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VOLUME V

GOCE DELCEV UNIVERSITY - STIP
FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY

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**GOCE DELCEV UNIVERSITY – STIP
FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY**



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YEARBOOK
FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY**

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Оригинален научен труд
Original Scientific Paper

УПОТРЕБАТА НА СТРАТЕГИИ ЗА УЧЕЊЕ ЈАЗИК КАЈ УЧЕНИЦИ ВО ОСНОВНО И СРЕДНО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ

Катерина Сусинова¹, доц. д-р Нина Даскаловска²

Апстракт: Со години научниците и лингвистите се обидуваат да ги откријат главните причини и фактори кои влијаат на учењето на странски јазик. Тие си го поставуваат прашањето: „Зошто некои луѓе се поуспешни во учењето на странски јазик од други?“. Тие предлагаат многу идеи, сугестии и хипотези, од кои многу ја вклучуваат употребата на стратегиите за учење како важен фактор. Главната цел на оваа истражување е да се утврди дали успешните ученици во последната година од нивното основно и средно образование користат слични или различни стратегии при учењето на странски јазик. Резултатите покажуваат дека има големи сличности во употребата на стратегиите, но се забележуваат и одредени разлики помеѓу одредени групи ученици.

Клучни зборови: *стратегии за учење јазик, успешни ученици, возраст, пол, сличности, разлики.*

THE USE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES BY PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL EFL LEARNERS

Katerina Susinova³, Nina Daskalovska⁴

Abstract: For years, scientists and linguists have been trying to discover the main reasons and factors that influence foreign language acquisition. They have been asking themselves the question: “Why are some people better at learning a foreign language than others?”. They have come up with a lot of ideas, suggestions, and hypothesis, many of which include the use of language learning strategies as an important factor. The main goal of this study is to investigate whether successful EFL learners in the final year of their primary

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and secondary education use similar or different strategies when learning English as a foreign language. The results show that there are a lot of similarities in the use of learning strategies, but sometimes certain differences can be noticed with the use of some strategies by particular groups of students.

Key words: *language learning strategies, successful learners, age, gender, similarities, differences.*

1. Introduction

The list of studies conducted in the area of language learning strategies is long and there is an abundance of evidence and supporting examples. This field began to interest researchers in the 1960s and many of them started to deal with the issue of language learning strategies and how learners use them in order to study a second language. Some of the most famous researchers in this field are Rubin (1975), Tarone (1977), Chamot (1987), O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990), Stern (1992), and many, many others. They define strategies as thoughts, behaviors, actions, operations, activities, forms, procedures, attempts, ways, techniques, or devices which help the learner acquire the new language. The learner uses them in various ways in order to comprehend and store the new information, and later on to be able to use that information in a meaningful context or a communicative activity. As Oxford (1990) suggests, a person uses the learning strategies which suit him most in order to learn faster, easier and more effectively, as well as to be able to use the language in different situations. She classifies language learning strategies into two basic groups:

- Direct strategies: Memory, Cognitive and Compensation Strategies;
- Indirect strategies: Metacognitive, Affective, and Social Strategies.

Nowadays, in most contemporary schools the roles of teachers and students have changed considerably, and as Hismanoglu (2000) puts it in his paper “now greater emphasis is being put on learners and learning rather than on teachers and teaching. What becomes more and more important today is how learners process new information and what kinds of strategies they employ to understand, learn or remember information from and about the second language”. And here the main and probably most important teacher role in teaching a foreign language is to provide a variety of tasks which would match different learning styles. Teachers who are willing to teach their students how to learn and become autonomous learners must always be aware of their students' individual needs and behavior profiles. Teachers must know a lot about their students' interests, motivations, and learning styles.

This is the main goal of this study. The results from this study may



help teachers in Macedonia recognize their students' strong and weak points when learning English as a foreign language in order to help them become better learners of the language. Furthermore, teaching students how to use the 'successful language learner' strategies when learning a foreign language is also important. As suggested by many linguists, despite the number of different styles and strategies of learning a foreign language, any learner could learn a second language in a similar way employing the strategies of the 'successful language learner' if he/she has a really strong will to do this.

Many researchers have discussed the characteristics of the 'good' or 'successful language learner', some of whom are Wenden and Rubin (1987), Oxford (1990), Lightbown and Spada (1998). All of them agree that there are certain strategies which any learner could employ to become better when learning the foreign language. Wenden and Rubin (1987) emphasize 14 such characteristics, some of which are creativity, learning to make intelligent guesses, taking charge of the learning process and making opportunities for practicing and using the language in and out of the classroom. However, all these learners' characteristics are not independent from one another: they interact in complex ways; and how they will develop in a learner depends on many other factors, such as age, gender, social and personal traits.

It has always been difficult for researchers to discover the nature of these complex interactions, but it has also been a challenge to try to do this. That is why this study will try to explain at least a portion of the vast 'sea' of language learning strategies and how they are used by students learning English in the final year of their primary and secondary education in the Republic of Macedonia.

2. Research questions

This study aims to investigate whether successful EFL students in the final year of their primary and secondary education in the Republic of Macedonia use similar or different strategies when learning English as a foreign language at school. Are there really certain characteristics which make them 'successful language learners' or not?

