
**LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND STYLES OF
SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

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ABSTRACT

An increasing body of academic knowledge suggests that there is no single ideal strategy in second language learning and use, since there are various factors involved in learning i.e. needs, styles, context and types of learners. Present study explores Language Learning Strategies and their types, with particular focus on learner's styles and individual characteristics. Study also looks at application and effectiveness of strategies in second language learning and proficiency. Authors identified application of several strategies in language classroom in the context of Pakistan. Authors also revealed that there is no single best strategy in language learning. Language teachers need to figure out fitting strategy and adjusting it appropriately to learners' specific style, context and socio-cultural background.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, Strategies, Types and Styles, Proficiency, Fitting, Specific Style, Socio-Cultural Background

INTRODUCTION

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has been a promising discipline for past decades with a focus on teaching and learning language skills. Since the world has become a global village with a dire need for a language that could serve as a medium of global communication, and English proved to be so, therefore, is called *Lingua-franca* (Phillipson, 1992). Phillipson suggests that English has recently been of global significance as it dominates in education sector, publishing companies, the media, and the creative industries. It also serves the purpose of communicative efficiency in which function is more important than form (Phillipson, 2016). Likewise, Coleman (2007) highlights the progress of English as a language of higher education, cultural cooperation, multinational corporations, and the internationalization of professional and personal domain of activity. In universities, English as a second language (L2 hereafter) is being taught as a demanding subject. There has been a significant change within higher education in the past two decades that is the dramatic increase in the number of students learning English as a second language worldwide (Arkoudis & Tran, 2010).

English is an important language in the subcontinent since British rule. However, the significance of English has remained central even after Pakistan attained independence in 1947. Since then it has been deemed as the symbol of status and power in the country. It is a major source of official communication across the institutions of the government (Haque, 1982). Ability to speak and write English opens many career opportunities and can be seen as a stepping stone in life. Shamim (2008) argues that "English is

considered the vehicle for achieving modernization, scientific and technological development and economic advancement for self and the country; in short, for improving one's life chances". Author also stressed that English medium schools have grown in large numbers all over Pakistan, even in the small towns with parental satisfaction to get their children educated in English medium. English being lingua franca is widely used in civil and military bureaucracy, and the federal and provincial civil service examinations are conducted in English.

The status of English in Pakistan has always been superior compared to other local languages and a symbol of success in employment, business and politics. Rahman (2001) elaborates that English is the medium of instruction in 'elitist schools', private and expensive English medium schools, and indirectly state-run cadet colleges. This has been considered as an investment that guarantees success in the future career (Rahman, 1997, Tamim, 2014). These factors raise importance of English as compared to other local native languages. It is "marker of class, urbane upbringing affluent family background sophistication and gave psychological and social advantage to those who were fluent in it. Thus not only upper middle class but even feudal and tribal chiefs from illiterate families sought to educate their children in the elitist English schools" (Rahman, 1997). Conversely, English as a language of power could rather be used to empower and liberate the subjugated people of Pakistan.

In Pakistan, English has been taught as an important academic subject at schools, colleges and universities. Many English language learning and teaching programmes have been introduced with a focus on teaching language skills to enable learners achieve linguistic and communicative competence. Besides, there are many private teaching centres and institutes that teach English language skills. Various ELT methods applied with a focus on teaching second language skills had unfortunately, worked for some learners and not for all. However, there are some good language learners who made a difference and acquired proficiency in second language learning by employing certain strategies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Previous research suggests there is a main role of learning strategies in second language learning, in the domain of SLA research, there has been some highlights of the significance of language learning strategies (LLSs). There arose a concept of learner's strategies, which was vague previously but was introduced in late 70s when (Rubin, 1975) and (Stern, 1975) introduced the idea of second language literature, with the relevant studies followed later on (Naiman, 1978). According to Oxford (2011), in the field of English language teaching, while understanding the notion of how languages are learned, there arose the concept of language learning strategies. The most

popular area in the domain of language learning initially started at 1960 (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

