

DEVELOPMENT OF METACOGNITIVE AND SOCIO-AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES IN EFL CLASSES AT SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Ingrida Eglė Žindžiuvienė
Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

Abstract. *The article focuses on the development of learning strategies during the process of foreign language learning. With the obvious implementation of cognitive learning strategies, the development of other types of strategies, metacognitive and socio-affective, remains an urgent issue. Very often these latter strategies are either disregarded or dismissed during the language learning process. However, recent studies have pointed out the necessity for the development of all types of learning strategies and their implementation at an early stage of learning. Therefore, the aim of this research is to determine the scope of the development of metacognitive and socio-affective learning strategies during the process of foreign language learning. Quantitative and qualitative methods have been used to determine the frequency and mode of the above-mentioned types of learning strategies during the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Two hypotheses have been raised: (1) Metacognitive strategies are often disregarded in the process of language learning in the classes for adolescents; (2) The potential of implementation of socio-affective strategies in EFL classes is underestimated in the process of language learning in the classes for adolescents. The object of the research consists of 12 selected EFL textbooks and activities included in them. The research results prove the fact that much more attention to metacognitive learning strategy development is needed during EFL classes, as these strategies strongly benefit the overall process of language acquisition. To compare, socio-affective learning strategies are more often implemented during EFL classes; however, their development is rather unsystematic.*

Keywords: *metacognitive and socio-affective strategies; secondary education.*

Introduction

Learning English as a foreign language is a substantial feature of the 21st century when English has become a *lingua franca* around the world. With the emergence of communicative approaches and the shift of focus on the learner, the attention is now given to the ways the learner masters the language, that is, what learning strategies s/he applies to making language learning faster, easier and more effective. At secondary schools sets of textbooks are still seen as major resources for teaching English. Due to differences of perspectives, the choice of textbooks depends on many factors and, therefore, may offer different approaches to the development of learning strategies. The focus of this research is to

determine whether EFL textbooks help learners to acquire the necessary skills, to analyse how learning strategies, especially, metacognitive and socio-affective ones, are developed and to determine whether this process meets the requirements outlined in *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*.

The aim of the research is to determine the range of metacognitive and socio-affective strategies found in chosen EFL textbooks and to discuss learning strategy development in language learning curriculum. The objectives of the research are the following: (1) To briefly survey language learning strategies; (2) to present the role of learning strategies in the language learning process; (3) to identify the place of learning strategy development in *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*; (4) to survey textbooks of English for Forms 5-9 (used in Lithuanian secondary schools for adolescent learners of English) from the aspect of metacognitive and socio-affective strategies introduced in them. Two hypotheses have been raised: (1) Metacognitive strategies are often disregarded in the process of language learning in the classes for adolescents; (2) The potential of implementation of socio-affective strategies in EFL classes is underestimated in the process of language learning in the classes for adolescents. The following **research methods** were used: qualitative and quantitative analysis of EFL textbooks; content analysis and survey of documents and scholarly sources.

The Concept and Range of Learning Strategies

As learning strategies have become one of the most important spheres of the language learning process, different researchers present a range of definitions of learning strategies (Bialystok, 1978; Rubin, 1987; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). Joan Rubin states that learning strategies “contribute to the development of language system” (Rubin, 1987) and this way influences learning. The definition from O'Malley and Chamot defines learning strategies as “the special thoughts or behaviors,” which is a factor indicating how learning strategies work (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). In Oxford's definition learning strategies are indicated as “specific actions” (Oxford, 1990). Both definitions (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990) provide the purpose of using language learning strategies that is to be able to “help them comprehend” (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990); “make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990). Learning strategies are employed during a learning activity consciously when the strategies are taught; once they are integrated into the learner's model of learning, they become automatic and unconscious.

