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RESEARCH ARTICLE



## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES OF STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF AUMP GWALIOR

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the present paper is to identify strategies that may be used by English language teachers involved in teaching in professional courses in urban areas. These teachers get a mix of students with urban and rural backgrounds as also with a mix of language skills from advanced to rudimentary.

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### INTRODUCTION

Universities at large and teachers in particular are today everyone's favorite punching bag. All the ills of the society, of industry, of development or lack of it, are found to be the fault of our system of education. As recently as last month a national leader called the universities 'silos', totally detached from society and industry to which they cater. Within the University System itself, the student has progressed from pupil to consumer. The LPG of liberalization, privatization and globalization has demolished the traditional education system and several tests and experiments are jostling hard to fill in the vacuum. The time is ripe to take stock of the situation and identify learning- teaching strategies for sustainable growth and development of mankind at large.

In India, the language English is not a foreign but a second language. It is also the language of international business and in the present globalized world, not knowing this language can be a serious hurdle in the career advancement of a professional. If we accept the fundamental premise that the object of a university is to produce industry ready graduates then teaching English becomes the foremost task of all universities.

### Objective

All students adopt some strategy- whether consciously or unconsciously- suitable to their learning style, to learn a language. Some of these strategies are unconventional and may be even undocumented.

The aim of the present paper is to explore the various strategies adopted by the students to learn English and to identify the effective strategies that may be used to fill the informal learning space of the student, much beyond the moribund teaching- learning methods.

### Methodology

The research question examined the Language Learning Strategy adopted and the demonstrated language skills of the student.

The study was conducted through sample survey and follow up interviews. The group comprised seventy five students (Male and Female) of Amity University MP Gwalior. In the 17-21years age group from BE II and IV Sem, BJMC II and IV Sem, Bio Tech II and IV Sem .

First a language test was administered, followed by a questionnaire. The exercise culminated with semi structured interviews.

### Literature Review

Study and identification of effective language learning strategies has always attracted a lot of interest and attention. Pioneering work was done by Rubin and Sterne in 1975. The object of both their studies was to identify the *dos* and *donts* of the successful language learners.

The Behaviorist School and the Cognitive School have contradictory opinions on the Language Learning Strategies. The Behaviorists believe that all learning is an associative process and language learning is also a conditioned response. The learner hears a number of sounds and gradually learns to associate particular sounds with certain objects/feelings/ideas. The Cognitivists on the other hand see all learning to be a problem solving process. They also believe that all human beings are equipped with a Language Acquisition Device or are biologically programmed to learn languages. Oxford's seminal work defined Learning Strategy as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self directed, more effective and more transferrable to new situations." (1990) She identified as many as 62 strategies that learners use to acquire, store and retrieve information such as grammar drills, sentence analysis, rehearsals, and deriving general meaning from specific etc. These are further classified into direct and indirect strategies. She also introduced SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) to determine the frequency of usage of the target language.

Jefferey Judge in his research paper *Use of Language Learning Strategies by Spanish Adults for Business English* (2012) has collected and listed all the studies that have been conducted on language learning strategies across the world. According to his list, several studies have been conducted in Asia, but apparently none in India.

The focus of the present study is on cognitive approaches which have been broadly identified by Samidha as Practicing, Receiving and Sending Messages, Analyzing and Reasoning, Creating structure for input and output (2005), and their use by students of Amity University Madhya Pradesh, Gwalior.

### Findings

The study yielded the following results:

- i. Need for English  
For Job: 80%  
Social Interactions: 20%
- ii. The What of Learning:

- Vocabulary: 65%
- Grammar: 5%
- Slangs and Net and Texting: 20%
- Language Games etc. : 10%
- iii. The Source of Learning:
  - News English: 42%
  - Novels: 31%
  - Newspapers: 19%
  - Text books: 3%
  - Others (Cricket Commentary): 5%
- iv. Strategy for Learning:
  - Translation: 68%
  - Rehearsal: 16%
  - Learning vocabulary by rote: 6%
  - Others (Learning the etymology):10%

To establish a correlation between learning strategy and demonstrated skills, the respondents were divided into three groups: high performers, the average performers and the poor performers

Performance Type	Chief Strategy for Learning
i. High	Reading fiction
ii. Average	Translating
iii. Low	Text books

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Any teaching to be effective has to be reflective and any learning to be effective has to be active and learner centered. As any discussion on curriculum shows, there are always three kinds of syllabus operant in the class room- the teacher's syllabus, the learner's syllabus and what finally happens in the class. The goal of practicing teachers should be to establish common objectives with the pupil.

The above results show that the learner in this particular context is interested in picking up vocabulary that may come in useful specifically during the placement process and in formal social situations. Also, that the most popular learning method is listening to the news where they are most likely to come across new words that are a) in vogue b) formal c) concurrent (with current affairs) d) used in correct context d) pronounced and enunciated correctly. Novels are not as popular and newspaper reading is more prescriptive than preferred. The same applies to text books.

- i. The teachers of English, however can use the news only in a limited manner. Even then, sticking to our traditional texts and other realia, we may atleast follow the AIDA approach .For example, even with e text like *Dream Children – A Reverie*, the vocabulary usage can be made more concurrent. Right from the word reverie itself, the students can be asked to go on a reverie and fantasize about the time when they are top managers/ scientists. Further, they may be asked to draft a Facebook post for their vacation, based on the author's sojourn Great Grandmother Field's House in the text. This will be upto the imagination of the teacher to make the application of learnt vocabulary as concurrent as possible by iterating how the learner may use it on the Internet, amongst friends and other likely places.
- ii. The dictionaries often give the root word. The teachers seldom use them for illustration in the class room. However, the current study shows that it is one of the strategies used by the learner unconsciously. The most interesting example quoted by a student was how she arrived at the meaning of the word **Plea** by recalling the word **Please**. Another narrated that he would always forget the difference between **Stationary** and **Stationery** till he stumbled upon the fact that pen, and pencil both have an 'e' **Folly** was not known but **foolish** was familiar.

The teachers of English are often used as dictionaries as consulting a dictionary is too cumbersome. (online dictionaries have improved matters). But often the learner looks only for the meaning or the

synonym. It ought to become the self avowed task of the teachers to take pains to go to the dictionary and look for the root word, identify the umbrella term and encourage the usage of all associated words by the learner.

- iii. The teachers need to access the informal learning space of the student. There is a vast virgin territory on the net which ought to be tapped. Posts or tweets are the order of the day amongst the college going generation. A resourceful teacher may use this both for teaching 'netiquette' as well as the beauty and power of language. Captions for pictures, invites for club activities, coverage of college events etc. are all opportunities knocking at our doors. Moreover, these are the writings where the students will seek the teacher out and not vice –versa as happens in the text book learning – teaching process.

Stern spoke of the thought underlying language teaching (Stern. 1983) The moribund system advocates teaching of literature for language which has without doubt its own merits. But an unthinking teacher may very well get carried away and remain confined to teaching literature and literary devices and styles in a 'communication' classroom. The adopting and encouraging of the strategies of the learners would facilitate learning and would go a long way in meeting the expectations of the students as well as those from ourselves as teachers of English.

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