achieved in two steps. Firstly, the learners can be taught to identify the effective LLS they are using at present, and secondly, they can be helped to build a repertoire of learning strategies from which they can choose the appropriate ones that suit the learning tasks. Oxford and Nyikos (1989:291) noted earlier that the “use of appropriate learning strategies enables students to take responsibility for their own learning by enhancing learner autonomy, independence, and self-direction.” In a similar vein, Chamot and Rubin (1994:774) insist that a properly carried out strategy teaching “can positively assist language learners to become more actively engaged in their own learning processes, thus taking on greater responsibility for learning.”

*A connection between 'specific' strategy teaching and successful learning could also be noticed in the field.* Macaro (2006:321), who is in favour of learning strategy teaching, specifies that “learner strategy instruction (or “training”) appears to be effective in promoting successful learning if it is
carried out over lengthy periods of time and if it includes a
focus on metacognition." O’Malley and Chamot (1990:7) also
report that the findings from studies of L1 learning strategies
have shown that students’ performance in “a wide range of
reading comprehension and problem-solving tasks” has been
successfully improved as a result of relevant effective strategy
teaching. Moreover, the relationship between proper use of
LLS and learning motivation has also been established in the
field. According to Macaro (2006:331), “It has, after all, been
one of the fundamental claims of learner strategy research that
effective strategy deployment leads to increased motivation.”

One can reasonably infer from the gross number of
available articles and research papers so far on ‘learning
strategies’ and ‘reading strategies’ (well over 1000) that there
is a growing need for the consideration of LLS teaching. Allen
(2003:320) sums up, “there seems to be consensus within the
educational community that students need to be taught
strategies.”

**Are learning strategies teachable?**

This review mainly addresses the following question:
*Can we, as teachers, help our students develop 'appropriate'
LLS and use them effectively inside the classroom? And, if
yes, how?*
As noted earlier, the study of LLS has contributed to language learning/teaching field by initiating investigation on the possibility and effectiveness of learning strategy teaching. Research in the field has helped in brainstorming the untraditional idea of encouraging learners to actively participate and take on direct responsibility for their learning. Therefore, discussions on LLS ‘teachability’ and the proper approach to its introduction were generated. Many investigations aimed at establishing “whether it is possible to facilitate learning through the use of certain strategies, or whether learners can modify their strategies and learn new, more effective ones” (Hedge, 2000:79).

Although many authors tend to believe that LLS are teachable (see (Oxford and Nyikos, 1989), (Chamot and Rubin, 1994) and (peacock and Ho, 2003)), There are still counterarguments to it. Rees-Miller (1993), for instance believes that all practical attempts to train students on LLS until mid 1990s have achieved only a limited success. She concludes that extreme caution should be exercised by teachers when planning and implementing any language learner training as such training may never be worthwhile. McDonough (1995:101) also concludes that “great care has to be exercised in moving from a descriptive and taxonomic position to an interventionist one.” He (2006) contends that strategy teaching has the limitation that it may well be taking place timewise at the expense of the actual language teaching.
However, we can disagree to this call for 'extreme caution' as almost all the stated limitations seem to be in the implementation and methodology of the suggested procedures. In other words, they do not question the importance and usefulness of strategy teaching. Macaro (2006:320), for instance, shows that strategy teaching is a worthwhile trend and justifiably claims that research in the field so far has provided “some evidence that learners can be helped to use strategies more effectively.” Similarly, Oxford (1990: 10-12) reports that research has shown that language learners who are exposed to strategy teaching programs have learned faster and 'better' than the others. She devised different activities in order to identify and teach learning strategies, and she successfully theorized from strategy training practice. She argues that the teacher’s roles should be expanded to include “identifying students’ learning strategies, conducting training on learning strategies, and helping learners become more independent.” She strongly advocates learning strategy ‘teachability’ and claims that since LLS are changeable, strategy teaching should be part and parcel of any language curriculum. She explains that, unlike ‘personality traits’, “learning strategies are easier to teach and modify. This can be done through strategy training, which is an essential part of language education.” She believes that this applies to both good and poor learners because the goal is the improvement of LLS use.
The mere suggestion that strategy teaching programmes have become worldwide makes some researchers believe in LLS teachability. Weaver and Cohen (1998:67) claim that strategy teaching is now exercised “in programs with both ample and with limited resources, in programs that cater to learners at all levels of the curriculum, and in a variety of formats with differing degrees of integration into regular curriculum.”

Which learning strategies to teach, and to whom?

