LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AS THE WAY TO STUDENT AUTONOMY

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The article deals with the analysis of different language learning strategies which help to develop student autonomy. The most popular types are given as examples with the tips how to develop these

strategies in the classroom. The benefits of such work are also shown in the article.

Key words: language learning strategies, student autonomy, self-development, strategy instruction.

Student autonomy is the ability of individuals to pursue self-development. It requires individuals to take personal responsibility for their own learning and development through a process of assessment, reflection, and action. It also helps the students to update skills and remain marketable.

Student autonomy is connected with individual learning strategies which might include the following:

 Individual development plan

 Special projects and assignments

 Coaching

 Learning groups (teams)

 Self-directed learning

 Classroom learning

 Distance learning

 Online learning

 Discussion forum.

In general, a strategy is a tool, plan, or method used for accomplishing a task. Researches define different types of strategies:

1. Cognitive Strategy: a strategy or group of strategies or procedures that the learner uses to perform academic tasks or to improve social skills. Often, more than one cognitive strategy is used with others, depending on the learner and his / her schema for learning. In fact, research indicates

that successful learners use numerous strategies. Some of these strategies include visualization, verbalization, making associations, chunking, questioning, scanning, underlining, accessing cues, using mnemonics, sounding out words, and self-checking and monitoring. Visual or verbal prompts either remind the student what has already been learned or provide an opportunity to learn something new. In the course of time the learner becomes independent or strategic: it is a student who uses cues and strategies within his / her learning schema, asks clarifying questions, listens, checks and monitors his / her work and behavior, and sets personal goals. A strategic learner knows the value of using particular strategies through experience, and is eager to learn others that might prove beneficial.

2. Learning Strategy: a set of steps to accomplish a particular task, such as taking a test, comprehending a text, and writing a story..

3. Metacognition and self-regulation: the understanding a person has about how s/he learns (personal learning schema) including the strategies used to accomplish tasks, and the process by which

the learner oversees and monitors his / her use of strategies.

4. Mnemonic: a device for remembering, such as a first-letter mnemonic for writing: PLAN (Pay attention to the prompt, List main ideas, Add supporting ideas, Number your ideas).[1, 15] Rhyme, rhythm, music, and key-word mnemonics are also useful memory tools.

Strategy Instruction is very important because it teaches them how and when to use strategies, helps students identify personally effective strategies, and encourages them to make strategic behaviours part of their learning schema.

Learning Schema is the sets, or mixes, of strategies that theindividual learner uses automatically to perform, produce, communicate, or learn. It can take years to develop a personal learning schema.

Many students' ability to learn has been increased through the deliberate teaching of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. This is especially true for students with significant learning problems— strategy instruction is crucial for them. It has been demonstrated that when struggling students are taught strategies and are given ample encouragement, feedback, and opportunities to use them, students improve in their ability to process information, which, in turn, leads to improved learning.

Because not all students will find it easy to imbed strategy use in their learning schema, differentiation of strategies instruction is required, with some students needing more scaffolding and individualized, intensive instruction than others.

It's a good question: what happens to students when they become strategic? The following outcomes can be expected:

☐ Students trust their minds.

☐ Students know there's more than one right way to do things.

☐ They acknowledge their mistakes and try to get rid of them.

☐ They evaluate their products and behaviour.

☐ Memories are enhanced.

☐ Learning increases.

☐ Self-esteem increases.

☐ Students feel a sense of power.

☐ Students become more responsible.

☐ Work completion and accuracy improve.

☐ Students develop and use a personal study process.

☐ They know how to "try."

☐ On-task time increases; students are more "engaged."

An attempt to identify the most essential strategies students should learn is an

impossible task; it depends on the needs of the learner and the requirements of the curriculum. However, student use of the following strategies often leads to improved student performance:

1. Problem-solving: verbalization, visualization, chunking, making associations, use of cues.

2. Memory: visualization, verbalization, mnemonics, making associations, chunking, and writing. These are usually more effective when used in combinations.

3. Productivity: verbalization, self-monitoring, visualization, use of cues.

4. Reading accuracy and fluency: finger pointing or tracking, sounding out unknown ords, self

questioning for accuracy, chunking, and using contextual clues.

5. Reading comprehension: visualization, questioning, rereading, predicting.

6. Writing: planning, revising, questioning, use of cues, verbalization, visualization, checking and monitoring. How are students taught to use strategies? Effective strategy instruction is an integral part of classroom instruction, regardless of the content being taught; it is not an additional subject. Teachers continually praise students for using strategies and use teachable moments to discuss them. Students are encouraged to help their peers become more strategic. What are the basic steps in teaching strategy use? The following order of steps can be followed:

1. Describe the strategy. Students obtain an understanding of the strategy and its purpose— why it is important, when it can be used, and how to use it.

2. Model its use. The teacher models the strategy, explaining to the students how to perform it.

3. Provide ample assisted practice time. The teacher monitors, provides cues, and gives feedback. Practice results in automaticity so the student doesn't have to "think" about using the strategy.

4. Promote student self-monitoring and evaluation of personal strategy use. Students will likely use the strategy if they see how it works for them; it will

become part of their learning schema.

5. Encourage continued use and generalization of the strategy. Students are encouraged to try the strategy in other learning situations.

Personally I tried these strategies teaching at the faculty of foreign languages where students have enough time for practicing the language. After having worked for one academic year with first –year students I tried to find out how the most advanced students work. They answered the set of questions and I realized that they can learn anywhere, at any time, with anyone, and they can use their time creatively.

For example, they were asked: What would you do to complete this assignment?

Your task is to learn a list of 30 vocabulary items taken from the text you have just read.[2, 113]

Their answers were the following:

☐ I make up a sentence with each word

☐ I put a hint next to each word on the list

☐ I say words out loud while memorizing

☐ I record the words and listen to them

☐ I sing words out loud

☐ I write words on one side of the paper and the definition on the reverse side

☐ I use new words as much as possible.

So, if we encourage our students to use these strategies and show how to apply them, we can make the learning process easier and more effective and the students will really become independent learners.

References

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