



Do Teachers Facilitate the Strategies their Pupils Need?

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Abstract: *Learner strategies play an important and unique role in second or foreign language teaching and learning. Knowledge of effective steps and techniques helps pupils reach better study results and become more independent and autonomous learners. The role of a teacher shifts and changes in autonomous learning; rather than a teacher, he or she is a consultant, helper and facilitator of learner strategies. The study brings an insight into strategic teaching of 13 Czech teachers who taught 202 pupils with completed primary education and who also focused on the strategies teachers facilitate, but their pupils do not apply. The study aims at a model of strategy facilitation which helps teachers implement strategy-based teaching into a foreign language curriculum. The article also aspires to address teachers of different subjects as giving advice on learning to learn plays a vital role in teaching. Furthermore, learner strategies are an important part of competence to learn, which helps teachers to understand why some learners are more successful than their peers.*

Keywords: learner strategies, teacher as facilitator, learner strategies, model of strategy instruction, strategy-oriented training, creativity

Theoretical background

Even if the term *learner strategies* is not new, it is not easy to find a generally accepted definition of the concept. It has been four decades since Joan Rubin (1975) defined successful learners and suggested their characteristics. Since then scholars have been contributing to the issue and elaborating it.

The first studies had an explanatory character with the aim of outlining the learner strategies good learners applied (Rubin, 1975; Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern & Todesco, 1978). The results were mostly based on retrospective interviews and indicated that good learners are active,

responsible learners who study systematically and are able to monitor their progress. In the 80's and 90's researchers started to investigate how and why learners choose particular learner strategies, to which extent learners employ them and whether they use the strategies consciously or unconsciously. During these years learner strategies were defined as tactics, steps, techniques, and tricks a learner applies to reach a goal (Cohen & Macaro, 2007). On top of that, first classifications of learner strategies were introduced. They were elaborated according to the function of the strategies, i.e. metacognitive, social, affective and cognitive (Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Chamot & O'Malley, 1999; Cohen, 2000).

Chamot and O'Malley differentiated metacognitive strategies that control and monitor learning and also evaluate learning exercises. Cognitive strategies in their classification are used for manoeuvring or transforming the material to be learned, and social-affective strategies engage the learner in communicative situations (Chamot & O'Malley, 1990).

In 1990 Oxford introduced her classification of learner strategies according to their function. This taxonomy is considered to be more sophisticated and comprehensible and "more systematic in linking individual strategies as well as strategy groups" (1990, p. 14), furthermore, less technical terminology is applied and therefore the taxonomy was principal for this research.

Basically, R. Oxford distinguishes two major classes of learner strategies: direct and indirect. Direct strategies "deal with the new language... in a variety of specific tasks and situations." The class comprises cognitive, memory and compensation strategies. To introduce the groups of the above mentioned direct strategies we have to examine their function in the target language. Cognitive strategies are the most important in terms of language learning and they fall into four sets: practising, receiving and sending messages, analysing and reasoning and creating structure for input and output (Oxford, 1990:43).

Memory strategies are responsible for retrieving and storing new information, cognitive strategies help students produce and understand new language Memory strategies are considered valuable and useful tools for remembering the language. To be more specific, they are important for vocabulary learning, storing and retrieving verbal material needed for communication (Oxford, 1990), while compensation strategies help students to "compensate" what they do not know, meaning use the language even if they have to bridge a gap in their knowledge. Indirect strategies, on the other hand, do not deal with the language but rather support learning "through focusing, planning, evaluating, seeking opportunities, controlling anxiety, increasing cooperation and empathy" (Oxford, 1990:151). The groups of indirect strategies therefore are metacognitive, social and affective. Metacognitive strategies are the ones that should be offered to young learners first as planning, centring and evaluating one's learning is of great importance and gives grounding for effective life-long learning (Hrozková, 2013).