A good logic and intuitive suggestion is to teach the required LLS used or chosen by more successful learners to the less successful. Brown (2001:208) assumes that one important goal of language teachers should be to equip their “students with a sense of what successful language learners do to achieve success and to aid them in developing their own unique, individual pathways to success.” That is why research, as Rees-Miller (1993:679) puts it, “has been devoted to discovering what good language learners do and how their learning strategies can be taught to less successful learners to improve their learning efficiency.” McDonough (1998:193) agrees, “there is now a large body of empirical work that has been able to identify the kinds of learning strategies adopted by people who appear to be effective language learners.” Ellis and Sinclair’s work (Learning to learn English:1989) aimed at
helping learners to make the appropriate choices of LLS provided that they are the choices of the most suitable and effective strategies that distinguish good learners from ‘poor’ ones. This is why Weaver and Cohen (1998) affirm that an essential step in the strategy teaching process is to develop a repertoire of effective strategies from which learners can select the appropriate strategy for the language learning task and apply it properly.

However, the assumption that LLS used by good learners are different from those used by ‘unsuccessful’ learners is questionable. Some might argue that they are unsuccessful learners not because they use less effective strategies, but because they do not use LLS properly. McDonough (1995:81-83) draws our attention to the fact that “almost any strategy can lead to failure if used inappropriately”. He adds, “it is not clear that what differentiates good and poor learners is the choice of strategy; it may simply be the range and amount of use of strategies.” Oxford (1990:13) agrees that it is not necessarily the choice but may well be the range of use of leaning strategies that makes the difference between highly and less motivated learners. She also supports the idea that it is the frequency of strategy use that most often makes the distinction between
male and female learners or learners of different nationalities. O’Malley and Chamot (1990:140) found that “more effective students used a greater variety of strategies and used them in ways that helped the students complete the language task successfully. Less effective students not only had fewer strategy types in their repertoires but also frequently used strategies that were inappropriate to the task or that did not lead to successful task completion.”

**LLS teaching practice and methodology**

There have been attempts by proponents of LLS ‘teachability’ to introduce textbooks to teach and develop learners’ learning strategies. One of the early attempts to teach LLS was by Ellis and Sinclair (1989) when they offered a ‘self-training manual’ of two stages namely, “preparation for language learning” and “skills training.” Their book had different activities that aimed to classify learners according to the learning strategies they employ. So, according to learners’ answers to the questions in a questionnaire as an introductory activity, there have been ‘analytic’, ‘relaxed’, and ‘a mixture’ learners. Then, activities of both cognitive and metacognitive strategies were introduced. McDonough (1995:123) summarizes, “Ellis and Sinclair present a whole range of activities designed to help learners discover and elaborate their strategic and organize the language, the learning material, and the time available for themselves.”
Another attempt was by O’Malley and Chamot (1990) who tried to experimentally discover whether strategy training was of any significant effect on students’ learning performance in the three language components of vocabulary, listening, and speaking. Their sample consisted of 75 high school ESL students (intermediate English proficiency level) in three differently taught groups. The first group was taught some cognitive and social learning strategies (cognitive group). The second was taught some metacognitive strategies in addition to the cognitive and social strategies (metacognitive group). The third was not taught any LLS (control group). All groups were tested twice before and after the treatment, and certain measures were taken to control for the teacher effects. Strategy training started explicitly as ‘direct instruction’, and gradually was reduced to merely reminding participants about strategy use towards the end of the treatment. The researchers found that the two treatment groups achieved better language performance in the speaking task than the controls. However, no significant differences could be found between subjects on listening or vocabulary at the posttest. The authors referred this to “the greater difficulty of the posttest materials, the lower interest level of the materials, or the advanced rate at which the cues for strategy use were faded” (ibid., p.174). Still, this experiment showed that LLS could be taught. The researchers stated, “this study demonstrated that strategy
training can be effective in a natural classroom environment with integrative language tasks.” (ibid., p.175).

A *conversational* strategies teaching course on EFL high school learners in Hungary was conducted by Dornyei (1995). Its effectiveness was assessed by means of a quasi-experimental research design. The 6-week implicit course had two groups. The treatment group consisted of 53 students and the control group had 56 students. All students were tested orally at the beginning of the training course and at its end. The course provided instruction on the use of three conversational strategies: ‘speech fillers’, ‘circumlocutions’, and ‘topic avoidance and replacement CS’. Procedurally, the effectiveness of the training on the use of circumlocutions and fillers was assessed by “computing quality and frequency gain score”. However, the efficiency of the training of the third type “was only indirectly assessed through the students’ fluency” (p. 71). “Significant within-group gains were found in the groups that received CS and conversational training, but a comparison of the three conditions did not have significant results” (p. 79). The ‘shortness of the training course’ and ‘the limited sample sizes’ were taken to justify the insignificant difference between the treatment and the control groups. Dornyei (1995:80) tentatively concluded that “the treatment was successful in improving some of the qualitative and quantitative aspects of strategy use”.
Due to the paramount importance of the reading component in language courses (see Allen, 2003 and Levine et al., 2000), strategic reading has occupied the vast amount of research on LLS teaching at the expense of teaching writing strategies. O’Malley and Chamot (1990:151) report that “little research has been completed on instruction in writing strategies compared to the substantial body of research on direct instruction in reading strategies”.