The research questions addressed in the study are the following:

- (1) What language learning strategies are used by students who finish primary and secondary school in the Republic of Macedonia?
- (2) Are there any differences or similarities in the use of language learning strategies between male and female students?
- (3) Are there any differences or similarities in the use of language learning strategies between primary and secondary school students?



3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study were 30 primary school students aged 14, and 35 secondary school students aged 18, who were in the final year of their primary and secondary education respectively in the Republic of Macedonia. There were 15 male and 15 female primary school students, and 15 male and 20 female secondary school students. They all started learning English as a foreign language at the age of 10. This means that the primary school students had been learning English for five years, and the secondary school students for nine years. All of them were successful language learners, as reported by their teacher who is the first author of this paper.

3.2. Instruments

The questionnaire that was used in the study was the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) by Oxford (1990) which consists of 50 statements divided into 6 parts. The six parts of the survey are in concordance with the six direct and indirect learning strategies proposed by Oxford (1990), presented in the classification system above. These are the three direct strategies: memory (part A), cognitive (part B) and compensation strategies (part C) and the three indirect strategies: metacognitive (part D), affective (part E), and social strategies (part F).

3.3. Procedure

The participants were asked if they would like to take part in the study. After the aim of the study was explained, they all agreed to participate. They completed the questionnaire individually and the teacher only helped them if they did not understand a word or a phrase. Then the questionnaires were collected and analyzed part by part, statement by statement, for each student. The results are presented in Table 1.

4. Results

The results show that all the participants use all the strategies to a certain extent. However, certain differences could be noticed with the use of some of the strategies, especially between the two different age groups.

Table 1 presents the use of language learning strategies by the primary and secondary school students who took part in the study. The results show that most of the average values range between 3.0 and 4.0 (with a total average range from 1.0 to 5.0). Average results ranging from 1.0 to 2.4 show low use of strategies, from 2.5 to 3.4 show medium use and from 3.5 to 5.0 show frequent



use of strategies. This implies that most of the strategies are usually used by most of the students from both age groups (primary and secondary school) and both gender groups (male and female).

Strategies	Primary school students		Total	Secondary school students		Total
	Male	Female		Male	Female	
Part A Memory Strategies	3.2	2.9	3.0	3.2	3.4	3.3
Part B Cognitive Strategies	3.7	3.9	3.8	3.6	3.6	3.6
Part C Compensation Strategies	3.3	2.7	3.0	3.6	3.6	3.6
Part D Metacognitive Strategies	4.0	4.1	4.0	3.9	4.0	3.9
Part E Affective Strategies	3.3	3.0	3.1	3.2	3.5	3.3
Part F Social Strategies	4.0	3.8	3.9	3.5	3.8	3.7
Overall average	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.7	3.6

Table 1. Language learning strategies use by primary and secondary school students

5. Discussion

From the results of the survey we can see that there are a lot of similarities in the use of language learning strategies between the different groups, but sometimes certain differences can be noticed with the use of some strategies for particular groups of students.

First of all, the results show that both groups use a variety of strategies in their acquisition of English. The strategies which are mostly used by all students are the cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies (parts B, D, and F). This shows that when learning English at school students really try to use mental processes such as practicing a lot by repeating, analyzing, summarizing, combining, etc., and by doing this they successfully send and receive messages in the foreign language. In addition to cognitive strategies, they also use metacognitive strategies which include planning, centering,



arranging and evaluating their learning. Finally, all these strategies will be useless if they do not use social strategies that enable them to use the language in different situations. That is why many students employ strategies such as cooperating with others, asking questions for clarification or correction, and even empathizing with others.

Secondary school students use compensation strategies more than primary school students. Table 1 shows that the average value for secondary school students for these strategies is 3.6, whereas for primary school students they are 3.3 for male and 2.7 for female students. This means that secondary school students usually try to compensate for their lack of knowledge by guessing if they do not know something, by using synonyms for words or phrases that they cannot remember at a certain moment, and by adjusting or approximating the message they want to convey. This also shows that these students are better at overcoming their limitations when speaking or writing in English than primary school students.

However, this does not mean that the students do not use memory and affective strategies (parts A, and E), but the answers in these two parts vary, and the average values for all students are below 3.5, which means that students use these strategies occasionally. The results show that the memory strategies that students use are connecting words with images or pictures, making a mental picture of a situation where the word might be used, or sometimes physically acting out some new words. Among the less used strategies are using rhymes or flash cards to remember the new words, which might be due to the role of the teacher, rather than of the student.

As for the affective strategies, it appears that students may need more encouragement from teachers, parents, and even themselves in order to develop these strategies better and manage their emotions. They should be taught how to discuss their feelings with someone else, how to write a learning diary, how to take risks wisely, and how to lower their anxiety when learning the new language.