Language strategies can also be classified in language skill areas, i.e. listening, reading, speaking and writing. Some authors also added skill-related strategies as they, in their opinion, cut-across-all four language skills. These are translation and vocabulary learning (Cohen, Oxford & Chi,

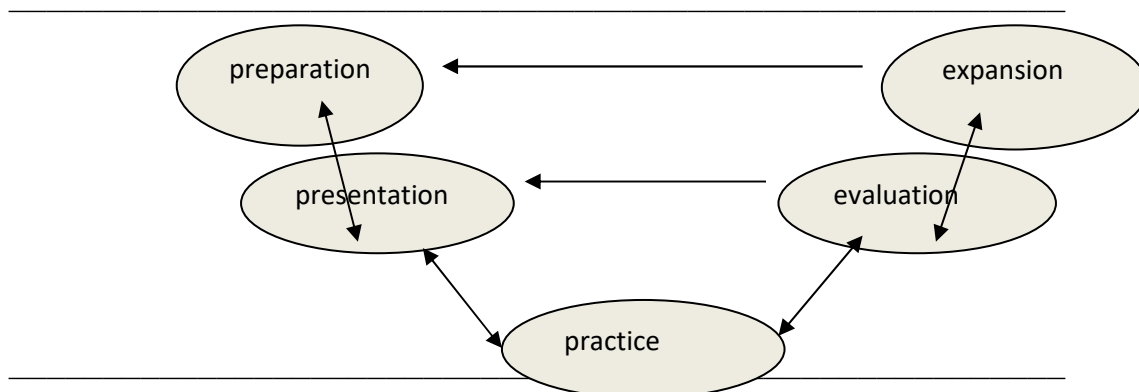
2002; Cohen & Oxford, 2002). Lexis is important for learners as some might need the words for reading or writing a text successfully, some to understand them when they hear them. Translation is a typical learner strategy not only in beginner classes. Some learners decode almost every word they need whereas others just certain words or chunks.

No matter which taxonomy is taken into consideration, learner strategies are teachable and transferable. This is closely related to a new role teachers have in learner-centred classes. They are rather facilitators, helpers who create a positive atmosphere in their classes, provide opportunities for their pupils so that they are able to understand their own learning process, and change their teaching style in order to transfer the responsibility and foster learner autonomy. One of a teacher's skills is, without a doubt, the ability to teach how to learn, in other words how to approach different tasks, which steps pupils should take to fulfil the task, how to organise and order the steps, which strategies "work" for them and which do not. In other words, to offer and promote those strategies learners do not apply to a desirable extent, or, on the other hand, to offer strategies high achievers apply to less successful ones in order to enhance their performance and help them to become more efficient and independent learners.

The first attempts to teach learner strategies were meant to be in special courses focused on strategy instruction, i.e. explicit information is provided to learners on strategy use aimed at reaching their own goals as well as boosting their performance. Later scholars arrived at the conclusion that it would be better to implement strategy based instruction directly into a foreign language curriculum (Oxford, 1990; Cohen, 1998; Chamot, 1999), which corresponds with the shift in perceiving learners as "practitioners of language not just targets of the teaching" (Allwright & Hanks, 2009:2). That is, in the authors' opinion, more positive view as the learners are considered to manage their learning and develop as responsible and autonomous language learners (Allwright & Hanks, 2009). Likewise, scholars emphasize the importance of positive and cooperative atmosphere in which the strategy tuition should be conducted. There are several models of strategy teaching a teacher can follow, however, they all have several aspects in common. These are strategy preparation phase, material preparation, strategy instruction and practice, and personalization of strategies (Oxford, 1990; Chamot, 1999, Cohen & Weaver, 2006; Cohen, 2011). Nevertheless, the CALLA¹ metacognitive model of strategy instruction presented by A. Chamot in 1999 seems to be easily incorporated in any foreign language lessons. The core of the model is formed by four metacognitive processes: planning, monitoring, problem solving, and evaluation, and consist of five stages.

¹ The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach.

Figure 1. Model CALLA



Source: A. Chamot, 1999:45

During the first stage teachers elicit the strategies their pupils know and already use. Then, in the presentation phase, the teacher presents a new strategy, explains how it works, names it explicitly, uses similar tasks to illustrate mental processes related to the strategy use and models them on similar tasks. It is important for students to understand why and how they should apply a particular strategy to a particular task, and to show them the effectiveness of the strategy applied. So, the role of the teacher is to scaffold strategy use to the maximum extent possible, and to give students feedback on “being strategic” (Chamot, 1999:47).