Learning strategies do not operate by themselves; instead, they connect into strategy chains which are “sets of interlocking, related, and mutually supportive strategies” (Oxford, 2003). In addition, learning strategies are tied to the learner’s learning styles and personal characteristics (such as anxiety and inhibition) of the learner (Brown, 2000). Oxford (1990) discusses the influence of demographic factors such as sex, age, and ethnic differences to learning strategies as equally important factor in the second/foreign language learning process. Furthermore, developmental studies have come to the general conclusion that “learning strategies develop with age, are used spontaneously with increasing sophistication by older students” (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). The development of learning strategies can be divided into three stages of skill acquisition, as suggested by an American psychologist J. R. Anderson in 1985: cognitive stage, associative stage and autonomous stage (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). In the cognitive stage a person develops an understanding of the steps required in skill performance. The learner is introduced to a new learning strategy that assists in completing a task. In the associative stage errors in understanding or performance are reduced and execution of the skill becomes more fluid and the learner applies the new strategy to several similar tasks. During the autonomous stage skills become automatic and the strategy can be used for completion of more cognitively challenging tasks.

The prevailing understanding of learning strategies is that they are actions, techniques, processes and thoughts employed to facilitate and solve problems related to foreign language learning. The investigation shows that acquirement of learning strategies is a cognitive process which requires active participation of the learner’s mental operations. The strategies applied in the learning process may be chosen both consciously and unconsciously in order to complete any task or participate in language activity.

The progress in cognitive psychology in the 1970s was the starting point of the research studies on language learning strategies (Zare, 2012). However, the main issue of the research studies has been actions done by successful learners to learn a second/foreign language (Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975, cited in Zare, 2012). Joan Rubin (1987) claims that identified strategies can be offered (as a system) to less successful learners.

Learning strategies that L2 learners use have been classified by many researchers in the area of language learning (Rubin, 1987; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Stern, 1992). The main aspect that is iterative in all taxonomies is the division of strategies into metacognitive, cognitive and social-affective strategies. Metacognitive strategies cover techniques employed for managing the overall learning process, for example, planning for learning, thinking about learning process, correcting your own mistakes, and evaluating success (Zare, 2012; Oxford, 2003). O’Malley and Chamot (1990) divide metacognitive strategy into seven specific secondary strategies, which are closely

related to the classification of metacognitive strategies listed by Rubin (1987): planning, prioritizing, setting goals, and self-management. H. Douglas Brown (2000) defines cognitive strategies as “more limited to specific tasks and they involve more direct manipulation of the learning material itself” (Brown, 2000). The manipulation is performed through note-taking, summarizing, repetition, translation and other strategies which are mentioned in O’Malley and Chamot’s (1990) taxonomy. On the contrary, Rubin (1987) and Stern (1992) divide cognitive strategies into clarification/verification, guessing/inductive inferencing, deductive reasoning, practice, memorization and monitoring. Hence, the categorization provided by O’Malley and Chamot (1990) is more specific in comparison to Rubin and Stern’s classification. Social-affective strategies are concerned with social-mediating activities and interacting with others (Brown, 2000). O’Malley and Chamot (1990) explain that they include cooperation and asking for clarification.

The taxonomy provided by Rebecca Oxford is “perhaps the most comprehensive classification of learning strategies to date” (Ellis, 1994, cited in Griffiths, 2004). Same as Rubin (1987), Oxford makes a distinction between direct and indirect strategies which are subdivided into six classes. Alongside metacognitive and cognitive strategies Oxford names four other strategies which are “memory strategies that help learners link one L2 item or concept with another” (Oxford, 2003); “compensatory strategies that help the learner to make up for missing knowledge” (Oxford, 2003); affective strategies “manage motivation, emotions, and attitudes associated with learning” (Zare, 2012); and social strategies help the learner to work with others (Oxford, 2003). These six broad classes include nineteen secondary strategies with a further sixty-two specific strategies which are the basis of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1990). SILL is a survey used to assess L2 learners’ use of learning strategies.

