

ABSTRACT

THE INSTRUCTION OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR LOW-PROFICIENCY ESL LEARNERS

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Language learning strategies have often been taught to ESL students to help them become more effective learners. However, formal strategy instruction has most often been taught to either intermediate or advanced proficiency students, where English can be used easily for communication, or to students with the same language background, where the students' native language can be used. The purpose of this research was to find effective methods for modifying language learning strategy instruction, specifically in reading and vocabulary skills, in order to make it more accessible and usable for low-proficiency high school ESL students when the native language cannot be used for instruction. Fifteen high school ESL students from varying language backgrounds, who were classified as high-beginning English proficiency, participated in this thirteen-week action research study. Lesson plans, anecdotal records, and unit self-evaluation forms provided information about how instruction was conducted and how students responded to it. Pre- and post-questionnaires were also used to determine if the instruction was effective. The results of the study suggest that a number of teaching strategies are helpful for making strategy instruction accessible and usable for low-proficiency ESL students.

THE INSTRUCTION OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES
FOR LOW-PROFICIENCY ESL LEARNERS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

When Fatima walked into my class the first day, she was as nervous as a child in a doctor's office. But it did not take long before her infectious smile and enthusiastic greetings were things that I looked forward to every day. Though war and poverty had prevented her from going to school for very long in Somalia, where she was born, and she only received a minimal amount of education during her three years in a Kenyan refugee camp, she showed an eagerness to participate in class and contributed a great deal to our discussions. She was not shy about asking lots of questions. As time progressed, however, I noticed her face getting more and more serious, and her smiles and greetings seemed to have a note of sadness in them. She was trying so hard to learn to read and write better, but the task seemed insurmountable at times, and her frustration was becoming more than she could handle. She never seemed to be able to understand what she was reading until someone explained it to her. Besides, at seventeen years old, she did not have much time left before she would need to get a job and start supporting herself. "School very difficult," she told me one day, as she put her pencil down.

I suspected that Mai Lee agreed, although she did not say it. She had studied a little bit of English in Laos, but after coming to the United States a few months ago, she seemed

completely lost in the constant torrent of strange sounds. Though I noticed that she must have spent hours outside of class memorizing lists of words and copying sentences, she still did not seem to understand what was going on in class most of the time, and I was certain that she did not feel like she could contribute to it. Even though Fatima envied her neat homework assignments that always received good grades, Mai Lee had plenty of frustrations of her own.

Alberto, too, was convinced that he was not very smart. His other friends from El Salvador thought English was easy, so it seemed, but it certainly did not come easily to him. Test after test received low marks, and he did not understand why he did so poorly. He felt more and more certain that he would never be able to graduate.

Although Fatima, Mai Lee, and Alberto are not real students, these sketches are conglomerations of very typical students that I have seen in my classroom. What I understand about them is partly from observations that I have made, partly from conversations I have had with them, and partly from journals and other student writings I have read from more advanced students as they reflect on their early experiences at our school.

Fatima, Mai Lee, and Alberto are all very different, but they share one thing in common: they struggle with learning English. However, it is not because they are unintelligent, lazy, or somehow fated to not succeed. In fact, most of the students in my classes have already demonstrated incredible ingenuity, stamina, and determination in their previous experiences. Some of them are refugees who have survived gruesome wars, and many have experienced debilitating poverty. Although there are some students who are well-

supported by their families who were able to come with them to the United States, other students do not have this support at home. Some students have taken on huge responsibilities at a young age, such as caring for younger siblings or sick parents, parenting their own children, or financially providing for numerous family members either here or in their native countries. It is common for students to need to work many hours outside of school, in addition to trying to go to school full-time. Understandably, some students come into my classroom constantly exhausted, after sleeping only a few hours each night.

Despite the enormous responsibilities many students have outside of class, they carry an incredibly clear conception of their need to be in school and learn English – not only for their future but even for their present jobs and other activities. As a teenager or young adult, however, they have a very short time in which to learn the language well enough to graduate. For those that have not had much opportunity to learn in a formal classroom before, they may need to learn nearly the equivalent of an entire K-12 education within a few short years before they are deemed "too old" to be in high school.

These students have a lot of English left to learn, and not much time in which to learn it. They need to learn English as effectively and efficiently as possible. How can I, as their teacher, best help them do this? I need to teach them English. But more importantly, I need to teach them *tools* for learning English. The purpose of this research is to do just that: to teach these students about language learning strategies in a way that is both accessible and usable.

I teach in a high school that is geared entirely for English language learners, in an immersion-style program, where all classes are taught in English. Students come from many different countries and language backgrounds, and although they enter the program before they become twenty-one years old, they are usually allowed to stay until they graduate. The majority of the students are between about sixteen and twenty-two, although some are a little younger or older.

In my lower-level high school ESL classes, students come with an enormous variety of backgrounds. Some come from years of formal education in their native countries. Some have never sat in a classroom before. For most, their experience in formal education lies somewhere between the two. In addition, they have various levels of experience in learning another language, some in formal classroom settings, and some in informal settings (such as when they lived in another country, after leaving their homeland but before coming to the United States).

Students also bring a variety of preconceptions into the classroom (Horwitz, 1987). They come with different expectations about how classes should be conducted and what teachers should do and what students should do in response. They come with a variety of fundamental beliefs about how languages are learned and how much control they do or do not have in the process of learning a language.

Students arrive with numerous ideas about how languages are learned. Some of those ideas are very helpful, and would benefit other students as well. Some ideas may not be as helpful as the students imagine they are, and need to be adjusted. Some ideas simply need to be expanded. For example, many students are good at using resources, such as language

dictionaries, to find the meaning of new words they encounter. I often see them flipping through their well-worn dictionaries several times a day. Students who do not use language dictionaries very frequently may benefit from learning to use them more often, especially if they are very literate in another language. Fatima's ability to ask questions is another strategy that is vital to language learning. Other strategies may not be so helpful, however. For example, I have seen students rigorously practice copying sentences from a story, and sometimes write those sentences word-for-word in answer to test questions that actually asked for something a little different. Although the exercise of copying can be valuable at times, these students need to learn how to understand the content of the story, by summarizing it, for example, in order to have a better grasp of it.

In my own experience with beginning-level classes, finding students who already have a good handle on how to approach language learning is not the “norm.” It is much more common for my classes to be filled with the blank faces of students who seem to be overwhelmed with the daunting process of learning English. Many seem to lack even basic tools about how to begin learning: how to memorize enormous amounts of new vocabulary, how to ask for help, how to study outside of class, or even how to do any learning task independently. They do not realize that they actually have a great deal of control over their own language learning, and that it is not just the teacher's responsibility to make sure they learn something. Perhaps their prior experiences in life have been so different from what they encounter in high school that they assume they have no control. When they do not progress very much, they either blame it on the school, or they conclude that they must not be capable of learning English.

No matter what kind of previous experiences they have had, these students have already learned a great deal about how to survive and function in life. My suspicion is that they have a great deal of knowledge that can somehow be applied to the process of learning English. But how can I help them make those connections? How can I help my students learn better? How can I help them be more self-directed and take more control of their learning, instead of feeling overwhelmed and helpless?

Language Learning Strategies

As I was grappling with questions about how to help my students understand more about the learning process, I came across a book by Rebecca Oxford titled *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know* (1990). Oxford defines language learning strategies as “specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). Associating a visual image with a word to help remember it, practicing a new word by using it in a sentence, and asking for clarification are all examples of language learning strategies. Other examples include identifying the main idea in a paragraph, looking for opportunities to practice the language, and giving oneself encouragement.

According to Oxford (1990), language learning strategies allow learners to become more self-directed and contribute to communicative competence. Communicative competence is the fundamental knowledge necessary for communication, and includes grammatical and sociolinguistic competence, as well as strategic competence (Canale &

Swain, 1980). Strategic competence incorporates the verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that are used to compensate for breakdowns in communication or to increase the effectiveness of communication (Canale, 1983).

Furthermore, language learning strategies involve not only cognitive aspects of the learner, but also metacognitive, social, and emotional aspects. They are often (but not always) conscious, and they are sometimes (but not always) observable. Finally – and significantly – these strategies are teachable (Oxford, 1990).

In Oxford's description of language learning strategies, I found exactly what I was looking for. This is what I want to teach my students. I want to give them *tools* to help them learn and to help them take control of their learning. I want to teach them language learning strategies.

As I looked around and found more and more information about language learning strategies, I found numerous ideas about how to assess what students already know about language learning strategies, how to instruct them, and how to evaluate what they have learned. However, in nearly every situation I came across, I found one of two things in common: either the teacher was working with students who were fairly advanced in their target language skills (and therefore extensive instruction and assessment could be done in the target language), or a significant amount of instruction (and possibly assessment) was done in the students' first language. Neither of these cases applies to my situation.

Challenges of Working with Beginning Students

Because my classroom contains students from so many different language backgrounds, I cannot use their first languages to talk with them about the learning process.

In addition, my students are still beginners. They are more advanced than entry-level ESL learners, and most of them have just enough oral proficiency in English to carry on a very light conversation about their family, what they did over the weekend, and the weather. But an extensive discussion about the cognitive processes of language development would leave these students quite lost. Furthermore, the extent of their differences in educational background presents an additional challenge, since they have varying degrees of literacy in both their first language and in English.

For students with more advanced English skills, talking about the learning process is relatively easy. I have found a plethora of information about teaching language learning strategies to high-intermediate to advanced language learners. (For example, Oxford, 1990; Wenden and Rubin, 1987; Cohen, 1998; Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Stewner-Manzanares, et al., 1985; Oxford, et al., 1990.) Because the more advanced students mentioned in these sources already had a significant amount of experience learning the target language, they also had much more prior knowledge to relate strategy instruction to. In other words, it is easier to talk about language learning with them because they simply know more English.

The truth is that beginning students, who have far less ability to understand metacognitive instruction about the language learning process, are the ones who need it all the more! Time is such a precious commodity for these high school students: children who are not children anymore and are somehow expected to conquer an entire K-12 education in just a few short years. They need all the help they can get. They need to be able to learn effectively and efficiently. Do I have to wait until they are more advanced in their English

skills before we talk about better ways of learning English? That seems rather ironic! Certainly, there must be a way to communicate more to them on the level they are at right now.

The Research Question

The goal of my research is to find effective methods for modifying language learning strategy instruction, specifically in reading and vocabulary skills, in order to make it more accessible and usable for low-proficiency high school ESL students when the native language cannot be used for instruction.

Significance for Others

All teachers desire to help their students learn. And most teachers hope that their students will not only learn knowledge in and of itself, but that they will learn more about how to learn, which is something that they can carry with them the rest of their lives. Teachers in situations similar to mine can probably relate to my frustrations, and most likely they will be able to relate to my questions as well.

This issue is also important in the field of second language teaching and learning. There has been a significant amount of research about the instruction of language learning strategies for advanced learners, or using the native language for instruction (Oxford, et al., 1990; Oxford, 1989 and 1996; Nunan, 1996; and Wenden & Rubin, 1987). However, much less is known about how to adapt the instruction of learning strategies for low-proficiency

learners when the first language cannot be used. My hope is to begin to expand on that knowledge.

Most importantly, I believe that my research will significantly help my students. If I can contribute even in the slightest amount to giving them a better grasp of how to learn English, by helping them become more successful language learners and take more control of their learning, then I will have succeeded.

Conclusion

The following chapter, the literature review, describes language learning strategies in more detail, discusses factors that influence the use of language learning strategies, and expounds on the benefits of strategy instruction. Then, it discusses what research has to say about how strategy instruction can be carried out and assessed. Finally, it describes the specific characteristics and challenges of teaching low-proficiency language learners.

The third chapter, the methods, describes how this research project was carried out. The results chapter then discusses the results that were obtained from the research. The final chapter, the conclusion, analyzes the outcomes of the research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

No matter what kind of learners they are – their cultural and language background, previous experience with formal education, individual learning style, etcetera – students are faced with an enormous task when they need to learn a new language. Being more aware of how to approach this task, and how to do it as effectively and efficiently as possible – language learning strategies – is an essential type of knowledge for them to learn. The earlier students can begin to learn this knowledge, the more it can help them. However, if their native language cannot be used for instruction, it becomes a little more challenging to teach this knowledge to students who are not yet very proficient in the new language.