Practice is the mother of wisdom not only in strategy based teaching. During practice stage teacher are suppose to create enough opportunities for their pupils or students to practise learner strategies, to incorporate them into their regular school work as well home preparation. To begin successfully, the teacher carefully selects materials which should be challenging for the students, and help them to overcome possible problems through scaffolding instructions. The practice aims at boosting students’ independence so that they are able to apply strategies to various different tasks effectively. Evaluation and assessment are both important parts of teaching and learning, though strategy instruction is not excluded. During this stage students reflect on their own learning: they evaluate the strategies they employ and their effectiveness for a particular task. According to Chamot (1999) they can use various techniques, such as, class discussions or strategy checklists and portfolios or learning logs. Learning a new subject matter or item is not always easy, rather than students are challenged by various obstacles on their way to the target. Therefore, the last phase of the model is aimed at expansion, i.e. process focused on transferring and “applying learner strategies to different content subjects” and on learning outside of school (Chamot, 1999:139). Language teacher teach the language itself but, on the other hand, they are responsible for many other areas and themes. They provide culture information, they use crosscurricular links, and some even apply CLIL². Therefore, it is natural for students that they compare the strategies the employ within the foreign language lessons they have but they do the same even in other subjects

² Content and Language Integrated Learning

they study, which means they contrast the strategies they use across their curricula.

Research

Participants

The participants of the research were 13 teachers of 202 pupils in the Czech Republic and some of them taught more than one class. The research itself was conducted in 9 schools in the South Moravian region in several steps. The first part was aimed at the primary school pupils and outlined their repertoire of learner strategies (Hrozková, 2015). The second part in question, focused on the learner strategies the teacher promoted and facilitated. To compare the data obtained the teachers were asked to complete the same field-tested questionnaire³ administered to their pupils with slightly reformulated items so that they addressed the teachers' way of facilitating learner strategies. In both questionnaires the respondents were given an opportunity to answer 16 open-ended questions, explain their points of view, and be more explicit, i.e. the learners gave answers about their use of learner strategies while the teachers gave answers on how they, in their opinion, usually promote learner strategies in the same situations or contexts, e.g.: *What do you do to (help your pupils understand sounds?)*. Their answers were compared to their learners' ones and helped us to see the facilitation from the perspective of both, the teachers and their pupils.

To learn more about the teacher participants the questionnaire was supplemented with a few items in order to discover whether they were familiar with the concept of learner strategies, to collect information about their qualifications, gender and the length of their teaching experience. Two participants were male and 11 were female. 5 out of 13 were qualified English teachers and 8 were not, which reflects the situation in the Czech Republic. The following table shows the length of teaching experience of the participants:

Table 1. The length of teaching experience

0–3 years	4–7 years	8–12 years	12–15 years	15–20 years	more than 20 years
2 (15, 3%)	4 (30, 7%)	2 (15, 3%)	2 (15, 3 %)	2 (15, 3%)	1 (7, 6%)

The participants claimed that they had learnt about the concept of learner strategies mostly during their university studies or in seminars for in-service teachers, meaning they knew that learner strategies are related to learning styles but, regrettably, their knowledge was quite limited and related to R. Oxford taxonomy, i. e. classes and individual groups of strategies, the teachers did not know much about the ways of implementing learner strategy instructions into the curriculum. Thus, they

³ The questionnaire was originally created by Cohen and Weaver (2006), for young learners and for the purposes of this part of the research was the items changed to address the teacher participants. Both questionnaires were administrated in Czech.

claimed they would appreciate more information on the topic itself including information how to put the strategies into practice and, at the same time, how to create opportunities for their pupils so that they could start using more efficient learner strategies and become more autonomous learners.