SILL has been used in a research carried out by Nemira Mačianskienė, a Lithuanian researcher, in 1998 to investigate the benefit of learning strategies for second language acquisition. The hypothesis of the research stated that students who apply cognitive, memory, compensation, metacognitive, social and affective strategies more often, demonstrate better results in EFL (Mačianskienė, 2004). The results of the research showed that more successful learners apply all (except affective) learning strategies (Mačianskienė, 2004).

A similar study of learning strategies was conducted by Carol Griffiths and Judy M. Parr in 2001 (Griffiths & Parr, 2001). One of the research aims was to determine which groups of learning strategies are used most frequently when learning a foreign language. The results showed that memory strategies are very rarely used, while social strategies are employed most frequently.

Earlier research studies on language learning strategies emphasise identification of strategic behaviours of the successful language learner, while more recent studies have classified strategies, which are employed by L2 learners during the process of foreign language learning.

Socio-affective learning strategies influence the process of language learning and the learners themselves. While many scholars have been investigating the effect of metacognitive and cognitive learning strategies, socio-affective strategies have not been studied at large, but the studies that have been conducted show some relevant results. Socio - affective strategies often have a positive effect on the process of learning. A study conducted on the effects of socio-affective strategy on reading comprehension among Iranian EFL learners showed a strong improvement of those students who used socio-affective learning strategies (Zeynali et al., 2015). The results of a similar study by Kyunghye Choi in Korea showed an improvement in correct translation of sentences, especially for students of lower levels (Choi, 2003). Likewise, Hamzah et al. carried out a study on the effects of socio - affective strategy on Malaysian students' listening comprehension with special attention to relaxation techniques (Hamzah et al., 2009). The results of the study revealed that students who used socio-affective strategies performed much better than those who did not (Hamzah et al., 2009). All three studies demonstrate that socio-affective strategies can enhance certain skills, like reading and listening comprehension, and translation.

Differently from these studies, other researchers chose to study only certain strategies belonging to the bigger group of socio-affective strategies. Elizabeth Phelps states that strategies dealing with emotions can have a positive effect on “mental processes as perception and memory, which are vital for learning” (Phelps, 2006). Such strategies as recognizing and managing emotions or encouraging yourself during language learning may be used to gain attention and focus, and improve memory, which is vital for learning vocabulary. In his study on cooperation strategy, Robert E. Slavin observes that “there is now substantial evidence that students working together in small cooperative groups can master material [...] better than can students working on their own” (Slavin, 1987). Hence, working in pairs or groups makes students more receptive to language content. Socio-affective strategies can benefit the language learning skills (listening, reading, vocabulary, and other skills). The usage of socio-affective learning strategies helps students form good learning habits and shape them as individuals and members of global community.

The objective of *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (further reference CEFR) states the importance of “independence of thought, judgement and action, combined with social skills and responsibility” (CEFR, 2001) which should be encouraged while teaching a language. To ensure independence, a learner must adopt learning

strategies during learning process; they will later be used in interactional situations as a communicative competence or as compensation and as a form of intrinsic learning. CEFR defines a strategy as “any organised, purposeful and regulated line of actions chosen by an individual to carry out a task which he or she sets for himself or herself or with which he or she is confronted” (CEFR, 2001).

In addition, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* briefly outlines the objectives for textbook writers: to formulate objectives in terms of the competence and strategies the learners have to develop; to make concrete, detailed decisions on the selection and ordering of texts, activities, vocabulary and grammar to be presented to the learner; to provide detailed instructions for the classroom and/or individual tasks and activities to be undertaken by learners’ response to the material presented (CEFR, 2001). This indicates that development of learning strategies may not be specified in some textbooks since no obligations to include language learning strategy training are imposed on textbook writers. The material and activities collected and presented to the learner are often directed at invoking the assumption of a natural language learning process.