Some chosen reading strategies are proved to be teachable by Salataci and Akyel (2002). They conducted a study to examine the possible effects of strategy teaching on reading comprehension of both English and Turkish. Twenty students from the Istanbul Technical University were tested before and after the 4-week reading strategy course. The course aimed at helping students to monitor their reading process and be aware of their strategy use. Also, it aimed to help students make use of their background knowledge to comprehend the new passages. The results showed that strategy teaching had a positive effect on students’ reading comprehension in English and Turkish.

An empirical study on the influence of a strategy teaching course on the reading proficiency of university ESP (English for Specific Purposes) learners in Tunisia was reported by Dhieb-Henia (2003). She used a sample of (61) students of Biology in two (experimental and control) groups.
The experimental group did an additional 10-week (30 hours in all) explicit teaching course on metacognitive and other general reading strategies such as scanning and skimming. Two reading tests were administered to both groups before and after the course to measure its effect on the subjects’ reading proficiency. The results showed that the experimental group performed significantly better on the reading test.

The reading strategies of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, 1990) are also proved to be teachable by Dreyer and Nel (2003). They conducted a study of a quasi-experimental design to investigate the ‘teachability’ of strategic reading and reading comprehension. 131 students in two (experimental and control) groups participated in this study. The students were taking a 13-week English for Professional Purposes (EPP) course in a South African university. The experimental group was subjected to an additional course of explicit reading strategy teaching sessions and computer learning enhancements and resources through internet hypertext. Students in this group had access to a specifically-made internet homepage which aimed to facilitate strategic reading. It had different sections for assessment and interaction between peers and instructors. Participants’ reading comprehension as well as their strategy use were measured at the beginning of the course and at its end. The results showed that the experimental group achieved significantly higher mean score on the reading comprehension measure than the control
group. This clearly suggests that the strategic reading instruction provided in a learning milieu enhanced by technology has been useful for the EPP students.

The aforementioned attempts towards practicing strategy teaching and many others suggest that LLS are teachable, providing that these strategies are conscious (i.e., deliberately chosen by learners (Allen, 2003:321)), and recommend strategy teaching programmes. Noticeably, proponents of strategy ‘teachability’ define strategies as conscious choices made by learners which can be taught either explicitly or through implicit teaching (a.k.a. ‘blind training’, see (Wenden, 1987:159). This tendency to underscore ‘consciousness’ as a major feature of strategies is the drive to believe that LLS ‘can be influenced by teaching’ (Dornyei, 1995:63). Otherwise, one would question the possibility of teaching subconscious actions and activities which in practice are beyond the direct control of the learner. For example, according to the Natural Approach to language learning (Krashen and Terrell, 1983), language cannot be learnt consciously. Instead, it can be acquired through natural use and communication. This should imply that conscious learning of LLS is also theoretically speaking out of the question.

Nevertheless, as learning strategies have been proved both theoretically and practically to be teachable, we have the
right to know about and decide on the appropriate 'methodology' for the introduction of LLS teaching courses.

Implicit or explicit strategy teaching?

Some researchers (see, for example, (Tudor, 1996:39)), are skeptical enough to question the claim that “strategies can be neatly pedagogised and ‘taught’ to learners in a straightforward manner”. Still, although they admit that the implicit approach has the advantage that is no training in strategy teaching is needed, O’Malley and Chamot (1990:154) report researchers’ recommendation that LLS teaching should be direct rather than embedded. Most investigated studies would prefer the explicit approach\(^5\) to strategy teaching.

Many researchers state unequivocally that strategy teaching should be explicit. Wenden (1987:160), who refers to the explicit approach to strategy teaching as the ‘informed training’, claims that “such training has been proven to be more effective. Students use the learned strategy more frequently and more effectively.” Oxford (1990:202-207) prefers to call this approach the ‘awareness or familiarization training’. She explains that in such an explicit strategy teaching situation, learners become aware of the importance of the learning strategy, familiar with the manner of its use, prepared to transfer it to other language tasks, and able to assess its potential effectiveness. Cohen (1998:19) agrees and
justifies that “by preserving the explicit and overt nature of the strategy training teachers better enable students to consciously transfer specific strategies to new contexts.”

Contrasting the overt with the covert approaches, Weaver and Cohen (1998:79) advocate the explicit type of strategy teaching because strategy learning is not fully guaranteed in the implicit type. They add, “When the strategies are implicit and thus not explained, modeled, or reinforced by the classroom teacher or the textbook itself, strategy training may not actually take place, and students may not be aware that they have been using the strategies at all.”