How can language learning strategies be made more accessible to low-proficiency English language learners without the use of the native language? This chapter explores what research has to say in answer to that question. First, language learning strategies will be described in more detail, as well as factors that influence the use of language learning strategies. Then the benefits of language learning strategy instruction will be explored, and what researchers have to say about how it should be carried out. Issues concerning strategy assessment will also be discussed. Finally, this chapter will look at specific characteristics of

low-proficiency learners and how those characteristics influence strategy instruction and assessment.

What are Language Learning Strategies?

Introduction

Until relatively recently, it had generally been assumed that certain people learned languages better simply because they were more intelligent and somehow had a greater genetic aptitude for language learning. In 1975, however, Rubin was one of the earliest to counter that theory in one of the first major articles about language learning strategies titled, “What the ‘good language learner’ can teach us” (1975). In this article, Rubin proposed that good language learners learn better because they use good *strategies* for learning, and that poorer language learners can benefit from learning to use these strategies. Some of the strategies suggested by Rubin at this time included being a willing and accurate guesser, using creative means to communicate (such as circumlocution, paraphrasing, or gesturing), looking for patterns in the language, and practicing (like repetition and seeking opportunities to practice with native speakers).

Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, and Todesco then came out with a list of strategies that successful second language learners reported using (1978, cited in O’Malley and Chamot, 1990), and Rubin and Thompson published a book for language learners that described strategies in 1982. Since then, numerous researchers have picked up the discussion and have come up with many characteristics of language learning strategies, as well as systems of categorizing them. Studies have been conducted to determine which strategies are used by

which type of people, how strategy instruction should be carried out, and the effectiveness of various types of strategy instruction. These studies will be described in more detail throughout the rest of this chapter.

Before going into further detail about language learning strategies, a couple of issues concerning the term “language learning strategies” should be clarified. It must first be noted that the term “learning strategies” is a broad term that includes not only “language learning strategies,” but learning strategies for other disciplines as well, and the term “strategies” is a broader term yet. However, for the simplicity of speech, and since this paper focuses only on learning strategies that are specifically related to language learning, the terms “learning strategies” or “strategies” will be used interchangeably with the more specific but longer term “language learning strategies.” Secondly, this term encompasses not only the actual strategies that are used, but also the learner’s “strategic knowledge,” or knowledge of how and when to use those strategies (Wenden, 1987a).

Classification Systems

The existence of numerous classification systems has created some confusion about how to categorize learning strategies (Tamada, 1997). Some taxonomies tend to emphasize only particular types of strategies, and some are more expansive. For example, the taxonomy by O'Malley et al. (1985a) mostly describes cognitive and metacognitive strategies, but the taxonomy by Oxford (1990) includes social, affective, and other strategies as well. Some strategies can be placed in more than one category – such as questioning for clarification which O'Malley et al. (1985a) and Chamot (1987) have classified as both cognitive and social at different times, which also causes overlapping and confusion (Tamada, 1997).

It is difficult to get a complete understanding of strategies. Because the use of strategies is not always conscious, only limited knowledge is gained from questioning the learner (Cohen and Scott, 1996; Politzer, 1983). Furthermore, because the use of strategies is often internal and therefore not always observable, it is also difficult for an outsider to know the full extent of strategy use (Wenden, 1987a; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Cohen and Scott, 1996).

Two classification systems have received a significant amount of attention in the field of language learning strategies: one was first developed by O'Malley and Chamot in 1985 (O'Malley et al., 1985a), and the other was developed by Oxford in 1990. Both systems are discussed here.

The classification system developed by O'Malley and Chamot was among the first to make a clear distinction between cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Rubin, 1987). Cognitive strategies are strategies that involve “manipulating the material to be learned mentally (as in making images or elaborating) or physically (as in grouping items to be learned or taking notes)” (Chamot and O'Malley, 1994, p. 61). Other example of cognitive strategies include summarizing, translating, and repetition. Cognitive strategies have also been described as methods for creating multiple links to a piece of information in order to be able to retrieve it better (Oxford et al., 1990). Metacognitive strategies, on the other hand, help learners deal with the process of learning. They are used for planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Chamot and O'Malley, 1994, p. 61). Managing the learning environment and being selective about what to pay attention to in a specific learning task are both

metacognitive strategies. Tables 1 and 2 show the cognitive and metacognitive strategies and their definitions from a classification system developed by O'Malley and Chamot.

Table 1: Cognitive Strategies (O'Malley, Chamot, et al., 1985a)

<i>Repetition</i>	Imitating a language model, including overt practice and silent rehearsal.
<i>Resourcing</i>	Defining or expanding a definition of a word or concept through use of target language reference materials.
<i>Directed Physical Response</i>	Relating new information to physical actions, as with directives.
<i>Translation</i>	Using the first language as a base for understanding and/or producing the second language.
<i>Grouping</i>	Reordering or reclassifying and perhaps labeling the material to be learned based on common attributes.
<i>Note-taking</i>	Writing down the main idea, important points, outline, or summary of information presented orally or in writing.
<i>Deduction</i>	Consciously applying rules to produce or understand the second language.
<i>Recombination</i>	Constructing a meaningful sentence or larger language sequence by combining known elements in a new way.
<i>Imagery</i>	Relating new information to visual concepts in memory via familiar easily retrievable visualizations, phrases, or locations.
<i>Auditory Representation</i>	Retention of the sound or similar sound for a word, phrase, or longer language sequence.
<i>Key Word</i>	Remembering a new word in the second language by identifying a familiar word in the first language that sounds like or otherwise resembles the new word, and generating easily recalled images of a relationship between the new word.
<i>Contextualization</i>	Placing a word or phrase in a meaningful language sequence.
<i>Elaboration</i>	Relating new information to other concepts in memory.
<i>Transfer</i>	Using previously acquired linguistic and/or conceptual knowledge to facilitate a new language learning task.
<i>Inferencing</i>	Using available information to guess meanings of new items, predict outcomes, or fill in missing information.
<i>Question for Clarification</i>	Asking a teacher or other native speaker for repetition, paraphrasing, explanation and/or examples.

Table 2: Metacognitive Strategies (O'Malley, Chamot, et al., 1985a)

<i>Advance Organizers</i>	Making a general but comprehensive preview of the concept or principle in an anticipated learning activity.
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<i>Directed Attention</i>	Deciding in advance to attend in general to a learning task and to ignore irrelevant distracters.
<i>Selective Attention</i>	Deciding in advance to attend to specific aspects of language input or situational details that will cue the retention of language input.
<i>Self-management</i>	Understanding the conditions that help one learn and arranging for the presence of those conditions.
<i>Advance Preparation</i>	Planning for and rehearsing linguistic components necessary to carry out an upcoming language task.
<i>Self-monitoring</i>	Correcting one's speech for accuracy in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, or for appropriateness related to the setting or to the people who are present.
<i>Delayed Production</i>	Consciously deciding to postpone speaking to learn initially through listening comprehension.
<i>Self-evaluation</i>	Checking the outcomes of one's own language learning against an internal measure of completeness and accuracy.

Although the system by O'Malley and Chamot has thorough explanations of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, it has been criticized for its lack of emphasis on social and affective strategies (Tamada, 1997; Cohen, 1998). The system developed in 1985 lists only one type of social strategy (cooperation), although they later moved the strategy of *questioning for clarification* from a cognitive strategy to a social strategy (Chamot, 1987). They also have since added the affective strategy of *positive self-talk* to their system (Chamot and O'Malley, 1994). However, Oxford and others have argued that much more attention needs to be placed on social and affective strategies, which are also integral to the learning process (Oxford et al., 1990; Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995; Cohen, 1998).

Oxford's classification system (1990) is organized a little differently from O'Malley and Chamot's. First of all, most of the strategies that O'Malley and Chamot classify as cognitive strategies are broken down into three groups of *direct* strategies, which include 1) cognitive strategies that help "students store and retrieve information," 2) memory strategies that "enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means," and

3) compensation strategies, which “allow learners to use the language despite their often large gaps in knowledge” (Oxford, 1990, p. 37). Secondly, she places a strong emphasis on both social strategies, which are used for learning with others, and affective strategies, which help learners regulate their emotions (Oxford, 1990). Oxford categorizes both of these as *indirect* strategies, along with metacognitive strategies. Although Oxford’s system has been criticized because of possible overlaps between categories, it has also been declared the most comprehensive classification system (Tamada, 1997). Tables 3 and 4 show groups of social and affective strategies from Oxford (1990):

Table 3: Social Strategies (Oxford, 1990)

<i>Asking questions</i>	- Asking for clarification or verification - Asking for correction
<i>Cooperating with others</i>	- Cooperating with peers - Cooperating with proficient users of the new language
<i>Empathizing with others</i>	- Developing cultural understanding - Becoming aware of others’ thoughts and feelings

Table 4: Affective Strategies (Oxford, 1990)

<i>Lowering your anxiety</i>	- Using progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation - Using music - Using laughter
<i>Encouraging yourself</i>	- Making positive statements - Taking risks wisely - Rewarding yourself
<i>Taking your emotional temperature</i>	- Listening to your body - Using a checklist - Writing a language learning diary - Discussing your feelings with someone else

Successful Learners Use Learning Strategies

The use of strategies is essential to successful language learning. All language learners use learning strategies, but more successful learners use them more consciously, appropriately, purposefully and frequently (Oxford et al., 1990). Numerous studies have shown that more successful language learners use more strategies, use strategies more frequently, or use strategies more effectively (Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995; Oxford and Ehrman, 1995; Oxford, 1994; Politzer, 1983; O'Malley et al., 1985a; Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Oxford and Ehrman also found that more cognitive strategies are used by students that are perceived by teachers as being more effective, higher aptitude learners (1995).

More successful language learners not only use more strategies, but they use them differently. Higher-proficiency learners are more frequent and effective users of metacognitive strategies, for example. (Cohen, 1998). They also probably tend to use strategies less consciously (Cohen 1998). Griffiths found that not only do more advanced students use more strategies more frequently, but more advanced students also use strategies that are more sophisticated (involving manipulation – such as grouping or elaboration – rather than just memorization) and interactive (2003). Successful learners are also good at choosing combinations of strategies that are mutually supportive and meet the demands of the specific task well (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990).

Factors That Influence the Use of Language Learning Strategies

Language learners come with an enormous variety of backgrounds, cultures, personalities, ages, and learning styles. They also come with different attitudes and beliefs, expectations, and motivations for learning a new language. Each of these factors has an impact on how they learn the new language, and what kinds of strategies they tend to use

(Cohen, 1998; Skehan, 1989). Understanding what these factors are and what kind of influence they have on strategy use provides an important starting point for understanding how to instruct the learners.

Learning Styles

Perhaps one of the most important factors that affects students' use of strategies is their different learning styles (Reid, 1995; Schmeck, 1988; Oxford, 1989, 1990; Kinsella, 1995a, 1996; Rossi-Le, 1995; Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995; Kroonenberg, 1995). Learning styles are sometimes confused with learning strategies, but while learning *strategies* are outward, often conscious, and teachable things a student can do to improve their own learning, learning *styles* are inward characteristics that cannot be changed. According to Reid, a learning style is the way a person naturally processes and remembers new information or new skills (1995). Learning styles can be described in a number of different ways. For example, some learners might naturally prefer learning in groups, while others learn best working individually. Some are more reflective, and some are more impulsive. Some are visual learners, some are auditory learners, and some are kinesthetic learners. Some learners have a high tolerance for ambiguity and enjoy taking risks, while others prefer more structured situations that are less flexible and risky (Reid, 1995).

Learning styles have an enormous impact on which learning strategies students naturally find to be most helpful (Rossi-Le, 1995; Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995; Kinsella, 1995a, 1995b). Equally important, however, is that students' learning styles can and should be stretched so that they can make the best of a wider range of learning situations, by learning compensatory strategies (Reid, 1995; Brown, 1994). Looking at the links between

various learning styles and strategies, and finding ways to help students stretch their own learning styles, is an essential element in strategy instruction (Kroonenberg, 1995).