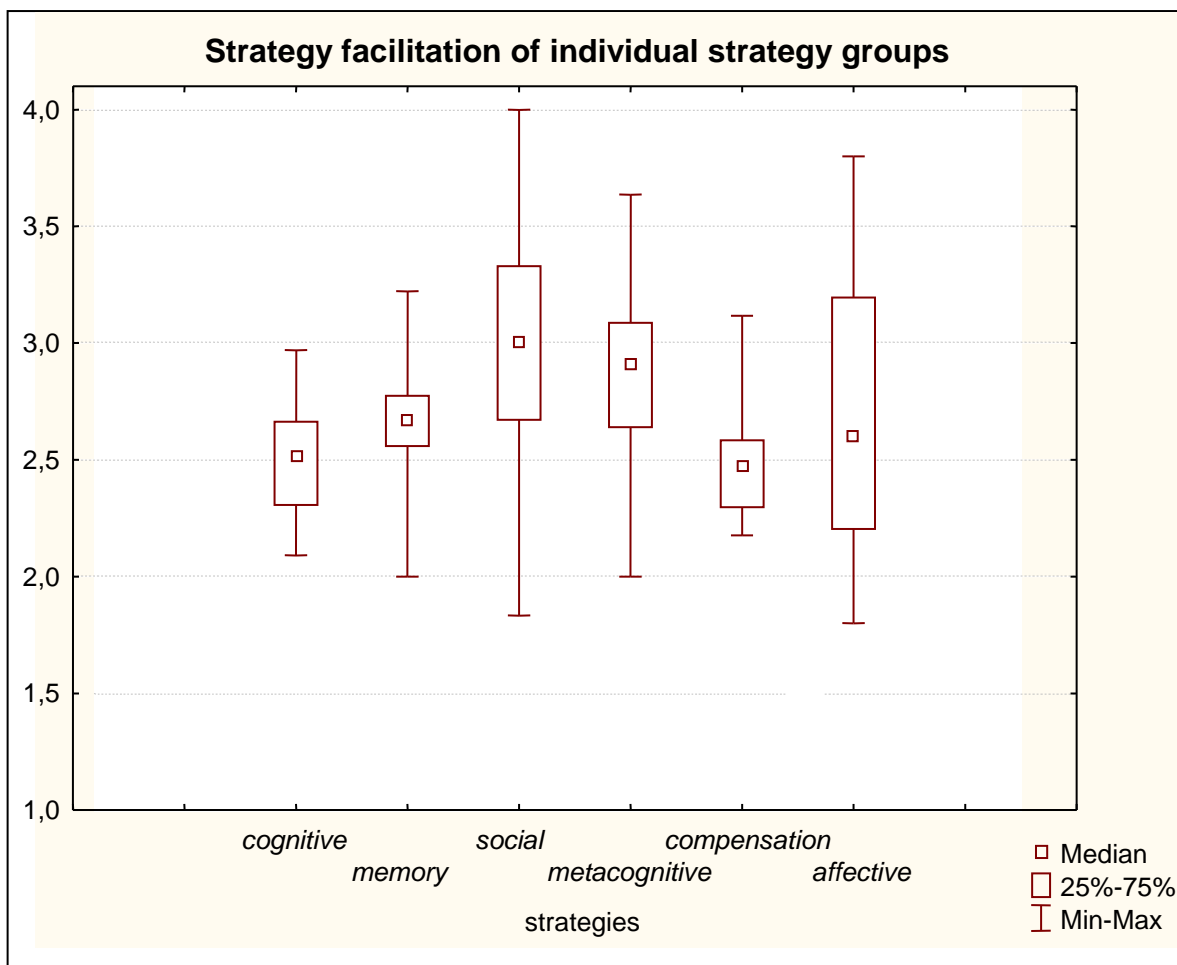
Findings and discussion

As mentioned above, the main research instrument was a field-tested questionnaire originally investigating the repertoire of strategies young learners employ. The fact that for teachers we used the same instrument, only slightly stylistically modified, allowed us to compare the findings and draw interesting conclusions.

In parallel with other research (Coyle & Valcarcel, 2002; Lan, 2005; Hrozková, 2013) the results showed that teacher participants implemented strategy instruction into the English curriculum to quite a limited extent and even if they provided some advice on learner strategies, their facilitation of them was one-sided and partial rather than complex and planned properly.