Empirically speaking, Lynch (2001:392) reports that “there is no shortage of studies supporting the claim that strategic training can help and that informed strategy training helps most, both in second language learning and also in the general educational field.” Allen (2003:335) also reports that all three well-established approaches to reading strategy teaching, namely the Reciprocal Teaching Approach, the Transactional Strategy Teaching, and the cognitive Academic Model, recommend the explicit teaching. Dhieb-Henia (2003:391) contends that “a growing body of empirical research has supported the explicit teaching of specific strategies for improving students’ reading comprehension”.

Separate or integrated strategy teaching?

Another highly relevant issue is whether recommended LLS are to be taught while teaching other language tasks or in isolation. Some might argue that since the focus is totally on strategies only, teaching LLS separately should lead to readily effective strategy learning and competent language learning in consequence. However, such an approach has not proved to be the appropriate choice due to the so many advantages which the integrated approach has over it. According to research, it has been pointed out that strategy teaching should “be woven into regular language instruction” (Oxford, 2001:170).

More than two decades ago, Wenden (1987:161) assured that “learning in context is more effective than learning that is not clearly tied to the purposes it intends to serve. The former enables the learners to perceive the relevance of the task, enhances comprehension and facilitates retention.” However, she had thought that in some particular cases, such as when the learners are not aware of the ‘relevance’ and/or importance of the training, or where it aims at developing strategy use autonomy in learners, ‘less integrated’ strategy teaching seemed more appropriate (ibid., p.162).

Some advantages of the integrated approach to strategy teaching are stated by Weaver and Cohen (1998:81). They
claim that “students experience the advantages of systematically applying strategies to the learning and use of the language they are studying.” They add that students “have opportunities to share their own preferred strategies with the other students in the class and to increase their strategy repertoires within the context of the typical language tasks that they are asked to perform.” (loc. cit). Oxford (1990:206) agrees, "when strategy training is closely integrated with language learning, learners better understand how the strategies can be used in a significant, meaningful context.” O’Malley and Chamot (1990:152) also advocate integrated strategy teaching on the basis that “practicing strategies on authentic academic and language tasks facilitates the transfer of strategies to similar tasks encountered in other classes.”

It is reported that attempts to introduce separate strategy teaching with content-independent curriculum have not been successful in many cases because “learners sometimes rebel against strategy training that is not sufficiently linked with their own language training” (Oxford, 1990:206). It does not meet the learners' need for language learning in context. Also, it is expected to be highly abstract and theoretical with little practicality and usefulness (ibid., p.201). Therefore, the integrated strategy teaching approach is favoured.
Conclusion

By and large, research supports the idea that the teaching of LLS is possible, and we are inclined to agree that such teaching is worth an attempt. It is recommended that an ‘explicit’ approach to LLS training is adopted in which strategies are introduced in combination with the tasks and drills of the different language skills. ‘Explicitness’ refers to the fact that learners are ought to be informed of the goals and methodology of the training course right from the beginning.

This approach has started to regain popularity, and new textbooks are being developed accordingly. These instructional materials, according to Cohen (1998:80), “reinforce strategy use across both tasks and skills, and thus encourage students to continue applying the strategies on their own.” The recent series of ‘Interactions access” (Hartmann et al, 2007) (Thrush et al, 2007) (Kirn and Jack, 2009) is a good exemplary model of this resuscitated trend in material development and selection in which language learner training exercises are incorporated into language learning textbooks.

However, some researchers ((Rees-Miller, 1993:687), (Ellis, 1994:556) and (Poulisse, 1996:158)) are still uncertain about its effectiveness and/or the introduction manner of the training scheme. Ellis (1997:88-89), for instance, argues that some strategy training studies “have been less convincing in demonstrating the effectiveness of strategy training,” although he admits that training students to use certain vocabulary
learning strategies “has generally proved successful,”
Therefore, more empirical investigations are highly recommended to measure the effectiveness of previous attempts to teach LLS.

Notes

1. The term ‘strategy teaching’ is used in this paper in preference to other common terms such as ‘strategy training, education, instruction, or development’ because the pragmatic meaning of ‘teaching’, which highlights the problem-solving facet of the process and takes into account the important concept of individual differences (Chamot and Rubin, 1994:771), makes this term superior to all other suggested terms and ‘general enough to serve this paper’s needs’.

2. ‘Unconsciousness’ here means ‘automaticity’. That is, a strategy, after being used repeatedly and effectively by the learner, can become natural and effortless.

3. Memorization is a mental process which should normally be subsumed under ‘cognitive strategies’. See (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990:85) and (Cohen, 1998:147).

4. Refer to efforts made by learners to make up for missing knowledge and/or fill information gaps.

5. It is explicit in the sense that the learners are informed in advance of the importance and aim of strategy teaching.
References


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