



Language Learning Strategies

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A more practiced eye,
A more fluent tongue,
A more responsive mind.

A more receptive ear,
A more involved heart,

According to Rebecca L. Oxford in *Language Learning Strategies*, these are the qualities which will enable our students to become more proficient language learners. When it comes to language learning, creating a practiced eye, a receptive ear, an involved heart and a responsive mind cannot be the job of the teacher alone; to be a truly successful language learner, students must work towards becoming autonomous learners. Learning strategies, which are employed by the students but facilitated by teachers, are keys to greater autonomy and more meaningful learning. The following article will outline Oxford's theory on language learning strategies.

What are learning strategies? Learning strategies are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning. Learning strategies are especially important for language learning because they are tools for the active, self-directed involvement which is essential for communicative competence. In order to develop communicative competence, students must engage in realistic interaction using meaningful, contextualized language. It is the role of the teacher to facilitate such naturalistic interaction. When students are encouraged to take control of their own learning by using learner strategies, the teacher's role shifts from instructor, manager, parent, director and evaluator to facilitator, helper, guide, consultant and advisor, thus making learning and communication both the goal and result of classroom activities.

Learning strategies can loosely be divided into five main groups. Metacognitive strategies help learners to regulate their own cognition and to focus, plan and evaluate their progress as they move toward communicative competence. Affective strategies develop the self confidence and dedication needed for learners to involve themselves directly and actively in the language learning process. Social strategies provide increased interaction and more empathetic understanding which will be handy when communicating. Cognitive strategies such as analysing, and certain memory strategies like the keyword technique, are very useful for understanding and recalling

new information. And finally, compensation strategies aid learners in overcoming knowledge gaps so they communicate to the best of their ability.

Features of Language Learning Strategies

Language Learning Strategies:

- 1- Contribute to the main goal of communicative competence.
- 2- Allow learners to become more self-directed.
- 3- Expand the role of teachers.
- 4- Are problem oriented.
- 5- Are specific actions taken by the learner.
- 6- Involve many aspects of the learner, not just the cognitive.
- 7- Support learning, both directly and indirectly.
- 8- Are not always observable.
- 9- Are often conscious.
- 10- Can be taught.
- 11- Are flexible.
- 12- Are influenced by a variety of factors.

(Oxford: 1990, p. 9)

The System of Language Learning Strategies

There are six groups of strategies, three of which are direct and three of which are indirect. Direct and indirect strategies support each other, and each strategy group is capable of connecting with and assisting every other strategy group. Direct strategies involve working with the language itself in a variety of specific tasks and situations. Direct strategies include memory strategies for remembering and retrieving new information, cognitive strategies for understanding and producing the language, and compensation strategies for using the language despite knowledge gaps.

Indirect strategies are used for general management of learning, including metacognitive strategies for co-ordination of the learning process, affective strategies for regulating emotions, and social strategies for learning with others. The learner will eventually use both types of strategies as s/he gradually becomes more responsible for her/his learning process.