



Cross-Sectional Research of Pupils' Foreign Language Learning Strategies and Achievement

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For successful foreign language learning, it is essential to take into account individual differences and needs of learners. An important part of this approach is paying attention to individual learner's strategies. This poster is focused on learning strategies used by foreign language learners at the end of primary education and at the end of lower and upper secondary comprehensive education in Czech schools and it discusses the differences of good and relatively poor language learners.

THEORY

Learning strategies belong to current topics of pedagogy, learning theory as well as foreign language learning. They are specific ways, actions and behaviour patterns chosen and used by learners to make their learning process more effective (Oxford, 1990). Chamot (2004) defines strategies as sets of conscious thoughts and actions that a learner takes to achieve a learning goal. The commonly used language learning strategies classification by Oxford (1990) divides the strategies into direct and indirect groups of strategies:

Direct strategies

Memory strategies – applied especially during vocabulary learning, vocabulary classifying, creating mental linkages, reviewing, etc.
Cognitive strategies – strategies like practising, reasoning and analysing, using mnemonic aids, etc.
Compensation strategies – overcoming limitations and insufficiencies in a language, guessing, etc.

Indirect strategies

Metacognitive strategies – arranging of learning, self-evaluation of learning, etc.
Affective strategies – use of self-encouragement, anxiety lowering, etc.
Social strategies – cooperation, ask for help, empathy, etc.

RESEARCH METHODS

Aim: The aim was to compare the declared strategy use of successful and poor language learners from the perspective of cross-sectional research at three educational levels such as to reveal learners' preferences in strategy use and discover variables influencing strategy use such as gender, foreign language etc. as well as results in language learning.

Sample: The convenient research sample consisted of 1482 pupils from primary level, 2384 pupils from lower secondary level and 1038 pupils from upper secondary comprehensive level in the Czech Republic.

Instruments: Pupils were asked to complete language learning strategy inventories adapted from Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (1990, adapted by Vlčková 2010). Reliability of adapted inventories were measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient: (inventory for primary level: 29 items, $\alpha=0,74$; inventory for lower secondary level: 67 items, $\alpha=0,90$; inventory for upper secondary comprehensive level: 67 items, $\alpha=0,95$). Moreover, the pupils from primary level were asked to fill in a language test. Reliability of the language test (12 items) was measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha=0,82$). Additional information about learners' marks and success was obtained from teachers and learners' self-assessment of the language skills in comparison to native speakers.

RESULTS

Primary level: In case of younger learners, good language learners (defined according to higher test score) were revealed to use more language learning strategies ($R = -0,08$, $p = 0,01$), for instance learning vocabulary from poems or songs, watching films or TV, reading in the foreign language, whereas the less successful learners reported using strategies such as looking for vocabulary in a dictionary, guessing the meaning of the word, asking a classmate for help.

Lower secondary level: Regarding the older learners, a significant relationship was found out between the foreign language mark and reported strategy use. The more strategies pupils used, the better their mark was ($R = -0,20$, $p = 0,00$). The strongest correlation was found with cognitive strategies ($R = -0,29$, $p = 0,00$), whereas the negative relationship was revealed in case of affective strategies ($R = 0,05$, $p = 0,02$), which may be explained by stress caused by language learning. In fact, the more affective strategies learners used, the worse their target language mark was.

Upper secondary comprehensive level: The same findings were discovered in connection with learners from this level educational level, whose good foreign language mark related to more frequent strategy use ($R = -0,16$, $p = 0,00$). Again, the strongest correlation with the mark was proved regarding cognitive strategies ($R = -0,21$, $p = 0,00$), whereas the negative correlation was found out at affective strategies ($R = 0,06$, $p = 0,05$).

The observed differences are statistically significant, however they are weak, which is in accordance with Artelt (2000 et al.) who confirms that the relation of foreign learning strategies and results is usually weak.

In all three samples, girls were shown as better language learners (Kruskal-Wallis test: $H(2, N = 4879) = 50,01$; $p = 0,00$). In connection with language aptitude, learners who considered themselves as gifted for languages reported using more language learning strategies, especially memory ($R=0,09$, $p = 0,01$), cognitive ($R=0,27$, $p=0,01$), metacognitive ($R=0,31$, $p=0,01$) and social ($R=0,21$, $p=0,01$) strategies.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results from the research, the following questions must be answered:

- Is the current foreign/second language learning and teaching satisfactorily focused on a learner? Are individual learner's strategies taken into account?
- Have language learners sufficient awareness about language learning strategies? Do they know how to improve their learning process and which strategies are available to them?
- Can good language learners' strategies be used to help poorer language learners learn more effectively?

References

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