The teachers supported indirect strategies more than direct ones. This fact corresponds with the results we gained in learner questionnaires. Pupils used indirect strategies more than direct ones. The following graph shows results for the individual groups of strategies encouraged by the teachers.

We can see that the teachers facilitated all the strategies from R. Oxford's taxonomy. The following sequence of strategies describes the order in which the teachers strengthened them: social strategies, metacognitive, memory-related, affective strategies, then cognitive and compensation strategies. As mentioned above, the teachers taught more than one class and therefore the results for this part of the research were compared and contrasted with the results we gained through the surveys done with young learners, their pupils.



The following table shows the number of pupils the teachers taught and the median for the strategy classes (direct and indirect) and also the groups of learner strategies.

Table 2. Median for strategy facilitation of individual teachers

Teacher	N pupil	direct	indirect	cognitive	memory	social	meta-cognitive	compensation	affective
1	18	2.51	2.68	2.52	2.56	2.67	2.64	2.47	2.80
2	19	2.31	2.68	2.09	3.00	2.67	2.91	2.35	2.20
3	8	2.91	3.23	2.94	3.22	3.00	3.09	2.71	3.80
4	13	2.32	2.41	2.30	2.67	3.00	2.27	2.18	2.00
5	15	2.61	2.73	2.58	2.78	3.33	2.82	2.59	1.80
6	8	2.39	3.05	2.27	2.56	4.00	2.73	2.53	2.60
7	11	2.66	3.18	2.45	2.56	3.50	3.00	3.12	3.20
8	17	2.14	2.27	2.09	2.00	2.67	2.00	2.29	2.40
9	22	2.54	3.00	2.52	2.67	3.17	3.18	2.53	2.40
10	28	2.42	2.68	2.48	2.56	1.83	3.09	2.24	2.80
11	15	2.49	2.45	2.67	2.44	2.50	2.64	2.18	2.00
12	14	2.88	3.27	2.97	2.67	3.50	3.09	2.82	3.40
13	14	2.78	3.41	2.94	3.00	3.17	3.64	2.35	3.20

The findings indicate that the length of work experience in teaching did not influence the extent of learner strategy instruction as the results were quite similar within the strategy groups. The pupils employed different strategy groups and also a different repertoire of learner strategies within the groups compared to the strategies their teachers claimed they scaffold. For the purpose, the study supported by the teacher-strategy was the one applied by their pupils to the extent of 50% at least.

The most employed and facilitated strategies were *metacognitive* ones, namely *paying attention* and *planning for a language task*. As for *memory-related strategies*, the situation was quite similar. All the teachers in the sample encouraged and recommended *structured reviewing* and *representing sounds in memory*. Memory-related strategies are of great importance at primary level, so promoting them should be done on a regular basis. Nevertheless, even if the teachers claimed they promoted them, the pupils used them only at a frequency of 56%, which is, again, not in accordance with the teachers' responses. *Compensation strategies* were rather neglected by both the teachers and the pupils. We were able to find only one, out of 10 possible, that would correspond with the criteria set for this part of the research, which was *overcoming limitations in speaking and writing, getting help*. The frequency score, the strategy was used by pupils was 58% and for teachers' support it was quite similar, 57%. Instead, the pupils were quite dependent on translating and were quite reluctant to try reading children's books claiming they could not because they would not have been able to translate the whole book. *Cognitive strategies*, i.e. strategies that deal with the language as such, did not reach the desired frequency score of 50%, only one single strategy. It was *using resources for receiving and sending messages*. Both, the teachers and the learners recommended and used dictionaries. Compared to the previous results concerning compensation strategies and other data obtained in the research, we can conclude that the use of dictionaries and translation prevailed, sadly, even in situations in which compensations strategies would be more efficient, for instance guessing intelligently and using linguistic clues such as guesses from a context. *Affective strategies* belong to the indirect class and deal with motivation, level of anxiety and feelings as to study a language also means to encounter and deal with different challenges. That could be one of the reasons why the learners used more affective strategies compared to their teachers' advice and instruction. Explicitly, they used *positive statements* and *taking your emotional temperature*, yet the teachers did support the strategies to a lesser degree, compared to the frequency score of their pupils. The score was 78% for the teachers and less than required 50% for pupils.