Schmeck (1988) argues that teachers must consider how learning style differences will affect an individual student's ability to use a particular learning strategy. In doing this, teachers should not only help students develop strategies that are naturally conducive to their learning styles, but they should also help students become more versatile learners by learning strategies that help them do things they may not be as comfortable with. For example, although memorization may not come naturally to some students, they need to be taught strategies for how to memorize information for when the need arises, such as memorizing new vocabulary. Likewise, students who are not naturally auditory learners must learn strategies that help them process information that is only available through listening.

Kroonenberg also advocates teaching to a variety of styles, both to reach all different types of students and to help students diversify their style preferences. She suggests that by using activities such as periodic portfolio assessments and individual conferences, students can be taught to reflect on their learning styles, notice in which areas they struggle, and learn strategies for improving their specific weaknesses (1995).

Learning styles can be described and understood in a number of different ways. Reid categorizes descriptions of learning styles into three major categories: cognitive learning styles, sensory learning styles, and personality learning styles (1995).

Cognitive learning styles. One type of cognitive learning style is related to field-dependence or -independence. Reid (1995, p. ix) defines a field-independent learner as one who learns sequentially, analyzing facts first and later analyzing ideas. Field-dependent

learners, on the other hand, learn best in context. They think holistically and intuitively, and they are sensitive to relationships and interactions (p. ix).

Chapelle (1995) describes a number of connections between field-dependence or – independence and learning strategy use. For example, field-dependent learners are more likely to use strategies for cooperating and empathizing with others, while field-independent learners are more likely to use strategies for arranging, planning, and evaluating learning. She also notes that both types of learners need to be guided into appreciating and using strategies that are do not necessarily come naturally for them.

Violand-Sánchez (1995) also describes characteristics of field-dependent and – independent learners. She found that most of the low-proficiency ESL students in her high school were field-dependent, and those students who succeeded were those who learned to become more field-independent. In other words, the ESL students in this study generally tended to naturally prefer field-dependence, but in order to succeed in U.S. classrooms that usually foster field-independence, students had to learn more field-independence. In order to help students who are more field-dependent, she says, teachers should be sensitive to students' affective needs, such as a positive learning environment and good relationships, provide classroom activities that utilize field-dependent strategies, such as cooperative learning activities, and help students learn strategies that strengthen their ability to be more independent. This suggests that teachers need a two-pronged approach to teaching field-dependent learners. They must first create a learning environment and learning activities that meet these students' affective and relational needs. Then teachers can begin to stretch these students by gradually teaching new strategies that foster more independence, in order to help

them become more well-rounded learners and be able to learn from the field-independent style of teaching that they are likely to encounter in the future.

A person's tolerance of ambiguity can also significantly impact which learning strategies a student uses (Oxford, 1994). A person who is more tolerant of ambiguity learns better when there is experiment, risk, and interaction. A person who is less tolerant of ambiguity prefers learning environments and tasks that are more structured and less risky (Reid, 1995). Learning a new language throws a person into an environment that is full of uncertainties, especially for low-proficiency learners, and for students who are naturally less tolerant of ambiguity, it can be overwhelming. A person's tolerance of ambiguity, and therefore willingness to take risks, has a serious effect on their ability to learn a new language (Ely, 1995). Teachers need to help their students realize their own difficulties in dealing with uncertainty, and help them view uncertainty more positively. Hopefully, students who struggle with uncertainty by feeling embarrassed or frustrated can begin to see uncertainty as an interesting opportunity to solve a puzzle (Ely, 1995).

Sensory learning styles. Sensory learning styles can be understood as perceptual or environmental. Perceptual learning styles include individuals who learn best through visual, auditory, kinesthetic (movement), or tactile (touch) senses. "Haptic" is a term that combines both kinesthetic and tactile learning preferences (Reid, 1995). O'Brien provides numerous helpful suggestions of strategies for different sensory types (1990, reprinted in Reid 1995). For example, in order to memorize something, visual learners should write it down, auditory learners should recite it out loud, and haptic learners should pace or walk while reciting to themselves. Environmental styles include sensitivity to physical variables such as sound,

light, temperature, food, etc., or sensitivity to sociological variables such as working individually, in pairs, or in groups, and level of teacher authority (Reid, 1995; Kinsella, 1996).

Personality learning styles. Personality can be described in a number of different ways. Oxford and Ehrman (1995) did a study using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, among other testing instruments, which describes personality in terms of introversion/extroversion, sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling, and judging/perceiving. They found that personality was definitely a significant factor in predicting which strategies are preferred by certain learners. For example, they found that social strategies were used more frequently by people who were more extroverted (and expressive) and sensing (concrete/sequential). Metacognitive strategies were used more frequently by people who were more judging (planful, systematic, and methodical) than perceiving.

Culture

All human behavior is influenced by culture, and how a person learns is no exception. This is partly reflected in learning styles, as different learning styles have been shown to be stronger in different cultures (Nelson, 1995; Stebbins, 1995; Damen, 1987; Reid, 1987). For example, Hawaiian-American learners tend to be more field-sensitive than most middle class Americans in the U.S. (Nelson, 1995). Kinesthetic and tactile learning is a strong preference for a large majority of ESL students, according to a survey by Reid (1987).

Perhaps the most significant influence that culture has on a person is a result of how a person is taught to learn, which may influence their preferred learning strategies. Numerous studies have shown that students from different cultures have a tendency to use different

learning strategies (see Oxford, 1996; Bedell & Oxford 1996; Griffiths, 2003) and prioritize common strategies differently (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). For example, many Asian students tend to use memorization strategies more prevalently than other students (Oxford, 1994).

The connection between cultural differences and learning strategies can provide important insight as to why students respond differently to different classroom activities. In one study, for example, a researcher looked for reasons as to why Vietnamese students are often not very interactive in North American classrooms, both in class discussions and in group work. Although North American teachers often assume that silence in the classroom is simply part of Vietnamese culture, this researcher observed numerous university classrooms in Vietnam and found that the noise level (from students talking) was usually far higher than in average U.S. university-level classrooms. In other words, the silence observed of many Vietnamese students in the U.S. is actually opposite of how they were probably used to learning in Vietnam. Sullivan cites a number of reasons for this difference, including the very different styles of verbal interaction (U.S. classrooms tend to emphasize the importance of each student being heard as an individual, while in Vietnamese classrooms, students tend to overlap a great deal and support each other), and the investment in the relationships in the classroom (Vietnamese student-student relationships are often life-long, whereas U.S. student-student relationships are often short-term and very shallow) (Sullivan, 1996). Teachers can help Vietnamese students not only by being open to their different interactional styles, but also helping them learn better strategies to deal with their new classroom culture.

One cautionary note is necessary regarding cultural influences on learning: although it may be possible to make some generalizations that help teachers understand how and why certain students learn the way they do, it is dangerous to trust too much in stereotypes that may be either inaccurate or over generalized. Not only are individuals more than capable of breaking any kind of generalization that can be made, but they are also very capable of learning new ways of learning (Kennedy, 2002).

Gender

Gender also seems to be a factor in strategy use. A number of studies have found that females employ a wider range of strategies than males and are more frequent users of strategies, although certain strategies may be used more extensively by males (Kaylani, 1996; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). One study found that females are much more likely to use compensation strategies than males, which enable the learner to establish understanding even when they do not know a specific word, such as guessing the meaning of something or describing a word (Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). Another study (Politzer, 1983) found that females use social strategies (such as cooperation and asking questions) more often than males. However, gender may not be as important as other factors, such as the student's proficiency in the target language, which is discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter (Kaylani, 1996; Griffiths, 2003).

Age

Although one study showed that age (using ages 14-65) did not have a significant impact on strategy use (Griffiths, 2003), Purdie and Oliver (1999), who did a study on strategy use of school-aged children, point out that the psychological and social differences

between adults, adolescents and children cause them to learn languages differently.

According to Wong Fillmore (1985), social strategies are more important than cognitive strategies for younger learners (cited in Purdie and Oliver, 1999). Oxford (1994) also says that students use different strategies at different ages, which makes sense, especially since some strategies are more sophisticated than others, and because language content changes as learners mature. For example, many of the metacognitive strategies, which require higher-level thinking skills, are more likely to be used by older learners than by young children.

Educational Background

Students' educational background has a profound effect on their experience in a second language classroom. For example, students who have already had a significant amount of formal education are better able to understand the concept of literacy, such as being able to draw understanding from visual symbols. They are also more likely to feel comfortable in the classroom and understand the routines, the purpose of instructional activities, and have realistic expectations about the time and effort necessary to learn a second language. Depending on the level of previous education, these students may also be able to analyze the new language metacognitively, such as in noticing and hypothesizing about grammatical patterns (Bell, 1991).

Educational background also impacts students' use of learning strategies. Oxford and Ehrman found that students with more previous formal education tend to use more cognitive strategies than other students (1995). It can be assumed that every type of education – formal or informal – from every culture, brings with it numerous strategies that learners are expected

to utilize in the process of acquiring and using knowledge. For example, when someone learns (through informal education) to grow garden plants, the process of planting the seed and watering it is mostly likely taught through *directed physical response*, where the student "acts out" the new knowledge and therefore retains it better than if they were simply told to do it out of context. In many cultures, students of formal education learn numerous strategies for memorizing material. It is said that in ancient times, for example, orators learned to memorize lengthy speeches by imagining themselves walking through a house, where each room represented a different part of the speech (Oxford, 1990, p. 38). According to Bell (1991), students who have had experience in formal classroom settings are likely to have developed learning strategies that can be applied to learning a new language in a classroom setting, and are therefore likely to make faster progress than those who have had little or no exposure to the formal classroom setting. Not that students who have not had formal education have not acquired learning strategies of their own, but many learning strategies used in formal education are not likely to be acquired elsewhere.

A learner's proficiency in the target language also influences strategy use, as learners tend to use different strategies at different levels (Oxford, 1994; Politzer, 1983). This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Motivation

Motivation is one of the most significant factors in strategy use (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995), and it is an essential factor to consider in the instruction of learning strategies (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Oxford, 1990; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). The more motivated learners are to learn

the target language, the more strategies they are likely to use, the more frequently they are likely to use strategies, and the more successful they are likely to be (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Kaylani, 1996; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). Likewise, the less motivated learners are in learning the target language, the fewer strategies they probably use. In a situation where a learner needs to learn the target language for daily survival in a new country, such as being able to buy something in a store or ask for directions or get a job, the learner is likely to use every strategy they know of – consciously or subconsciously – in order to learn the language and communicate his or her needs. That learner might also be especially receptive to learning new strategies that are recognizably useful. However, a student who is learning a second language in order to fulfill a course requirement and does not anticipate using the language in any other context would probably not be nearly as resourceful or anxious to use all possible strategies for language learning and communication.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) explain that there are two types of motivation, or orientation toward language learning. Instrumental motivation is when a language is being learned in order to accomplish some purpose, such as progressing in one's career or fulfilling a course requirement. Integrative motivation, on the other hand, occurs when a learner learns a new language in order to integrate themselves into a new community which uses that language, and reflects a sincere interest in both the people and the culture of that language. Although either type of motivation promotes successful language learning, students with integrative motivation are generally more successful language learners than students with instrumental motivation (Gardner and Lambert, 1959; Gardner, 1960), because instrumental

motivation tends to be more limited to a specific goal, while integrative motivation is more holistic.

Attitudes and Beliefs

Language learning is also significantly impacted by the learner's beliefs about language learning. Beliefs can be shaped by previous language learning experiences, and by cultural background. Some are fairly well aligned with current second language learning research, but many are not (Horwitz, 1987). All beliefs have a significant effect on learners' receptiveness to the ideas and activities presented in a language class, and when the classroom approach is different from the learners' experience, those beliefs can be inhibitive (Cotterall, 1995). Oxford (1994) also reports that negative attitudes and beliefs have a negative impact on a learner's ability to employ good strategies, and Cotterall (1995) found that learners' beliefs about language learning have a significant impact on their development of autonomy.