The studies' focus was on the identification of various language learning styles and strategies adopted and employed by second language learners. There has been a great deal of research in this area with a focus on these two important variables influencing language learning: styles, i.e., the general approaches to learning a language; and strategies, the specific behaviours or thoughts learners use to enhance their language learning. Hence this domain has emerged since 1980s as a new trend in second and foreign language education with a lot of research (Oxford & Crookall, 1989). The focus moved from language teaching methods to learner's strategies in second language learning. In recent years, language teaching shifted away from the quest for a successful teaching method to the focus on how teachers and learners can achieve their desired objective- that of learning and acquiring linguistic competency. Besides, a great deal of controversy was generated by various research studies on why some students are more successful language learners than others (e.g. Cohen, 1998, 2011; Griffiths, 2003, 2008, 2013; Macaro, 2006; Naiman, 1978; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 2011; Rubin, 1975). Thus, various studies found that the language learning strategies work as contributing factor in successful language learning. Therefore, researcher's interest developed on it as a new discipline, focusing on learner's approach to learning, both inside and outside classroom, various kinds of strategies applied by them, and the cognitive development they go through while learning and using language.

In particular, to second language learning, strategies have been defined as definite steps and techniques applied by learners, in order to solve language learning problems or the study skills (Cohen, 1998). According to Oxford and Crookall (1989), learning strategies are specific steps or behaviour taken often consciously by learners to enhance acquisition, storage, retention, recall and the use of new information. The shift of focus from teachers to learners, the teaching techniques to the learner's strategies a fundamental move from teacher-centred to the learner-centred approach in second language learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

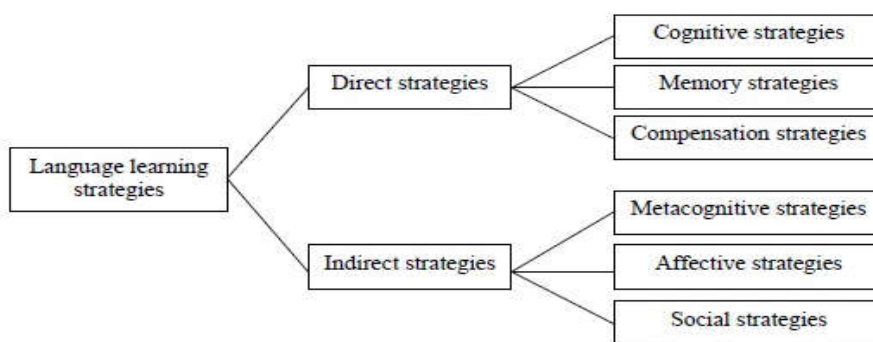
Types and Classification of Strategies: As mentioned by Oxford (1990) LLSs are most important for language learners, both in theory and practice, therefore, research studies into learner's use of specific steps taken to solve language learning problems have resulted in the identification and then classification of various strategies into several categories according to different criteria like, various learning behaviours and approaches have been labeled accordingly by different researchers. This demonstrates the variations amongst strategies are due to variations in their nature and approach, such as

metacognitive learning strategy, in which learner plans the organization of his learning, *cognitive* learning strategy, where learner uses mnemonic devices to learn language through vocabulary, *performance* strategy applies the technique of rehearsing what one is supposed to say and the *affective* strategy in which learner strengthens his self-confidence by talking to oneself (Cohen, 1998).

Classification of Strategies: In the 80s, there was a shift of focus from the identification of the strategies to the classification of them based on various reasons. Several researchers proposed various types and classifications of strategies, along with the factors influencing the selection and use of them, and the relation between the strategy use and language learning achievement (Zare, 2012). According to Rubin (1981) strategies can be classified into direct and indirect types. The classification of strategies continued, and in 1985 these were further classified into cognitive, metacognitive and social categories. Learning strategies employed by language learners have been identified and further categorized by several professional researchers in the domain of SLA (for example, Oxford, 1990; Bialystok, 1981; O'Malley, *et.al.*, 1985; Willing, 1988; Stern, 1992; Ellis, 1994). These studies have been able to identify, classify as well as assist in developing an instructional framework.

Based on previous research studies on learning strategies, Oxford (1990) built up a new learning strategy organization, which classifies all the learning strategies into two main types: direct and indirect strategies, which were further sub-divided into direct strategies; memory, cognitive and compensation strategies, and indirect strategies classified into metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The most consistent framework-model of LLS has been proposed by Rebecca Oxford. These are the six broad strategies which comprise nineteen secondary strategies, with a further categorization of 62 specific strategies, presenting a thorough strategy inventory for language learning (Oxford, 1990).