Methodology and Research Results

For this research, during the period of 2013-2018, content analysis of 12 selected EFL textbooks was conducted to investigate the range of metacognitive and socio-affective strategies. Although cognitive learning strategies were also surveyed, the focus of the research was the development of metacognitive and socio-affective strategies. These textbooks have been chosen according to a model of rating the effectiveness of textbooks, Textbook Evaluation Research (Wang, Lin, & Lee, 2011). The study has been performed by applying O’Malley and Chamot’s taxonomy of learning strategies to 12 EFL textbooks selected from three major ELT textbook publishers.

To assess learning strategies in the textbooks, O’Malley and Chamot’s taxonomy has been used because Rebecca Oxford’s taxonomy includes factors which would induce many hypothetical assumptions and, for this reason, may distort results. Tasks have been analysed and divided according to metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies. The quantity of each group of strategies has been calculated and the range of strategies has been determined.

Results show that the majority (elementary 70 %, pre-intermediate 53 %, intermediate 68 %) of tasks in the student’s books are based on cognitive skill development by implementing cognitive strategies like imagery, grouping, inferencing and other strategies. Metacognitive strategies are rare (elementary 27 %, pre-intermediate 34 %, intermediate 26 %) in textbooks (O’Malley and

Chamot's taxonomy includes the following metacognitive strategies: planning, monitoring and evaluation sections). The analysis of the student's books has shown that they often lack self-evaluation tasks. Textbooks may include sections for revision; however, these tasks are directed at student-teacher collaboration. This type of assessment is rather impersonal, teacher-dependent; whereas, "self-evaluation" indicates a more personal way of assessing one's own outcomes of L2 learning. In addition, the strategy of directed attention is learner-dependent because personality factors of a learner influence the range of attention span, concentration on a task or activity or treatment of irrelevant distractors.

Tasks regarding socio-affective strategies are well applied in the textbooks. They cover co-operation as well as asking for additional explanation. Cooperation strategy is applied when a task asks students to work in pairs or groups; question for clarification strategy is applied when students are encouraged to give questions in order to access more information. However, the frequency of interactive activities, based on socio-affective strategy development is low (elementary 3 %, pre-intermediate 13 %, intermediate 6 %), approximately 2-3 activities per unit in elementary and intermediate level books, and approximately 5-6 activities per unit in pre-intermediate level books.

The dominance of cognitive strategy development is obvious in all selected textbooks; it varies from average 64 % to 73 %. The reason is the significance of cognitive skills that help learners memorize new foreign words and recall them in appropriate situations. Metacognitive strategies relate to planning for learning by checking before learning the capability of listening/reading comprehension and evaluating the outcomes. The most attention for metacognitive strategy development is given in *Upstream* textbook (29 %) (Dooley & Evans, 2010). Certain metacognitive strategies, such as advanced organizer, directed attention, selective attention and self-evaluation, often depend on the composition of a textbook and may not be included in tasks.

According to Brown, socio-affective strategies are related to "social-mediating activity and interacting with others" (Brown, 2000, 124). Social mediation involves participation in the society of the target language in real-life situations (Abdallah, 2015). Brown's definition, while quite popular, is mainly concerned with the social aspect, because there is no direct mention of emotions or other words signalling affective strategies. An alternative to this definition could be a description of socio-affective strategies as strategies that help learners regulate and control emotions, motivations, and attitudes towards learning, as well as help learners learn through contact and interaction with others (Chou, 2004). In this research the following categories of socio-affective strategies were taken into consideration: encouraging yourself and others; recognizing/managing emotions; asking questions for clarification; cooperation; empathizing with others; developing cultural awareness.