Wenden (1987b) did a study which explored insights of second language learners about how to learn a second language. She found that students have a wide range of specific beliefs about how languages should be learned, and that those beliefs have a significant impact on which strategies they use. Some students in the study believed that language is best learned through using it in natural contexts, practicing it, living in it, and not worrying about making mistakes. These learners were more likely to use communication strategies such as asking questions and using gestures and illustrations. Other students believed that the best way to learn a new language is to learn about the language, through taking a formal course, studying grammar and vocabulary, and learning from mistakes. These students were

more likely to use cognitive strategies such as organizing new words into lists and using resources such as dictionaries and grammar books. Some students also had strong beliefs about the personal factors that influence language learning, such as feelings, self-concept, and language learning aptitude, although these students were not distinguished from the others in terms of strategy use.

According to Horwitz (1987), teachers also have beliefs about language learning, and when teachers' beliefs and students' beliefs don't agree, it can become a source of conflict in the classroom. Teachers need to listen to their students' beliefs and use that discussion as a starting point to clear up misconceptions about language learning and help students learn better strategies. Horwitz developed a Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) to test student beliefs about how languages are learned, and found that some misconceptions can lead to the use of less effective strategies, or prevent students from using good strategies. For example, if a student believes that a language can only be learned through independent reading and writing, he or she is not likely to be enthusiastic about cooperative learning activities, and the student is not likely to develop good communication strategies.

Other factors that influence use of language learning strategies

There are also other factors that impact strategy use. For example, an individual's aptitude for language learning has an effect on strategy use (Skehan, 1989). Some factors that influence strategy use depend not so much on the individual as on the context. These include the purpose of the task (a person is likely to use more strategies if the task is something necessary for survival rather than a task that is required to complete an

assignment), resources that are available, and the individual's access and ability to use those resources (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 1994; Oxford & Leaver, 1996).

In summary, it is important to understand that learners come with an enormous variety of factors that influence their use of learning strategies, including their learning styles, cultures, educational backgrounds, beliefs, motivations, ages, and genders. Being aware of the individual mix of characteristics that comes with each student provides essential groundwork for effective strategy instruction.

Strategy Instruction

Although at least one researcher has said that strategy instruction is not effective (Skehan, 1989), there seems to be enough evidence to the contrary to be confident that strategy instruction can, indeed, be effective at helping students learn more successfully (for example, see Politzer, 1983; O'Malley et al., 1985b; Oxford et al., 1990; O'Malley, 1987; Rubin, 1987; Cohen, Weaver, & Li, 1998; Oxford & Leaver, 1996; Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1996; Oxford, 1990; Muñiz-Swicegood, 1994; Stewner-Manzanares, Chamot, O'Malley, Kupper, & Russo, 1985). Strategy instruction is also effective in promoting learner autonomy, or helping learners take control of their own learning (Oxford et al., 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Stewner-Manzanares et al., 1985). In addition, strategy training can help teachers become more aware of their students' needs and improve the relationship of their instruction to students' styles and strategies (Oxford et al., 1990; Nyikos, 1996).

Cohen uses the term *strategy-based instruction* to describe "explicit classroom instruction directed at learners regarding their language learning and language use strategies,

and provided alongside instruction in the foreign language itself” (1998, p. 17-18). In this paper, the terms “instruction,” “strategy instruction,” and “strategy training,” will all be used interchangeably to describe “strategy-based instruction.”

How is good strategy instruction carried out? This section explores what experts say in answer to that question, including general characteristics of good strategy instruction and a few instructional frameworks for strategy training.

Characteristics of Good Strategy Instruction

Researchers have come up with a number of characteristics of good strategy instruction. As the following sections will show, strategy instruction should be explicit, integrated, task-based, and individualized. It should also deal with affective factors and promote learner autonomy.

Explicit. One essential element of good strategy instruction is that it is explicit – that it raises learner consciousness both of their own strategy use and of the existence of other strategies (Cohen, 1998; Rubin, 1987; Oxford, 1994; Nyikos, 1996; Oxford and Leaver, 1996; Oxford et al., 1990; Wenden, 1987c). Rubin further explains that being active and conscious helps learners to internalize information (1987). While less successful teachers think it is sufficient to allow a learning strategy to be embedded in a task without making it explicit, good teachers are conscious that what is self-evident to them is not necessarily self-evident to their students (Nyikos 1996).

Raising consciousness is not always easy to do. It requires the instructor to be persistent both in general discussion of strategies and in making students aware of their use

of strategies (Oxford, 1996). Good teachers help students become more aware of learning strategies by reflecting on a language activity after it is completed, and analyzing their strategy use (Nyikos, 1996).

Integrated and task-based. Strategy instruction is much more effective when it is integrated into regular classroom activities, rather than treated separately, and when numerous strategies are taught over a longer period of time (Cohen, 1998; Oxford et al., 1990; Nyikos, 1996; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford and Burry-Stock, 1995; Oxford, 1994; Oxford and Leaver, 1996; O'Malley et al., 1985b; Wenden, 1987c). When only one strategy was taught, students did not seem to benefit as much as they could have if a number of strategies had been taught (Oxford, 1990). Results from another study indicate that because strategy instruction was not integrated into normal class work, it was seen by students as irrelevant (Oxford et al., 1990).

The concept of integrating instruction to the existing curriculum is somewhat related to Wenden's idea of "task-based" instruction (1995). In order to complete a task successfully, she says, learners need to determine the purpose of the task, what type of task it is and how much familiarity they already have with this type of task. Then, they need to figure out how to do the task: what knowledge or skills are necessary, what should be done first, and what strategies should be used to do it. Teachers are warned against designing their curriculum based on strategies. Instead, teachers should plan lessons around tasks that are authentic and representative of the learners' needs, relevant to the students, and appropriate to the students' level; then, they need to help learners figure out strategies to use based on those tasks (Wenden, 1995; Oxford, 1994; O'Malley, 1988; Scarcella and Oxford, 1992).

Individualized. Because particular learning strategies are not equally effective for all students and different students have different needs, strategy instruction must be individualized. This can be done partly by helping students to use strategies that they have a natural affinity toward, because of their learning style, culture, or other individual characteristics (Bull & Ma, 2001; Schmeck, 1988; O'Malley, Russo, Chamot, & Stewner-Manzanares, 1988; Chamot & O'Malley, 1996; Oxford, 1994; Oxford & Leaver, 1996; and Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). However, personalizing strategy instruction must also be done by stretching students and helping them become more versatile learners (Schmeck, 1988; Kroonenberg, 1995).

In order to help different learners use different strategies at different times, students also need to be provided with a range of strategies to choose from for a given task (O'Malley et al., 1988; Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 1990; Chamot and O'Malley, 1994). Another way to make strategy training more effective for individual students is to help them generate their own strategies; when students create their own way for remembering something or doing something, it is easier for them because it is personally meaningful, whether or not others can understand it (Oxford et al., 1990). Good teachers are well aware that not all learners learn the same way, and they are very in tune with students' needs and abilities by getting constant feedback and checking for understanding (Nyikos, 1996). When students are able to analyze their individual needs and communicate these needs to the teacher, it becomes more possible to individualize instruction (Oxford et al., 1990).

Finally, part of personalizing strategy instruction is helping students build on prior knowledge and strategies that they are already using (Rubin, 1987; Oxford et al., 1990). The

first step to helping students build on prior knowledge is to assess students' current needs and strategy use (Oxford, et al., 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Cohen, 1998; Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary, & Robbins, 1999).

Promotes learner autonomy. Learner autonomy is often mentioned as an integral purpose of strategy training (Oxford and Leaver, 1996; Oxford, 1994; Cohen, 1998; Rubin, 1987; Oxford et al., 1990; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1991 and Holec, 1987). One focus of strategy training must be to help learners take responsibility for the learning process and evaluate both their own progress and the usefulness of individual learning strategies (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 1994). Once students are able to take control, they can be the best judge of how to approach a learning task and choose which strategies should be used (Rubin, 1987; Oxford and Leaver, 1996). Self-direction also helps students transfer learning strategies to other tasks, both in and outside the classroom (Rubin, 1987; Oxford, 1994).

Deals with affective factors. Affective factors, such as emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and motivations, are all influential in strategy use and need to be addressed directly in strategy instruction (Oxford, 1994; Oxford, 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). If learners hold unhelpful attitudes and beliefs, such as "I have no control over my language learning, and therefore it is not my responsibility to learn", strategy training is unlikely to be effective (Oxford et al., 1990). Attitudes and beliefs are a crucial part of strategy training (Oxford & Leaver, 1996; Wenden & Rubin 1987; Oxford, 1990). Teachers need to pay careful attention to their students' attitudes, motivations, anxiety level, etc., and do what they can to promote a positive atmosphere, encourage self-esteem,

address negative beliefs and attitudes, and provide interesting and relevant materials and activities (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992).

Instructional Frameworks for Strategy Training

In addition to general guidelines about how strategy instruction should be carried out, several frameworks for strategy instruction exist, which are related in some ways. The following section will focus primarily on three different instructional frameworks, which are summarized in Table 5.

The first model of strategy instruction is from the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach, or CALLA (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Chamot et al., 1999). This approach focuses on the integration of three aspects of learning: content area instruction, academic language development, and explicit instruction in learning strategies. It is particularly targeted toward students who have at least an advanced-beginning or intermediate level of English proficiency. By helping students develop specific academic vocabulary to go with each content area (like science, math, social studies, etc.), it meets the fundamental belief that language is best learned when it is meaningful and applicable to a specific context or goal. It is also based on a scaffolding model for strategy instruction, which emphasizes extensive teacher responsibility and support in the beginning, followed by less and less teacher support as students are increasingly able to use strategies autonomously. This process must be individualized, however, by assessing which strategies students need, and giving more assistance to different students who have more need for strategy instruction. (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; 1996). One of the nice things about this model is that it is presented very simply through five basic steps: preparation, presentation,

practice, evaluation, and expansion. The book by Chamot et al. (1999) includes a large selection of helpful activities and sample forms for teachers to use for each of these five stages.

Another model for strategy instruction is termed “Completely Informed Training,” or sometimes “Strategy-Plus-Control Training.” It was first introduced in an

Table 5: Instructional Frameworks for Strategy Training

CALLA (Chamot & O'Malley, 1987, 1994; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Chamot et al., 1999)	Completely Informed Training (Oxford, 1990; Oxford et al., 1990)	Levels of Strategy Instruction According to Consciousness (Oxford and Leaver, 1996)
		No Consciousness – strategies are embedded into the curriculum without explicit discussion.
Preparation – Students prepare for strategy instruction by identifying their prior knowledge about and the use of specific strategies.	Prior to strategy instruction <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set the scene and explore attitudes, expectations, and current strategy use. 2. Select strategies. 3. Consider integration of strategy training. 4. Focus directly on affective issues. 5. Prepare materials and activities. 1 – Students try a language task without training in the target strategy. Then, they discuss how they did it; the teacher praises any useful strategies and self-directed attitudes mentioned.	Awareness – Students are introduced to the general concept of language learning strategies and reflect on their own strategy use.
Presentation – The teacher demonstrates the new learning strategy and explains how and when to use it.	2 – The teacher explains and demonstrates the new strategy or strategies (mentioning the need for greater self-direction and expected benefits, such as higher grades, faster progress, and greater self-confidence).	Attention – Students go from thinking about strategies in a very general sense to thinking about specific strategies.
Practice – Students practice using the strategy with regular activities of moderate difficulty.	3 – Learners apply the new strategy to the same language task as before, or a similar one.	Intentionality – Students' attitudes and beliefs come to reflect value on strategy use.
Evaluation – Students self-evaluate their use of the learning strategy and how well the strategy is working for them. Expansion – Students extend the usefulness of the learning strategy by applying it to new situations or learning tasks.	4 – The teacher shows how the strategies can be transferred to other tasks, and provides practice using the techniques with new tasks. 5 – The teacher helps students understand how to evaluate the success of their strategy use and to gauge their progress as more responsible and self-directed learners.	Control – Students are able to evaluate the success of a learning strategy and transfer it to other relevant situations or tasks.
(This model is recursive and flexible.)	Following strategy instruction <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evaluate the strategy training. 2. Revise and begin strategy training again. 	

article by Oxford et al. in 1990, and was also presented in Oxford's book from the same year. It is actually presented as one part of an overall strategy training model, which focuses on steps that teachers should take when implementing strategy training, including preparation on behalf of both students and teachers, issues that teachers should consider for instruction, the "Completely Informed Training" method for instruction, and how teachers should follow up instruction with evaluation and revision.