FIGURE-1
TAXONOMY FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY (OXFORD, 1990)



Oxford's Learning Strategies: Classification of strategies by Oxford (1990) has been most influential and most inclusive taxonomy of strategies ever provided. She introduced six major learning strategies to language learners, categorized them further into two different groups; direct and indirect. Her major learning strategies taxonomy presents a reliable classification of learning strategies, besides O'Malley & Chamot (1985) and other researchers have also offered alternative taxonomies. The highly recommended framework of language learning strategies, according to Oxford (1990), is what every teacher should know.

The Cognitive Strategies: The Cognitive strategies are the direct approaches towards language learning. These strategies enable language learners to manipulate the language material through various approaches, like; reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, outlining, synthesizing, re-organizing information to develop stronger plans. These strategies increase L2 proficiency through mentioned approaches towards learning.

Metacognitive Strategies: Metacognitive strategies involve learner's identifying his/her own learning style preferences and needs, planning for tasks of L2, gathering and organizing the materials, arranging, monitoring errors and evaluation of the task achievement and strategy success. The learning strategies are employed to manage the overall learning process. According to Purpura (1997), metacognitive strategies put a significant, positive and direct effect on cognitive strategy use, and have an exclusive role to play over cognitive strategy. These strategies according to many researchers have proved to be strong predictors of second language proficiency (Oxford, 2003).

Metacognitive involve memory-related strategies and not necessarily involve understanding in depth. It helps in learning and retrieving information in an orderly way, is useful at earlier stage of learning, since they are used for memorizing vocabulary and structures, therefore, in learner's test performance in grammar and vocabulary the use of memory strategies have a relatively negative impact (Purpura, 1997).

Compensatory Strategies: Compensatory strategies involve guessing from the context in listening and reading, using synonyms and filling in the words missing to help in speaking and writing. The learner attempts to fill in the gaps, missing knowledge through guessing and filling up tasks (Cohen, 1998). The strategies used in compensatory approach are known as a form of communication strategies, since they are more of language use and not that of language learning strategies. The compensation strategies are for language use though, yet, they can aid in language learning as well (Oxford, 2003).

Affective Strategies: Affective strategies involve the identification of learner's mood and anxiety level on his own, focusing on reward for good performance, talking about feelings, positive self-talk and using deep

breathing. Social strategies involve communicating with a native speaker and exploring cultural as well as social norms, these strategies help learner work with the communicative partner in understanding both the target language and its culture. These strategies are significantly related to L2 proficiency (Oxford, 2003:15).

**CLASSIFICATION MODEL OF
LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES SINCE 1970s**

Language Learning Strategies Classification	Author (year)
Active Task Approach	(Naiman, 1978)
Realization of Language as a System	
Realization of Language as a Means of Communication and Interaction	
Management of Affective Demands	
Monitoring L2 Performance	
Strategies that Directly Affect Language Learning	(Rubin, 1981)
Classification/ Verification	
Monitoring	
Memorization	
Guessing/ Inductive Inferencing	
Deductive Reasoning	
Practice	(Rubin, 1981)
Processes that Contribute Indirectly to Language Learning.	
Creates Opportunities for Practice	
Production Tricks	Brown & Palinscar (1982)
Cognitive Strategies	
Metacognitive Strategies	O'Malley <i>et.al.</i> , (1985)
Social-Affective Strategies	
Direct Strategies	(Oxford, 1990)
Memory Strategies	
Cognitive Strategies	
Compensation Strategies	
Indirect Strategies	
Metacognitive Strategies	
Affective Strategies	
Social Strategies	

Moreover, these are the major classifications that were done by researchers since 1970s, yet, there are several other proposed classifications of LLS by researchers and educationists. Liu (2010) lists some major classifications based on learner's various types of learning strategies available to them.

FACTORS AFFECTING STRATEGIES USE

The research studies undertaken in this area presented some major and practical findings which can be useful for teachers in understanding the choice of learner's learning strategies for successful learning as well as the factors which affect these choices and how to cope with them. Educators in this field need to discover specific ways to assist the low proficiency level language learners to learn second language efficiently and successfully by adopting the high proficiency level learning strategies, that could suit each individual language learner, since, no single teaching method could be suitable and applicable for all language learners. Hence, it is the choice of learning strategies that both a learner as well as teacher could make in order to achieve the target.