The greatest discrepancy between the strategy instruction and application was noted in *social strategies* which did not reach the required 50% in the pupils' answers. On the other hand, the teachers claimed they recommended them. The most promoted social strategy was *asking for clarification and verification* (frequency 100% - 66%) and *asking for correction* (frequency 66% - 33%). As for *metacognitive strategies*, the teacher claimed they taught *planning for a language task* (frequency 66% - 33%) and *setting goals and objectives* (frequency 66% - 33%).

As mentioned above, the questionnaires offered both the respondents' groups the possibilities to specify their answers in open-ended items. To review the responses, the teachers were not successful in recommending activities and options young learners have outside of the classroom, rather they were convinced that young learners' opportunities to practise English were more than limited and therefore they had to rely on their English lessons only which is why they practised grammar in the textbooks they used on a regular basis.

Q: What do you recommend to your pupils to practise English outside the classroom?

T12: Young learners do not have many opportunities. They should practise exercises in their books.

Sadly, the teachers did not prepare and plan the facilitation, although this stage is essential, which was reflected in pupils' comments:

P 81: Our teacher gives us advice on how to learn e.g. vocabulary. "But as it does not work for me, I do not usually listen to her."

P62: Our teacher instructs us just to listen to her carefully in the class, nothing else. Yes, she says something on how to learn from time to time. But mostly she wants us to work with the coursebook at home and practise things done in the lessons.

To put it in a broader context, the teachers did not recommend modern technologies and their use in language learning, such as YouTube and short cartoon pupils could watch, or tablets and apps suitable for young learners i.e. to practise pronunciation, to create a comic or even a short video and prepare a story based on it, even if the generation of today's learners is a "click generation" and they are used to using technologies for many other purposes. Why not use the hidden potential and direct their passion.

Conclusion

There is broad agreement in literature that learner strategies instruction should be incorporated in the curriculum and should be done systematically in positive, cooperative atmosphere which makes learning easier and fun. One of the features of learner strategies is that they are teachable (Oxford, 1990) and thus teachers should shape strategy instruction and ought to offer efficient learner strategies. In consequence, the repertoire of learner strategies students are able to apply also depends on the opportunities their teacher creates. However, the research findings to date recorded in different countries, e.g. Spain (Coyle & Valcarcel, 2002), Taiwan (Lin, 2001; Lan, 2005), Ireland (Kiely, 2002), or the Czech Republic (Hrozková, 2013), have revealed the limits in strategy instruction despite the fact it is considered to one of their educational/teacher competences. Strategy oriented coaching is a challenge and teachers differed in degree of readiness for it.

Knowing which strategies learners already apply and prefer is an indispensable step which should be taken in strategy training. As this stage was lacking, the strategy instruction the teachers gave to their pupils was

not comprehensible enough. The teachers rather facilitated strategies their pupils already used or those they thought their pupils might need. Put another way, they did not implement strategy instruction into their curricula but, regrettably, supported learner strategies within hidden curriculum, i.e. not knowing what their pupils needed they applied a hazy conception of facilitation. They did not create opportunities for learner strategy instruction and subconsciously offered and supported less effective or, for some learners, even ineffective strategies. Moreover, it is possible to say that the teacher did not reflect on their teaching and their pupils' learning process as they were not aware of the fact that they did not meet their pupils' needs and therefore their facilitation of learner strategies was not successful. On the other hand, they called for more information on learner strategies in the questionnaires, so intuitively they might have known they were not able to go the extra mile.

To conclude, the knowledge gained through this research underlines and emphasises the importance of seminars aimed at learner strategies and their facilitation for pre-service as well as in-service teachers. To be able to empower their students' performance, to go the extra mile, teachers need to know how to manage and design a strategy-oriented sequence, as learning how to learn is viewed as a particular objective of teaching in general, not only teaching foreign languages.

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