The third instructional framework was presented by Oxford and Leaver in 1996. It is a little different in that it is not so much a list of steps for the instructor to go through, but a division of types of instruction that can be carried out, according to the level of consciousness that each type of instruction promotes (from *no consciousness*, to *awareness*, *attention*, *intentionality*, and finally *control*). However, because learners must progress through each level of consciousness one at a time, it does correlate relatively well with the steps laid out by the other two models. It is included in this discussion because it examines strategy training from a little different angle, and it is interesting to reflect on the comparison between the progressive stages learners go through in strategy training and their level of consciousness and autonomy. Oxford and Leaver use this division of consciousness levels, where the highest level of consciousness and best instruction occurs at the level of *control*, to demonstrate the value of the "Strategy-Plus-Control Training" model described above.

The Oxford and Leaver model describes one level of instruction that does not correlate with the other models, where the learner has *no consciousness* of strategy use. This type of instruction is also called "blind" or "camouflaged" instruction (Oxford et al., 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987). In other words, strategies are taught in such a way that students are

encouraged to use strategies, and shown how to use them, without ever talking about strategies metacognitively. It is generally advised not to use this type of instruction, since it goes directly against one of the core ingredients of successful strategy instruction – that it should be explicit – as discussed earlier. However, one instructor did find it to be a useful technique when he was unable to do more conscious instruction with some of his students because they felt threatened by new ways of learning and new concepts such as learner responsibility (Oxford et al., 1990), which may be true for some beginning learners.

Numerous parallels can be drawn between these three instructional frameworks (*CALLA, Completely Informed Training* by Oxford, and the *Levels of Strategy Instruction According to Consciousness* by Oxford and Leaver). These parallels are visually represented in Table 5. The following explanation uses the five steps given by the CALLA model (Preparation, Presentation, Practice, Evaluation, and Expansion) to compare the frameworks in more detail.

1: Preparation. Effective strategy training requires a certain amount of *preparation*, to use the CALLA term, which involves both input and output from the students. First of all, the teacher needs to elicit a certain amount of information from the students, in order to be better informed about the students' needs and make appropriate decisions about which strategies to teach and how to teach them. This is usually done through some sort of pre-assessment tool, such as a survey or questionnaire, which identifies information about students' backgrounds, goals and expectations, attitudes and beliefs, prior knowledge about strategies, and current strategy use. (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990;

Chamot et al., 1999; Oxford, 1990; Oxford et al., 1990; Oxford & Leaver, 1996; and Cohen, 1998)

This kind of pre-assessment actually serves another purpose as well: to introduce students to the concept of learning strategies, and to help them to begin reflecting on their own strategy use. This is exactly what Oxford and Leaver term *Awareness*, where students' consciousness about learning strategies is first "pricked" or "woken up." Students who have gone through strategy assessment are likely to be more interested in strategies, especially when they understand that language learning can be made easier through the use of good strategies (Oxford et al., 1990). In Oxford's "Completely Informed Training" model, several separate steps are used in this phase to help the teacher focus on each essential aspect of preparation, as described in Table 3. Besides surveys and questionnaires, other pre-assessment tools include interviews, observations, verbal reports, diaries and dialogue journals, and learner histories, all of which are described later in this chapter. Strategy awareness can also occur through games (such as those described in Oxford, 1990, ch. 1) lectures, and discussions.

Before going on to present a new strategy to students, Oxford's Completely Informed Training model uses a little twist to get students interested in learning the new strategy: by having students first try to do an activity without training in the target strategy, students are better able to reflect on what they already know, and what specific challenges exist in that task which could be aided by the use of the target strategy. This provides good preparation for the teacher's subsequent direct instruction and demonstration of the new strategy.

2: Presentation. In the second stage of strategy instruction, learners are presented with a specific strategy or set of strategies to be taught. Part of this involves giving each strategy a name. Whether the name is one devised by experts in the field, or one that the teacher or learners come up with, it is helpful for getting students to think about the strategy explicitly, discuss it, and remember it. The teacher describes how the strategy is used, why it is important and how it applies to the specific task at hand, and models it for the students with several examples (CALLA, 1994; Oxford et al., 1990).

In Oxford and Leaver's model, this *presentation* phase correlates with what they call *Attention*, where the instructor tries to help students go from thinking about strategies in a very general sense to thinking about specific strategies. At this level, students become involved in planning specific strategies to use in specific language tasks, looking at how specific strategies relate to certain learning styles, comparing their own strategy use with others, offering advice to each other about using strategies more effectively, etc.

3: Practice. In the third stage of strategy instruction, learners are given the opportunity to *practice* the strategy or set of strategies that are being targeted. (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Chamot et al., 1999; Oxford, 1990; Oxford et al., 1990; and Cohen, 1998). One of the important elements of this phase is that it is integrated into the regular class work, so the students can make a solid connection between the new strategy and authentic tasks that they must accomplish. It is also important that the tasks are challenging enough to require the use of the new strategy, but not so difficult that they are overwhelming. In this phase, teachers should provide lots of encouragement and feedback. As time goes on and students become more proficient and independent, the

teacher can provide fewer reminders and give students more choice in which strategy to use. (Chamot et al., 1999)

Oxford and Leaver call the fourth level of consciousness *Intentionality*, where students go from thinking about a specific strategy to making the decision to use that strategy. In order to use the strategy, they must view the strategy as helpful: they must perceive that the benefit outweighs the effort of using the strategy. Part of this also entails seeing value in both the language they are studying and the specific tasks in front of them, as well as feeling confident that they can get the support they need. In other words, strategy instruction at this level must deal directly with students' attitudes and beliefs. This can be done partly by helping students understand what a particular strategy does and why it is useful. Dialogue journals, individual or group counseling, and group discussions are also helpful for identifying and addressing negative attitudes and beliefs.

4: Evaluation. In the fourth stage of strategy instruction, learners reflect on their use of a specific strategy or strategies and evaluate its usefulness. This helps promote learner autonomy, and enable the instruction to be more individualized – both ingredients of good strategy instruction. Different strategies are helpful in varying degrees to different students, and in order for students to take control of their own learning, they need to be able to make choices about which strategies they should use for which tasks. In the evaluation phase, students learn to do their own planning, monitoring, and evaluating of strategy applications. Evaluation can take place both for individual strategies that were targeted recently and overall strategy use. (Chamot and O'Malley, 1994; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Chamot et al., 1999; Oxford, 1990; Oxford et al., 1990; and Cohen, 1998).

In the Completely Informed Training model, the evaluation piece and the expansion piece are actually reversed. However, the order is probably not too important – the CALLA model even states explicitly that the five stages are recursive, and teachers may find it helpful to move between various stages as needed. Both evaluation and expansion help learners gain autonomy and control.

Activities that encourage learners to evaluate strategies include discussions, checklists, learning logs, journals, interviews, and portfolio assessments. Questionnaires, similar to what might be used for pre-assessment, can also be used. (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Chamot et al., 1999; Oxford, 1990; and Oxford et al., 1990)

5: Expansion. In the final stage of strategy instruction (according to the CALLA model), learners are shown how to transfer the new strategy to different situations or tasks, and given opportunities to practice it. (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Chamot et al., 1999; Oxford, 1990; Oxford et al., 1990; and Cohen, 1998). This requires that students have both a solid understanding of a strategy, and also a good understanding of the specific requirements and challenges of the new task. Again, teachers need to provide more extensive support at the beginning, by telling students which strategy to transfer to which task and how to do it, and asking students to reflect and evaluate the success of the transfer. As students become more comfortable applying strategies to new contexts on their own, less teacher support is needed and students become more autonomous. *Evaluation* and *Expansion* are the two essential pieces of Oxford and Leaver's final level of consciousness, which is *Control*.

Discussions, cooperative activities, and learning logs are just a few activities that can help students learn to expand their strategy expertise (Chamot et al., 1999). Another good tool is to have students share strategies with each other and coach each other on how to learn more effectively (Oxford et al., 1990).

As stated previously, the CALLA model is recursive, and it is intended that teachers both repeat the cycle continuously as new strategies are taught, and move flexibly between stages as the context and students' needs require. Following the strategy instruction, the "Completely Informed Training" model also calls for evaluation and revision on the part of the teacher, and continual repetition of the training cycle.

Strategy Assessment

Strategy assessment is a significant issue because it plays a crucial role in two phases of strategy instruction: *Preparation* and *Evaluation*. The goal of strategy assessment is to elicit information from learners regarding how they learn: which strategies they use when, and how often. Strategy assessment can also help the learner become more reflective and recognize the value of learning strategies (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1985). There are a wide range of strategy assessment tools, each of which has its own advantages and disadvantages, including interviews and questionnaires, observations, verbal reports, diaries and journals, and recollective studies. Computer tracking systems have also come into recent use by some researchers (Cohen & Scott, 1996), but they are not discussed here, because they require equipment that is unavailable for this research project and therefore inapplicable.

Interviews and Questionnaires

One of the most common methods of data collection is through individual and small group interviews, and through surveys and questionnaires. Although interviews are conducted orally, while questionnaires are written, they have a couple of similarities. Firstly, both use a set of questions (which is often preset) to elicit learner responses. Secondly, in both of these techniques, questions can be either more or less structured. Structured questions generally require yes or no responses, or indications of frequency. Less structured questions are open-ended. (See Table 6.)

Table 6: Sample Questions for an Interview or Questionnaire

<i>Structured Questions</i> (Oxford, 1990)	Answer using 1-5, where 1 = never true of me, and 5 = always true of me - How often do you try to find patterns in English? - How often do you try to remember a new word by connecting it with a mental image or picture? - When you can't think of a word during a conversation in English, how often do you use gestures? - How often do you look for more opportunities to read in English?
<i>Unstructured Questions</i>	- How do you remember new words? - What helps you understand a difficult reading passage? - What do you do when you don't understand what someone is saying to you?

When more structured questions are used, it is easier to see overall patterns and it is easier to use with greater volumes of learners. When less structure is used in the questions, it allows the learner to have more control of the information. The learner can elaborate and provide more detail and other information that might not otherwise be gained. (Cohen & Scott, 1996). However, lack of structure also makes it more difficult to interpret and analyze (Oxford, 1990).

Written questionnaires have the advantage that they may be less time-consuming for the researcher. Oxford's *Strategy Inventory for Language Learning* (1990) is one well-known questionnaire that has been used around the world and found to be very reliable (Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995). However, the level of language proficiency required to complete this questionnaire makes it difficult to use with low-proficiency students.

Interviews may be more time consuming, but they also enable the researcher and learner to work together to describe strategy use as fully and accurately as possible. They also allow for the flexibility to pursue points of interest that come up and may not have been foreseen (Cohen & Scott, 1996; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Interviews can be conducted either individually or in small groups. Individual interviews can be especially time-consuming. Small group interviews may save time, but they may also be influenced by more out-going students, since some students may not want to say what they really think since their peers are listening (Cohen & Scott, 1996). Group interviews also make it difficult to individualize the data (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Both individual and small group interviews rely heavily on the rapport established between interviewer and interviewee, and are affected by the level of formality. Formality is related not so much to the level of structure that is used in the questions, as how the interview is conducted. If the interview is more formal, students might be uncomfortable and therefore find it hard to give honest, open answers. Too much informality, however, might not be desirable for the interviewer to maintain objectivity (Cohen & Scott, 1996).

One of the disadvantages for both interviews and questionnaires is that they rely on self-reported data. Learners may not be aware of their own strategy use, or they may have

inaccurate perceptions. One suggestion for helping learners report accurately is to have the learner focus on a specific, recent activity, which is similar to doing a verbal report, as described later. Another disadvantage is that unless the student's native language is used, the learner may not fully understand the questions or be able to answer them completely (Cohen & Scott, 1996).