According to various studies, there are certain factors that affect the choice and use of LLSs, such as, motivation, age, gender, learning beliefs, intelligence and aptitude. (Oxford & Crookall, 1989) present some influential factors in the choice of learning strategies: age, sex, attitudes, motivation, language learning goals, motivational orientation, learning style, aptitude, career-orientation, national origin, language teaching method, task requirement, language being learned, duration and degree of awareness. Each of the factors mentioned is essential in terms of being capable and significant in choosing appropriate strategies.

The Motivation Factor: Motivation is a major and promising factor as far as the choice of strategies is concerned. Research has proved that high motivated learners tend to use more strategies than less motivated ones. According to Gardner (1985), motivated learners are active in learning and therefore, achieve higher proficiency level. Learners with an aim, target and career seeking are self-motivated. The choice of career has always been a major effect on reported language learning strategy use (Oxford & Crookall, 1989). Along with motivation, factors like gender, age and experience have obvious influences on the choice of language learning strategies too.

Learner's Belief: Learner's belief is yet another factor that influences the strategies that learner's choose to learn new material, usually based on previous learning experience. Intelligence, according to research findings is both a strong as well as a less important factor, it is little complex because it cannot be said for sure, that a learner with strong academic performance is a successful language learner too. Aptitude means learner's potential for achievement. An aptitude test is devised to perceive of learner's future achievements, still it is not sure that successful language learners are necessarily strong in all components of aptitude, because every learner has a different capability, such as good memory, ability to figure out, guessing etc. Therefore, learners with different aptitude choose different learning strategies.

Gender: Gender, as a factor for choosing learning strategy has been of major focus in research studies Oxford (1989, 1990, and 2011). It is not the matter of using any particular strategy, since sometimes male and sometimes

female learners make proper use of any particular strategy. However, it is a research based theory that female learners employ effectively more learning strategies than male learners (Ehrman, 1990).

Cultural Background: Another very significant variable affecting strategy choice and use is cultural background. Different types of learners are defined by cultural background; they seem prone to use specific strategies in a particular cultural context and background. They assume some strategies to be useful and effective and use them at different frequency levels. Some learners in a particular culture prefer rote-memorization, analytical approach and rule-based strategies, others seem to be less willing in trying out new learning techniques. Therefore, it is a research proved statement that learner's cultural background does influence the choice and use of strategies by learners.

APPLICATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM IN THE CONTEXT OF PAKISTAN

Rubin (1981) argues that learning strategies are not the property of highly competent individual learners, but could be learned and adopted by less successful learners too in order to achieve second language proficiency. In a language learning class, it can easily be observed that some learners are most competent in learning second language, while others would find it difficult to learn. Learners who are competent, active and efficient tend to use a variety of strategies and therefore are self-regulated, autonomous and self-guided. The learner's choice and use of strategies is quite natural with them, but the challenge in creating more effective language learners and training them for adopting learning strategies is, thus, for the language teacher. The task of the teacher becomes quite difficult because along with teaching language skills, he also needs to motivate, encourage and assist learners by providing appropriate strategy training according to learner's distinctive styles and needs.

THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The context of current study is University of Sindh. It is a public research university in Jamshoro, Sindh. It is one of the oldest universities in Pakistan, founded in 1947 in Karachi later on was shifted to Hyderabad and started working as a full-fledged teaching university, initially it started as a teaching institution in the pursuit of its basic mission to impart knowledge. Later on, with a rapid departmentalized growth of the university's organizational structure, a better equipped campus was established in Jamshoro in 1955 and was named after Allama Imdad Ali Kazi, former Vice-Chancellor of the university as a tribute to the great scholar and visionary.

The university consists of faculties of natural sciences, social sciences, arts, education, Islamic studies, commerce and business administration. The institutes and academic faculties of the university provide teaching leading to

undergraduate bachelors, bachelor's honours and post graduate master's degrees. University is also running MPhil and PhD programmes.

The University runs various campuses in other cities of Sindh. The university is also a member of the Association of Commonwealth Universities of the United Kingdom.

In the context of Pakistan, if we see, there are various factors causing difficulty in both the language learning and teaching. In case of University of Sindh, Jamshoro (UoSJ), there are many issues which are quite similar in overall Pakistan. Students, who get admission in UoSJ, join after completing their higher secondary education. Their ages range from 18 to 23 years, and their cultural, educational and social background is also diverse. Most of the students come from low educational and rural background, with little exposure to learning a second language, only a few come from good social background with good educational orientation.