The second aim of this study was to see whether there are certain similarities or differences between students at the same age, but different gender. The results show that there are a lot of similarities between male and female students from both groups, and that most of the students use the same strategies. However, there are some differences. On the one hand, one can see that the average values for memory, compensation, and affective strategies for primary school students are at or below 3.0 for girls and between 3.0 and 3.5 for the boys. This means that boys tend to use these strategies more often than girls, although they also do not use them as much as they should. On the other hand, the average value for cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies is above 3.5 for both boys and girls, where girls have a slightly higher average value for cognitive and metacognitive strategies than boys, and boys have a



slightly higher average value for social strategies than girls. This leads to the conclusion that boys at this age are better at remembering more effectively, compensating for their missing knowledge and managing their emotions and learning with others. Girls, on the other hand, are better at using all their mental processes, organizing and evaluating their learning slightly more than boys.

Table 1 shows that there are not too many differences in the average values for secondary school male and female students. Actually, one may notice that the average values for the cognitive and the compensation strategies are the same for both male and female students (3.6), and the values for using the metacognitive strategies are also very close (3.9 for boys, and 4.0 for girls). This means that both boys and girls at this age usually use all their mental processes, compensate for their missing knowledge, and organize and evaluate their learning. However, there is a slight difference in the use of memory, affective and social strategies, where girls have a bit higher average value than boys. This means that girls at this age are better at remembering more effectively, managing their emotions, and learning with others.

The third aim of this study was to find out whether students of the same gender, but different age, use similar or different learning strategies when learning English at school. As Table 1 shows, the overall average value for using all the strategies for boys is very close, 3.6 for primary school boys, and 3.5 for secondary school boys. This means that most of the strategies are used equally by both groups, although there is a bigger gap between the average values for some of the strategies, such as the compensation and the social strategies. In relation to compensation strategies, secondary school students have higher average value of 3.6 than primary school boys whose average value for this section is 3.3. On the other hand, primary school boys have a higher average value of 4.0 for social strategies, whereas secondary school boys' average value is 3.5. This could lead to the conclusion that when boys are younger, they feel freer to learn with others. It could also mean that boys at this age need help from somebody or maybe they just feel more secure when they study with somebody else, someone who is at the same age. But, the older they get, the more independent they feel and they rely more on themselves than on other people. However, older boys try to compensate for their missing knowledge more than primary school boys. This means that younger students do not try to make a lot of guesses of unfamiliar words, and they also do not use a lot of gestures during a conversation in English. What could be implied here is that with time students learn how to become more intelligent guessers, they learn how and when to use specific mimes and gestures, and eventually overcome their limitations when speaking English.

The situation with the girls is somewhat different because there are bigger differences in the use of strategies. The results for metacognitive and social strategies show that both groups of females are very good at organizing and



evaluating their learning, and feel comfortable when learning with others, which is not so much the case with secondary school boys. However, the average values for the other four strategies are very different for primary and secondary school females, which means that at different age girls tend to use different strategies. According to Table 1, younger girls use only cognitive strategies slightly more than older girls. Memory, compensation and affective strategies are used by secondary school girls a lot more than by primary school girls. This implies that when girls are younger they tend to use mental processes a little bit more than when they are older, but this may mean that the older they get the more confident they become, and they rely on using other strategies as well, since they have already built up a certain amount of knowledge of the language. In addition, older girls remember more effectively, compensate for their missing knowledge, and manage their emotions better than younger girls.

6. Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the survey was conducted only in two schools, one primary and one secondary, and only in one town, so we cannot make a comparison with other schools from other towns. Moreover, the number of participants was not large enough to allow us to draw firm conclusions from the study. Finally, in order to meet the criteria of ‘a good language learner’ only high-achieving students were included, so we cannot compare them with lower-achieving students. Further studies are needed that would be conducted in other settings, meaning more schools from different towns in the country, which would include more participants of different proficiency levels.

7. Conclusion

This study shows that not all learners are alike and that every learner learns in a way that best suits him/her. However, sometimes students of different age and gender show some patterns of similarities or differences which may distinguish them as a group of learners. This may mean that learning strategies develop and change over time, because the learner grows up and transforms with age. The study also demonstrates that some learning strategies are used more than others, which leads to the conclusion that certain individuals are more inclined towards using and developing a group of strategies, such as cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies, rather than memory, compensation and affective strategies.

As mentioned before, teachers are very much responsible for the way in which students will nurture and develop the learning strategies. What is crucial here is ‘teaching learners how to learn’. As Brown (2007: 129) puts



it, “teachers should help students first of all to take charge of their language learning process – to become *autonomous* learners, and then to become *aware* of their styles, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses, and finally to take appropriate *action* on their second language learning challenges”. Teachers must help learners in the process of putting certain strategies into practice. It is the best way to help learners become good language learners. This relationship between teachers and students needs constant nourishing so that both teachers and students could get the most from it. Jeremy Harmer (2007: 107) asked: “Is teaching about the ‘transmission’ of knowledge from teacher to student, or is it about creating conditions in which, somehow, students learn for themselves?” Thus, the main role of the teacher is to help students learn and practice the use of learning strategies in order to become more independent learners. As Brown (2007: 147) states, “teachers need to recognize and understand a multiplicity of cognitive variables active in the second language learning process and to make appropriate judgments about individual learners, meeting them where they are and providing them with the best possible opportunities for learning”.

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