Observations

Although observations are limited because they allow only observable strategy use to be recorded, they are very useful for observing some kinds of strategies (like *cooperation*, *planning*, or *organizing*), and they may reveal insights about strategy use that the learners themselves may not realize (Oxford, 1990; Cohen & Scott, 1996). Observations can be performed by a number of observers who develop a system for consistency, they can be done through a recording with video or audio, or they can be done by an individual (who may or may not also be the instructor) through field notes. It is important to remember that results may be limited to only students who are more verbal or extroverted. Furthermore, observers may be affected by biases, or prior expectations, observations can be quite time-consuming as well. In order to increase objectivity and get more quantifiable data, observers may make use of a structured form, such as the "Classroom observation guide" used in the study by O'Malley et al. (1985a). However, a structured form is also more limiting; therefore, some observers choose to combine the use of a form with more general note-taking (Cohen & Scott, 1996).

Verbal reports

Verbal reports are similar to interviews, except that they focus on specific language tasks and try to get the learner as close to the actual language task as possible (in time and setting) (Cohen & Scott, 1996). One type of verbal report is the think-aloud method, where learners are trained to think out loud as they go through a learning task (Cohen & Scott, 1996; Oxford, 1990; Cohen, 1997, 1998). Verbal report methods can be insightful in many ways, most notably that since information is gained so closely to the actual language task, it can reveal things that are lost when the learner reflects on the experience much later. However, disadvantages of verbal reports are that the learner may need to be taught how to do it, they depend on the learner's level of consciousness of strategy use, they depend on the respondent's verbal skills (which may be low in a beginning ESL class), they can potentially be intrusive to the language tasks, and the learner might change or suppress data because they know it's being recorded (Cohen & Scott, 1996; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Verbal reports, like other self-reported data, also omit strategies that are used unconsciously (Cohen, 1997, 1998).

Diaries and Dialogue Journals

With a diary, the learner writes reflections over an extended period of time (Oxford, Lavine, Felkins, Hollaway, & Saleh, 1996; Cohen & Scott, 1996). With dialogue journals, the learner writes reflections with a reader who responds (usually a teacher, but it could also be other students) (Peyton & Reed, 1990; Cohen & Scott, 1996). Both of these can be very useful in the classroom setting, because not only do they help teachers find out more about their students, but they can also be beneficial to the learners themselves as they practice writing and become more aware of their own thought processes (Cohen & Scott, 1996;

Peyton & Reed, 1990; Oxford et al., 1996). There are several ways to use diaries and dialogue journals to gain information about strategy usage. For example, teachers can ask students to write reflectively about their learning, either from very recent experiences (for example, by asking, "How did you remember the new words from last week's story?") or from more distant experiences, such as in a learner history (described below). Teachers can also have their students take notes about a learning task during class, and then use the notes to write reflections about strategy use later. Alternatively, students could take notes directly in their dialogue journals during class about questions or comments they have (Cohen & Scott, 1996), or students could learn to record some of their own strategy usage in their journals. Diaries and dialogue journals can produce a huge volume of data, however, and the data can be quite random and difficult to categorize. They are also subject to the same criticisms of interviews and questionnaires, because they produce self-reported data that may not be accurate or complete (Cohen & Scott, 1996). Moreover, like many types of assessment, if diaries and dialogue journals are written in the target language, they are also dependent on the level of writing proficiency of the students, which is probably not high in a beginning class.

Recollective Studies

Through recollective studies, or learner histories, learners are guided to think about a prior language experience (from months or years in the past) and reconstruct what it was like (Cohen & Scott, 1996; Oxford & Green, 1996; Oxford et al., 1996). They are very unstructured, and can be either written or spoken. The large gap in time between the actual learning task and recollection does not enable the learner to provide as much detail, but it

does enable the learner to think about the experience as a whole, and possibly be more objective. The distance of time might also help the learner to reflect and evaluate what worked and what did not. Oxford & Green (1996) suggest that learner histories are a useful first step toward helping both teacher and learner discover past experiences, learning styles, and learning strategies that the learner is already using.

Every method of strategy assessment has its advantages and disadvantages. Some are more time-consuming than others, and some are more suited to being integrated into the regular class work than others. Most assessment methods (aside from uninteractive observations) offer at least some learning opportunities for the students themselves, since they ask learners to reflect on their own learning in some way. The best strategy assessment is done by carefully choosing a complementary combination of assessment methods (Cohen & Scott, 1996; Oxford, 1990).

Special Challenge: Low-Proficiency Learners

A great deal of research has been conducted regarding the strategy instruction of intermediate or advanced second language learners or using the students' native language for instruction (Nunan, 1996; Oxford, 1989, 1990, 1996; Oxford et al., 1990; Wenden, 1987c; O'Malley et al., 1985b). However, relatively little research has been done concerning the strategy instruction of low-proficiency students, without the use of the native language for instruction.

Instruction and Assessment of Low Proficiency Learners

Learners who are not yet proficient in the target language present a special challenge for both strategy instruction and strategy assessment, especially if the instructor cannot use the student's first language (Chamot et al., 1999). Not only is it difficult for the teacher to talk about strategies, but it is also difficult for students to communicate their problems and frustrations to the teacher. Lower level students also probably tend to have higher anxiety (Griffiths, 2003). In addition, many of these students are either nonliterate in their first language, or they have low literacy in their first language. Either way, part of their challenge is in literacy in general, which adds to the challenges of strategy instruction.

Strategy assessment is challenging for low-proficiency learners as well, especially if they are learners of English. The language barrier impedes the effectiveness of many testing instruments, which are only available in English. Even if translation may be considered, it is difficult to translate testing instruments effectively.

Teaching strategies to low-proficiency learners must begin with knowing as much as possible about the learners themselves. Part of that involves understanding which strategies low-proficiency learners tend to use. Knowing those strategies can be helpful because it indicates which strategies these learners are likely to find easiest to understand, and most applicable. It also indicates how low-proficiency learners need to grow in order to expand and improve their strategy skills. Finally, a few researchers offer some general advice specific to teaching low-proficiency learners.

Strategies used by low-proficiency learners

Several studies have investigated the strategies that low-proficiency learners tend to use. Lower level students tend to use fewer strategies, but they use them more frequently (Griffiths, 2003, O'Malley et al., 1985a). The strategies they use tend to require less cognitive processing and less active manipulation of the learning task. They also tend to use strategies with less complex and more discrete-point language tasks like vocabulary learning and pronunciation, rather than integrative tasks, and they tend to use more cognitive than metacognitive strategies (O'Malley et al., 1985a). The study by O'Malley et al. found that low proficiency learners are likely to use strategies such as repetition, note-taking, translation, imagery, and elaboration. Strategies such as inferencing and contextualization are not used as frequently (O'Malley et al., 1985a).

According to a study of 348 students of ages 14-64, most of whom were from Asian countries, memorization was a common strategy for lower level students, and they tend to manage feelings (such as dealing with anxiety about learning the new language) through more inward activities, such as writing in a diary or talking about their feelings, rather than more outgoing, communicative activities (Griffiths, 2003).

Cunningham Florez (2000) found a number of strategies that were used by her beginning (adult, Hispanic) ESL students. Most strategies were socially-oriented strategies, such as consulting others and working together, helping each other, translating for each other, and confirming answers with each other. Other strategies she labeled as resourcing strategies (consulting dictionaries, books, or native speakers; using context, pictures), strategies based on prior experience or knowledge (comparing languages, using cognates), repetition

strategies (both oral and written), and coping strategies (humor, encouraging one another, sharing memories and traditions).

General advice for teaching low-proficiency learners

Relatively few experts offer advice that specifically applies to strategy training for low-proficiency learners, using the target language for instruction. Lavine, who teaches beginning university Spanish classes, gives some suggestions regarding which strategies should be taught to beginning students. She says that among the most useful strategies for these students are the metacognitive strategy of *deciding the purpose for listening*, the social strategy *cooperating with peers*, the compensation strategies *guessing meaning* and *talking around* (or circumlocution), the affective strategies *laughter*, *group encouragement*, and *positive-self talk*, and the memory strategies of *associating/ elaborating* and *using imagery* (Oxford et al., 1990).

Chamot et al. (1999) advise that in order to teach learning strategies to beginning students using the target language, teachers should start slowly, and begin with a single strategy that students are already using implicitly (like *cooperation*). By giving the strategy a name, and using lots of simple language, gestures, and repetition to demonstrate how to apply it (not to mention patience and perseverance), the task of strategy training is not impossible for these learners.

Conclusion

This chapter has described what researchers have said about language learning strategies, how learners use strategies, and advice about strategy instruction and assessment.

This information provides the groundwork for helping students like Fatima, Mai Lee, and Alberto, who are low-level learners with varying degrees of previous formal education. The following chapter describes the challenge of this research project, which was to devise a plan for the strategy instruction of low-proficiency students, when the native language cannot be used for instruction. It describes the context of the study, the type of research that was performed, stages in the process of the project, and data collection techniques that were used.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

How can language learning strategies be made more accessible to low-proficiency high school ESL students when their native languages cannot be used for instruction? This chapter documents a method that was used for attempting to answer that question. First, the specific context within which this project took place is described, along with information about the participants. The research method is also discussed, and why it was chosen. Finally, the specific plan of action is laid out: how strategy instruction was carried out with these students, and how data was collected in order to assess whether or not the instruction was successful.

Context and Participants

This research took place at an alternative high school for ESL students, which is in a metropolitan school district in the Midwestern United States. Students at this high school take six classes a day covering a range of content areas, all of which are taught in English.

The strategy instruction in this study was carried out in a class titled *1A Reading*. The class met for 50 minutes each day, and the strategy instruction took place over a period of 13 weeks during the fall semester of the 2004-2005 school year. Although there were typically

as many as 22 students in the class at any one time, attendance and fluctuations in residence, class level, and family issues (such as having a baby) made it so that there were only fifteen students who participated in the study from start to finish. Statistics about those fifteen students are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7: The Participants

Culture of Origin	Total	Gender		Age			Previous Education	
		male	female	18-20	21-24	26-29	≥ 5 years	≤ 2 years
Hmong	8	3	5	4	3	1	7	1
Somali	2	1	1	1	1		1	1
Oromo	2		2		1	1	2	
Mexican	1	1		1			1	
Cambodian	1	1		1			1	
Chinese	1		1	1			1	
Total	15	6	9	8	5	2	13	2

Although this high school has historically had roughly equal populations from Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the high Hmong population in the class reflected a recent influx of Hmong students from a refugee camp in Thailand. The Oromo students were from Ethiopia.

In my anecdotal records, where I noted observations about specific students, I started out focusing on several students but ended up focusing on only one student by about half-way through the research project, which is explained later in more detail. This student was a 23-year-old Hmong female, who was from Laos (not the Thai refugee camp). She had gone to school for eight years, where she learned to read and write in Lao, and she had spent about two years being tutored at home in Hmong.

Obtaining accurate and quantifiable information about students' previous formal education, which has significant implications about literacy, turned out to be difficult in some cases. This information is not recorded in official school records. Although some students do bring transcripts from their countries of origin, many students do not have transcripts from their previous schools for various reasons. In asking students about their previous education, I realized that the question was not nearly as simple as it first seemed to me, especially given their limited English. In some cases, students had received limited education from a formal classroom, but had also been tutored by a parent, sibling, or paid tutor. Without knowing the exact nature of this tutoring, it was difficult to quantify it, and it was not included in the totals for formal education. In some cases, students' education was disrupted by war, and may or may not have been picked up again later. Not all formal education was the same, either. It was difficult to know how many students were in a class, whether or not there were sufficient desks and books and other resources, how much education the teacher had, or how often the school met (anywhere from "intermittently," "when there was relative peace," to "six days a week"). It was impossible to expect answers to all of these questions, not only because of limited English, but also because the frame of reference is different (for example, "school" and "classroom" and "teacher" could all have meant different things to different students, given the variety of their previous experiences). Moreover, this issue can be quite personal, since some students may view any lack of previous education with a certain amount of shame.

Overall, however, although I seriously questioned the accuracy of students' responses in a few cases, the majority of students had a high level of previous education, and a high

level of literacy. All of them seemed to have learned to read and write in at least one other language as a younger child (although in the case of at least one of the Oromo students, for example, the student said she no longer remembered how to read or write in her first language). I occasionally saw evidence of this literacy with several students when they made notes, such as definitions, in another language. Their level of previous education was somewhat surprising to me, since literacy seemed to be a stronger issue in previous semesters of this course. However, it could also be noted that when students were encouraged at times to write notes in another language (such as a definition for a word), several students did not, whether it was because they were unable or uninterested.