Majority of students from these diverse social, cultural and educational backgrounds make second language learning as well as teaching a challenging and a fascinating job. Not just learners, but the teachers who teach English as a compulsory subject are not themselves trained in English language teaching. The material used is also quite poor and could not be used successfully as a language teaching and learning stuff. The large number of students in a class are also a problem and the time-span also hinders the process of language learning and teaching. However, some learners could still make the learning achievable. It is an exception mainly due to the proper choice and use of strategies.

Some learners tend to prefer metacognitively oriented learning strategies, which are analytical and memory-based- a far more structured and rule-oriented approach of learning. It is observed that learner's are more oriented towards the use of rote-learning and memory-based strategies and are less willing to try out new approaches at university level. In our context, majority of learners have this approach, they learn to memorize and not to understand, they memorize to pass the exam and not necessarily to acquire proficiency, which though they aim to achieve. However, such approach could be used only at initial stage and not throughout the learning stages for a proper learning step wise, otherwise it may have a negative impact on learning.

While, some learners tend to use the cognitive strategies, that is a direct approach to language learning. Learners use various methods, such as reasoning, note-taking, analysis, summarizing, outlining and re-organizing the information in order to develop learning plans. In the context of Pakistan, if learners are taught to learn how to plan their learning according to their personal style, then learning a second language becomes easier task for them. It has been strongly suggested by research that learners should use it as a direct strategy to learning, in order to be self-directed and teacher's role has to be minimized in the classroom. Cognitive strategies, in the context of Pakistan will surely help learners in developing not just language proficiency

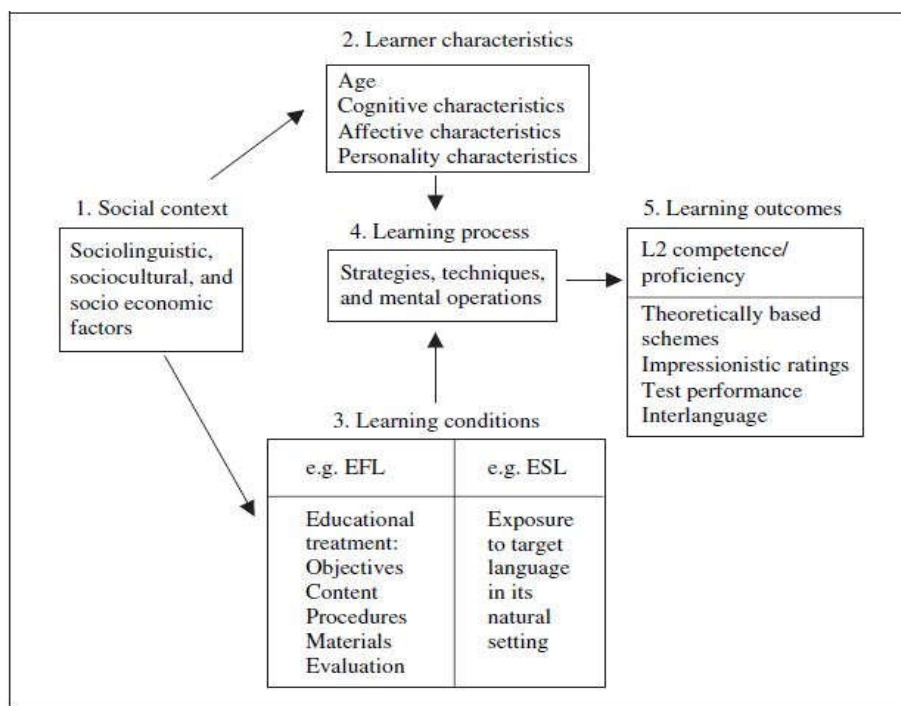
but learning skills in further tasks. Teachers should focus more on learner's cognitive development rather than their memorizing of targeted material and syllabus.

In the context of Pakistan, where we have crowded classes, with a number of students from diverse socio-cultural and educational backgrounds with distinctive individualistic features, a variety of strategies could be applied, taught and inculcated to language learners. Not all of the learners respond in the similar way to all of the strategies, therefore, a teacher could be helpful to them in adopting a relevant approach.