The results revealed that the structure and tasks in all EFL textbooks include development of metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies; yet, those strategies are generally introduced implicitly. In addition, the textbooks pay different attention to the development of each group of learning strategies. The analysis showed that the most of attention is dedicated to cognitive strategy development, which demonstrates the obvious focus on language material. However, the quantity of activities related to metacognitive and socio-affective strategy development range differently in every textbook. The greatest concern arises about the textbooks where the percentage of socio-affective strategies is very low. It has been also noticed that textbooks do not apply self-correction strategy; however, this can be explained by the fact that this type of strategy is highly dependent on the cognitive skills of a learner and there is no possible way to transform this strategy into a task to develop it. Finally, the third incongruity concerns self-evaluation during an interactive activity. Interaction strategies require the language user to monitor the process of interaction, compare it with the predicted outcomes and evaluate the present outcomes.

Socio-affective learning strategies are not explicitly introduced in the textbooks of English. Awareness of socio-affective learning strategies is a significant part of the process of learning English. The usage of socio-affective learning strategies varies in different textbooks of English. The analysis of five different textbooks of English showed that socio-affective learning strategies most frequently occur in the textbook *English Unlimited* (Tilbury, Clementson, Hendra, & Rea, 2012) (267 occurrences), whereas the lowest number of socio-affective learning strategies is observed in the textbook *Enterprise* (Dooley & Evans, 2001) (74 occurrences). However, most extensively they are developed in the textbook *Solutions* (Falla & Davies, 2012) (229 occurrences) – the only textbook that integrated all six socio-affective strategies. Six different socio-affective learning strategies such as encouraging yourself, recognizing/managing emotions, asking questions for clarification, cooperation, empathizing with others and developing cultural awareness were found. According to the results of the research, all textbooks of English contain the strategies of cooperation and developing cultural awareness, whereas the strategy of asking questions for clarification was found only in the textbook *Solutions*. In addition, all the textbooks apart from *Enterprise* include exercises that contain two strategies per one exercise. The textbook *Solutions* has the widest variety of such pairs of strategies.

Socio-affective learning strategies can be integrated in activities on various skills such as listening, reading, speaking, writing, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. The research showed that these strategies are mostly used in the activities on speaking, while the smallest number of socio-affective learning strategies is observed in activities on pronunciation.

The aim and objectives of the research were achieved, and both hypotheses (1) Metacognitive strategies are often disregarded in the process of language learning in the classes for adolescents; (2) The potential of implementation of socio-affective strategies in EFL classes is underestimated in the process of language learning in the classes for adolescents) were confirmed. The research results prove that metacognitive and socio-affective learning strategies play a significant role in the process of language learning. Their possible implementation is often disregarded or only implied; therefore, the use of metacognitive and socio-affective strategies depends on rather subjective consideration of both teachers and students.

Conclusions

Alongside linguistic content other factors play a significant role in language teaching and learning. Language education should ensure not only linguistic training, but it should also foster good learning habits, develop lifelong learning skills, encourage students to be responsible for their learning process and outcomes and to reflect on their progress. The research results showed that learning strategies are not equally developed in EFL textbooks: major types of learning strategies (metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective) are applied in the textbooks; yet, the employment of metacognitive and socio-affective strategies is rather minimal in comparison to the obvious cognitive ones. Therefore, development of metacognitive and socio-affective learning strategies is present in the content of teaching material but, in most cases, it is presented implicitly rather than explicitly. The quantity of activities related to metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies varies; yet, cognitive strategy development is dominant, although the development of metacognitive strategies has been acknowledged as definitely related to the development of general competencies, while socio-affective strategies influence the development of communicative competence in a foreign language, the latter aspect being outlined in the CEF as the most important purpose of foreign language acquisition.

Since language education is strongly textbook-based and has a significant influence on the way teachers and students organize their work, a textbook can be a source of metacognitive and socio-affective strategies. Awareness of these two types of learning strategies can lead to successful results in the process of learning English. Moreover, metacognitive and socio-affective learning strategies can be integrated in activities such as listening, reading, speaking, writing, vocabulary training, grammar and pronunciation. Development of these two types of strategies can help students to form better learning habits for life-long learning and to become socially competent, culturally aware and emotionally intelligent.

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