The *1A Reading* class in which this research took place was intended to focus on reading skills for students that were classified by the school as having English proficiency level “1A,” which is considered high-beginning. (The school has students from level 1, beginning, to level 4, advanced. Level 1A is the highest of the three beginning levels, including 1B and 1C in addition to 1A.)

In order to understand students' level of English proficiency more clearly, it is helpful to think in terms of various aspects of the language. Since this class was especially focused on reading skills, and the strategies taught were specifically applied to reading, it is probably most important to understand students' reading proficiency. Table 8 describes the reading level of the average 1A student, in various aspects of reading:

Table 8: Average Participant Reading Proficiency

Vocabulary	Can understand most basic vocabulary (used for Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) such as <i>want</i> , <i>problem</i> , <i>happy</i> , and <i>come</i> , but
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	not most academic vocabulary (used for Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency), such as <i>desire</i> , <i>situation</i> , <i>delighted</i> , and <i>arrive</i> .
Idioms	Cannot understand most idioms.
Verb Tense	Very familiar with simple present and present progressive. Also recognizes simple past, past progressive, and simple future, although s/he may not be familiar with most irregular past tense spellings (such as <i>built</i> or <i>caught</i>) and s/he may not use these tenses correctly on a consistent basis.
Sentence Structure	Can easily understand basic sentence structure (i.e. Subject-Verb-Object), but may be confused with more complicated structure, such as passive tense, or the use of noun and verb phrases or prepositional phrases. Can understand most simple questions such as <i>Who is the girl?</i> and <i>Did the boy go home?</i> but has difficulty with more grammatically complicated questions such as <i>Why does the old man want to buy a new hat for his wife?</i> and <i>How did the woman by the door make the dog leave?</i>
Decoding Skills	Given enough time, can sound out most words that are spelled like they sound, with basic spelling patterns, such as <i>provide</i> , <i>constant</i> , or <i>basketball</i> . Has difficulty with words that have more complicated spelling patterns, such as <i>genuine</i> , <i>rough</i> , or <i>precious</i> .
Strategy Use	May employ some basic reading strategies, such as repetition (reading a passage multiple times) or asking questions (asking a friend, usually in the native language, or the teacher, in English). Some students may use bilingual dictionaries to find the meaning of new words in another language. Unlikely to use more abstract strategies such as using the context to understand the meaning of a word, inferencing, summarizing, or most metacognitive strategies.

It is important to note that although this represents the average student, the range of reading abilities in the class did vary – there were always some students who struggled with the reading material, while others understood it quickly.

Other areas of language proficiency include writing, speaking, and listening. Obviously, students are not able to write as well as they can read. Their vocabulary is more

limited, and their usage of verbs and sentence structure is far from perfect. However, students' writing ability generally does correlate with their reading ability, which was true with these students. The oral abilities of these students, however, had much more variance. For some students, their speaking and listening far surpassed their ability to read and write – they could use more vocabulary than they would be able to understand in writing, and they could listen and grasp general ideas relatively well. These students were good at asking questions and participating in group discussions, which provided strong support for their reading. Other students, although their reading skills may actually have been higher than their more verbal peers, seemed to have a very hard time understanding all but the most simple statements or questions that I asked them. They were often reluctant to speak in front of the class, and some even had a hard time asking me questions individually.

Action Research

The question of finding out how to make language learning strategies accessible to low-proficiency students basically involved two dimensions. First, a plan was developed for how to teach language learning strategies in a comprehensible and usable way for beginning learners, in a situation where I could not use their native languages to talk about learning strategies. Secondly, the plan was tested and frequently modified along the way. This two-pronged approach was well-suited to action research.

Wallace describes action research as “systematically collecting data on your everyday practice and analyzing it in order to come to some decisions about what your future practice should be” (1998). This corresponds directly with the strategy training model described by

Oxford (1990), where teachers begin by determining learners' needs and doing some careful planning, conduct "completely informed training," evaluate the instruction, and make revisions which apply to future instruction. The concept of action research also ties in with the CALLA model of strategy instruction, which guides teachers through similar steps (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Chamot et al., 1999). Both of these instructional models were discussed in more detail in the previous chapter, the Literature Review. Other researchers have also successfully used action research in their classrooms to learn more about strategy instruction (Nunan, 1996) or learning styles (Jones, 1998).

The idea of doing action research also fit well with my personal goals. It seemed like an excellent method for testing out a new idea, which is exactly what I wanted to do with what I had learned about language learning strategy instruction. In addition, action research is very directly applied to teaching, and therefore the results I hoped for (not only to see students become more strategic learners, but also to improve my own teaching) can be seen very directly as well.

Research Methods

My instructional plan for teaching language learning strategies to beginning students drew primarily from two of the instructional frameworks discussed in the Literature Review: the CALLA by O'Malley and Chamot (1990, 1994), and the Completely Informed Training model by Oxford (1990). My plan encompassed both instruction and data collection, and it involved five stages:

Stage 1 – Preparation

Stage 2 – Strategy Instruction

Stage 3 – Assessment

Stage 4 – Revision

Stage 5 – Conclusion

The purpose of the first stage was to gather as much information as possible from students about who they were, what they believed, and which strategies they already used. The second stage involved developing and teaching a strategy unit. The third stage involved assessing the unit to reflect on what went well or what did not go well. The fourth stage required revising the strategy instruction as necessary, and then returning to the second stage to teach another strategy unit. The cycle of going from strategy instruction to assessment and revision and back to instruction continued throughout the semester. The final stage, at the end of the semester after the strategy instruction had finished, involved doing a final assessment of the students and trying to help students make some conclusions of their own. Every stage of this plan included both instruction and data collection, as described in the next section of this chapter.

Concerning data collection, it should be mentioned that because the participants were not limited to learning English only in this class. They were in five other classes throughout the day, besides learning that was taking place outside of class. So, it was impossible for me to gain accurate information about what they learned that could be credited only to the strategy instruction that occurred in my class. Therefore, attempts were not made, for example, to make a comparison between their English proficiency or reading ability before the research began and after it was finished. It is impossible to state that any improvement

could only have happened as a result of the strategy instruction that occurred during this study.

Therefore, my focus was not so much on the students' performance as a result of this class, but rather on seeing positive results from the instruction during class, which I was able to observe as their teacher. In other words, my goal was not to collect quantitative data about the use of learning strategies to prove that students learned more learning strategies as a result of this instruction. Instead, my goal was to gain a sense of the effect of this instruction through observations of students, their work, and their feedback, and to continually use that information to improve the instruction.

Stage 1: Preparation

Preparation for strategy instruction, according to the CALLA and the Completely Informed Training model, involves both gathering information from students about how they learn and what their needs are, and introducing them to the concept of strategies instruction.

As described in the Literature Review, one of the suggested ways of both preparing students for strategy instruction and gathering information about them is to use a survey or questionnaire to find out what strategies are already used by students (Oxford, 1990; Chamot & O'Malley, 1994). This not only provides the instructor with valuable information about the students, but it also introduces students to the idea of thinking about how they learn the language. This prick of awareness prepares students to start focusing attention on specific strategies when the time comes.

Unfortunately, the limited ability of the participants to understand English made it difficult to use an extensive questionnaire such as the one suggested by Oxford. They did not

understand much of the language needed to talk about strategies generally. So without actually going further into strategies instruction, the concept of learning strategies remained quite abstract and difficult to discuss with students extensively. I knew that I would not be able to give them a solid understanding of learning strategies until we began going through the actual strategy instruction and working on concrete examples together.

However, I wondered if it was possible to gain some information directly from students about their strategy use, even if it was quite limited. I also knew that even if they did not understand it completely, some sort of introduction to strategies would begin to develop their strategy awareness and help them be more receptive to the concept when I began the "real" instruction later on. Therefore, I developed a very simplified questionnaire (see Appendix A), which asked students about how frequently they used several reading strategies. Before taking the questionnaire, I introduced the term "learning strategies" and discussed it with them. As the students were taking the questionnaire, I verbally explained as much as possible and gave examples for each question.

Stage 2: Strategy Instruction

The strategy instruction stage was the core of the training process: here, students were introduced to new strategies and given opportunities to practice them and incorporate them into their repertoire of learning tools. This stage consisted of multiple units, where each unit focused on a new strategy or set of strategies to be learned. Each unit encompassed the five main steps of the CALLA model (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, 1994), from *preparation* to *expansion*, and Steps 1-3 of the Completely Informed Training model (Oxford, 1990), as described in Table 5 from the previous chapter. The following instructional steps were used:

- 1 – *Preparation*: Students try doing a language task. The teacher observes strategies that the students are already using. Discuss the activity, and comment on strategies the students are already using.
- 2 – *Presentation*: Demonstrate the new strategy and how it should be used, with lots of modeling.
- 3 – *Practice*: Students practice the strategy with similar language tasks of moderate difficulty.
- 4 – *Evaluation*: Students reflect on the strategy.
- 5 – *Expansion*: Demonstrate how to apply the strategy to new, somewhat different learning tasks, and give students opportunities to practice it.

Although it was expected that several different strategy units would be taught, it was difficult to predict how much time students would need to understand and practice a new strategy before beginning a new strategy unit. In the end, only four strategies were taught:

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Testing Yourself

Self-monitoring

Summarizing

These strategies were selected based on what I perceived to be students' needs (strategies they did not know yet), concreteness and usability of the strategy, and applicability to students' reading tasks. This selection process corresponds with characteristics of good strategy instruction that were described in the Literature Review:

selecting strategies based on what students did not know yet helped ensure that instruction was individualized. Selecting strategies that were concrete and readily usable and understandable helped address the needs of low-proficiency learners. Selecting strategies that are readily applicable to students' reading tasks helped ensure that the strategy instruction was easy to integrate and task based.

In reality, the strategy units were not so distinct that one completely finished before the next began – it turned out to be much more practical to continue developing one strategy through more practice and expansion while the next strategy was being introduced, practiced, evaluated, and expanded. By the end of the semester, nearly all of the strategies were still being practiced and expanded upon simultaneously. Students were taught to ask questions before reading a passage (the strategy of setting a purpose for reading), to check understanding while they were reading it (self-monitoring), and to summarize it when they were finished (summarizing), before preparing for a test by quizzing themselves on new words (testing yourself). Similarly, the stages of instruction, assessment and revision often happened concurrently, as I was already making revisions and teaching a new strategy before the instruction of the first strategy was completely finished.

During this instructional stage, a number of data collection techniques were used. The questions I was trying to answer included: What did I plan to do? What am I actually doing? and How are students reacting to my instruction?

Lesson Plans were an obvious and practical way to document information about what I planned to teach and what actually happened. Using this method of data collection, I tried to answer these two questions: How did I plan to teach them? and What actually happened?

I wrote lesson plans with one color ink, and then wrote comments during or after class with another color of ink.

In order to document more information about what was happening with individual students during lessons, I used *Anecdotal Records* (see Appendix B). With this data collection technique, I used a form which provided space for a student's name and a quick note about questions such as: What strategies do students demonstrate using in Step One, before the presentation of the new strategy? How are students doing during the practice opportunities (Steps Three and Five)? Do they understand the strategy? What evidence do they show of using the new strategy or other strategies (especially from previous units)? What kinds of reflections do they give in Step Four? How well are they able to transfer the strategy to new tasks? Is there evidence of more effective learning? Is there evidence of autonomy? All of these questions were answered in very brief notes as the class was being conducted or shortly afterward. Because there were so many students in my class, and because attendance was often irregular with some students, I decided to limit the anecdotal records to a few students, whom I chose based on learners who were neither exceptionally high nor exceptionally low in their English ability, and had regular attendance. However, as time went on, I found it difficult to keep close records on all the students I had chosen, partly because of attendance issues, and partly because it took more time than I expected. I was not able to consistently record sufficient information about those students and still give adequate attention to the other students in the class. By the end of the project, I was focusing on only one student, who had seemed to struggle somewhat with the material at the beginning of the

semester, but did not have additional significant learning issues, such as lack of literacy or possible learning disabilities.