The compensatory strategies are also suggestive for both the language learners and teachers to be adopted in classroom tasks, since they involve making guesses from the context in listening and reading. The tasks work for the learners using language through filling in the gaps by synonyms, matching words in both speaking and writing. Such strategies enhance learner's comprehension skills with language proficiency. The suggestive strategy in the context of Pakistan is not any specific one but the choice and applicability depends on the style of learners and major factors involved in learning, such as learner's age, gender, social and educational background, learning objectives and learning needs. If the teacher focuses on these factors and choose the learning strategies accordingly then learning will be efficient and teaching successful.

In a co-educational environment, some female learners feel conscious and nervous in learning and participating in the classroom tasks and activities, while some male learners seem to be dominating the class. In such situation, teacher should adopt the socio-affective approach by letting the learners interact in groups and participate effectively in activities within mixed groups of male and female learners from diverse backgrounds. In group activities, the learner's from low language proficiency can be helped by peer guidance and interactive support. The task-based, group activity based teaching and learning will give all the learners an equal learning chance, will enhance confidence and participation skills and will minimize teacher's role from being authoritative to a facilitator. Moreover, the selection and use of strategies by an expert teacher can no doubt make a big difference in learning L2 successfully and enhance language skills and motivation level of learners. Both direct and indirect language learning strategies can be used in the context of Pakistan where there is great diversity found in learners, hence, each of the strategy would be applicable to different learners with various styles and factors of learning.

FIGURE-2
FRAMEWORK FOR EXAMINATION OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING



The above image shows the process of second language learning and the test of second language learning acquisition. It demonstrates that learner's characteristics along with the social context and learning conditions working with learning processes affect the learning outcomes. Hence, there are various factors at work while language learning and teaching takes place.

CONCLUSION

The present study discussed the issue of language learning strategies and styles of second language learners and their role and applicability in learning a second language. It focused on the major aspects of the research into the target area. The research into language learning strategy and styles has been an active and useful instrument designed by researchers to guide both learners and teachers in achieving second language proficiency.

The current study reviewed extant literature in this area of language learning strategies and styles, types and language proficiency. The present work focused on how the study of learner's strategy use can be useful for language teachers, especially in the context of Pakistan.

LLS is an actively researched upon area and is as vital as language itself. LLS is a multifaceted and versatile phenomenon and hence, is difficult to account for from a single perspective, but from a general perspective and

by surveying diverse studies. Based on the diversity of LLS contexts and a range of variables involved, any single study would seem unlikely to bring successful language learning and teaching with a focus on strategies involved. Therefore, it is suggested that language teachers should not, as had been traditionally the approach, rely on any single ELT method or LL strategy for language teaching. Rather should have an approach in which the best from a range of strategies should be applied in the different context and learner's diverse styles. Similarly, Cohen (2011) stressed upon the significant role of using language learning strategies that is to enhance learning, to perform specified tasks, to solve specific problems, to make learning an easier, faster and more enjoyable task in order to compensate for a deficit in language proficiency.

The conclusions of various studies reviewed suggest that it is important for language instructors to attempt for developing learner's own metacognition which will further facilitate them in selecting the most appropriate strategies for the task given (Chamot, 2004). Similarly, it is also important for the language learners to learn particular strategy items which have been identified by research as effective and required to accomplish the tasks in L2 learning. Learning preferences, strategy choice and proper use assist learners in achieving the proficiency. This is where both the learning style and strategies come in and leads to successful language learning. Learning styles are fixed within learner's personality, as they are known as innate behaviour of learners. Therefore, the choice and training of learning strategies should be accordingly dealt.

Besides, research also shows that learning strategies can be taught and trained to assist the learner in enhancing the level of learner's self-efficacy and achieving goals. With a teacher's encouragement and support, learners can best use learning strategies; otherwise will reflect their basic and typical learning styles. Hence, a teacher can actively help learners to try out some strategies effectively that are outside of their basic style preferences. All this can possibly happen through strategy identification and instruction by a trained teacher. The task of teacher involves focus on diverse variables affecting strategy choice and use; age, gender, individual differences, motivation, cultural-background and some others. However, research shows that learner's collective styles and preferences are strongly suggested to be used in the classroom (Oxford, 2003). The objective of such research studies and practices is basically to encourage and accelerate learner's learning process so that the efforts of learners and instructors could be effective and useful in L2 learning and use. There is yet a big room for further research in the area of strategy choice, use, instruction and proficiency gain.

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