Stage 3: Assessment

In the assessment stage, I looked at the unit from various aspects and made assessments about what was good or bad about it, and what should be done differently next time. In order to collect data for this stage, I used a *Teaching Self-Evaluation Form* (see Appendix C) which I completed after each unit was finished. I adapted this form from one that Wallace developed (1998, p. 188). It includes a rating scale from 1 to 5, and a place for general comments about each step in the strategy unit, the lesson's overall appropriateness to students' level, relevance to students' needs, students' understanding and use of the strategy, organization, etc.

Stage 4: Revision

Using what I learned through evaluating each unit, I made any necessary changes, revised the next lesson, and went back to stage 2 and taught the next unit. Again, this stage was not a separate process but integrated and continuous. In this way, my instruction was continually adapted throughout the semester. In terms of data collection for this stage, my ideas about revision were included both in the Teaching Evaluation Form and in the revised Lesson Plans for each consecutive unit.

Stage 5: Conclusion

The final stage occurred at the end of the semester, when the course was about to be finished. In order to help students bring what they had learned about strategies to conclusion, I reviewed the strategies that were taught throughout the semester during a class discussion

and asked them to reflect on them. Then, I gave the students a *Post-Questionnaire* (see Appendix D), which asked them many of the same questions that were asked in the Preliminary Questionnaire, in addition to other questions to help me get as much feedback from them as possible.

Data Analysis

The data I collected, as described throughout the section above, included lesson plans, anecdotal records, teaching evaluation forms, and a pre- and post-questionnaire. Part of the goal of this project was to reflect regularly on what was happening in order to make continuous revisions throughout the study. This data was also analyzed more formally at the end of the study by looking for patterns regarding how instruction was carried out, how students reacted to the instruction, and any changes that occurred in both of those aspects throughout the semester. I did this by reading through all of my data collection tools, highlighting specific patterns that I noticed, and reflecting on those patterns.

Conclusion

In order to learn more about how to make language learning strategies more accessible for low-proficiency learners, an instructional plan was developed and tested through action research. In the following chapter, the results of this research are described and analyzed.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This research study attempted to find ways of making language learning strategies more accessible for low-proficiency students. This chapter details the results of the classroom research portion of the study. The strategy instruction is described using data from lesson plans, anecdotal records, and self-evaluation forms. Questionnaires that were given before and after the strategy instruction are compared and discussed. The data collection methods used in the study are also evaluated. Finally, overall patterns that were observed in the study regarding both challenges of strategy instruction and principles for doing strategy instruction with these students are described.

Strategy Instruction

Preparation for Strategy Instruction

Before beginning strategy instruction, I gave students a preliminary questionnaire (which is discussed later). I then began the instructional stage of the study. Although I had introduced strategies to students in a general sense through the questionnaire, most students probably still had very little concept about what strategies were at this point.

A total of four strategies were taught: *setting a purpose for reading*, *testing yourself*, *self-monitoring*, and *summarizing*. Throughout the instruction of each strategy, I tried as much as possible to go through the five steps laid out in the Methods chapter: Preparation, Presentation, Practice, Evaluation, and Expansion. The following is a narrative of the strategy instruction, which uses the data that was collected during this stage: lesson plans, in which I documented what I planned to do and what actually happened during class; anecdotal records, in which I noted observations of students and their work; and teaching self-evaluation forms, in which I regularly reflected on my own teaching and general student reactions.

Strategy # 1: Set a purpose for reading (Ask yourself questions before you read)

The first strategy I attempted to teach to students was *setting a purpose for reading*. I chose to teach this strategy first because it seemed like an appropriate place to start, since it is the first thing readers should do before they start reading. I also hoped that by being more prepared for reading something, and mentally setting a purpose for reading it, they would more likely internalize it and make personal connections with it, so they would be able to think about it on a higher level. Although I had already been leading students in pre-reading activities, such as discussing the pictures that often supplement stories, I wanted students to do this on their own. Too often, it seemed that students were so quick to start reading a given story that they did not take time to prepare for reading it.

As with each strategy that I taught, I first had to find a good name for it. I decided that the idiom *setting a purpose* would not only be difficult to explain with limited English, but it would also be rather difficult to show in a tangible, recognizable way. I wanted to

focus on explaining the concept, not just the term – I wanted the terminology to speak for itself as much as possible. I decided to focus on the idea of *asking yourself questions*, which is both easier for the students to understand linguistically and a more tangible concept for them to be able to recognize. So, instead of calling the strategy *setting a purpose for reading*, I called it, *ask yourself questions (before you read it)*. Although advanced readers use many different approaches to help them set a purpose for their reading, such as skimming, noting words that happen to jump out in the text, and their own personal thoughts that may relate to the story, I thought that the easiest things for my students to focus on would be the title and the pictures that usually accompany stories for students at this level.

Preparation. In order to prepare students and help them recognize the benefits of using this strategy, I took Oxford's suggestion (1990) of having students try a language task without any training in the target strategy. As I documented in my lesson plans, I first found a short fable that was illustrated with a fairly detailed drawing. I told the students that they were going to read a short story, but first, they could look at the title and picture, which I projected from an overhead. After a short time, I replaced the picture with the actual story, which I gave them time to read, until everyone said they were finished. I then turned off the overhead and told them to write down everything they remembered from the story. The students were very surprised at this request, and at first they told me they could not remember anything. After some coaxing, most students were able to write down at least a few words.

Presentation. In the next step, the presentation of the strategy, I introduced the strategy as *ask yourself questions before you read it*. Using another fable which was similar

in length and illustration, I again asked them to look at the title and picture. Together we brainstormed questions that could be asked about the story, which I wrote on the board. I then gave them time to read this second story, and again asked them to write down what they remembered about it. This time, I noted in the anecdotal records that students were able to write down a significant amount – from several sentences to more than half of a page. It seemed quite evident to them that using the strategy had made a difference. Of course, it could be argued that students were able to write down more because they could anticipate what they would be asked to do this time. However, that motivation in itself seems to be part of setting a purpose for reading, too. After all, thinking about what may be written in response to "write down what you remember" may not be all that different from asking yourself questions regarding what it is about.

Practice. In order to practice this strategy, students were later given another story – this time an informative story about a country in Western Africa. Students worked in small groups, and were asked to look at the title and pictures that went along with the story (before actually reading the story) and write down questions that they thought might be answered in the story. After collecting all the papers, I took ten questions from what students had come up with, and wrote them on the board the next day. I read and explained the questions to them and then read the story to them, pausing at appropriate places to ask students to answer the questions as we came across the answers.

As I reflected in the self-evaluation form, this step of practicing the strategy went well in some ways but not in others. A strength of this step was that the questions were taken directly from the students' work. This seemed to give them some sense of ownership, or at

least the idea that you do not have to be the teacher to ask good questions. However, there were several things that made this step less successful than it could have been.

First of all, I did not realize how significant it was that this story was informative, unlike the two narrative stories we had been working with before. So, the students were not able to model their questions after the story that I had used to present the strategy. Pictures that go along with narrative stories may lead more easily to questions as well. The students were not yet ready to deal with such a different type of reading. I should have saved the informative story for later, when it was time to expand on the strategy.

Secondly, even though it was nice that I took the questions directly from the students in my effort to encourage students in their question asking, I realized afterward that the questions had not been chosen carefully enough. As it turned out, not all of them had simple answers, and a few were not answered in the story at all.

Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, some of the linguistic demands of the strategy – namely, asking questions in English – were very challenging for students. Granted, when students actually use the strategy on their own, the questions they ask do not necessarily need to be in English. Even if they think of the questions in their native language, or just in their head without putting them into specific words, it is still setting a purpose for reading. However, it would be difficult for us to talk about it as a class without putting the questions into English. So, before beginning the instruction of this strategy, it would have been beneficial to give some instruction about asking questions in English. The focus of this class was not for them to have perfect grammar, since the ideas were much more important in this context than whether or not the grammar was perfect, but receiving some

instruction on the formation of questions would have given them a lot more tools to work with as they were trying to think about questions they could ask. In addition to instruction on how to form questions grammatically, discussion about which *types* of questions are appropriate for which types of stories would also have been helpful. For example, with a narrative story, it is appropriate to ask things like "Who is in the story?" "What is the problem in the story?" and "How did the story end?" But informative stories might lead to questions about the main topic such as "What is the weather like in this country?" or "What kinds of animals live in rainforests?"

Although there seemed to be a fair amount of confusion among students in the beginning, they were given further practice of this strategy with the next story that we did, which was a narrative story and therefore more closely resembled the fables that we did earlier. That was helpful. The more practice students got, the more they seemed to understand the strategy, and the more the questions they wrote down evidenced that understanding.

Evaluation. In order to get an overall feeling of what students thought about the strategy, and to encourage them to think about it metacognitively, I encouraged them to evaluate the strategy for themselves. I collectively asked students to tell me what they thought about the strategy. Did they think it was useful? Would they likely use it in the future? Almost all of the students answered very positively. Although they assured me that their response was honest, and they were not just telling me what they thought I wanted to hear, I still felt uncertain about whether I was getting accurate feedback. It may have been better to ask them to write their response on a small piece of paper to give to me, rather than

asking for a collective oral response like this. I also asked some students individually if they had used this strategy before this class, and they all told me that they had not.

Expansion. An excellent way to expand on this strategy, if I had focused only on narrative stories thus far, would have been to expand now with an informative story. Since I had already worked on an informative story with them, I thought about expanding in a different way. However, I decided that we had gone far enough with that strategy for now, and it would be better to have them continue to practice what they had already learned than to try to expand on it any more. Approximately two weeks were spent on this strategy, from preparation with the fables through the first practice story, although a lot of that time was spent working with the material in other ways, such as practice reading, after reading activities, and quizzes. However, I continued to have them practice this strategy throughout the rest of the semester, from actually writing down questions to verbally talking about the questions.

In retrospect, I chose a fairly abstract strategy to teach first. Although the preparation and presentation piece was planned well, the fact that I then chose an informative story to do instead of continuing with narrative stories was poor planning. Overall, though, I think students responded fairly positively to this strategy. Although the linguistic demands of this strategy (such as asking questions in English) were somewhat difficult for these students, I think the concept was cognitively appropriate to their level and applicable to their needs. With enough modeling and working together on it, they seemed to understand the concept and put it into practice.

Strategy #2: Repetition (Test Yourself)

One of the things I did not like about the first strategy unit I had taught was that it seemed to be a fairly abstract and complicated strategy to start with. So, I decided to do something more concrete and simple for the next strategy. I also wanted students to be able to process new information more thoroughly, so they could remember it better, digest it more, and show their mastery of that new knowledge in tests and other tangible measures (which would give them positive feedback). The use of *repetition* for remembering new information seemed to fit naturally. It was concrete, relatively easy to understand, and I hoped it would give fairly clear results.

As I thought about how to use repetition in this class, I first thought about the enormous amount of new vocabulary that students encounter in reading materials. I had noticed that although we encountered many new words in the stories we read in class, most of the students did not seem to interact with the words or digest them more than just looking at them, asking what they meant, and moving on. This was also evident in the quiz results that tested those vocabulary words. I noticed that a couple of the students made organized lists of new words as they came across them, along with translations into their native language. I wanted all students to learn this type of strategy. I wanted all students to learn additional ways of processing the material so they could make the most of the instruction they were getting.

Again, I wanted to make the strategy a little more approachable by giving it a new name. I decided to call it *test yourself (after you read it)*, since using repetition to learn something like new vocabulary seemed a lot like giving a test to yourself. Then, as I was thinking about how to integrate this strategy into the existing curriculum, another idea came

to me. The students had been working on *asking questions* before reading a story. I also wanted students to be able to remember information from the story. What if I were to take the questions they had already come up with, work with them to find answers to those questions, and then help them learn to remember what they learned by quizzing themselves on those questions? In this way, the questions that students started with would provide a foundation for understanding the story throughout the learning process. Hopefully, students would also see greater purpose for asking those questions in the beginning.

Ultimately, the strategy of *repetition*, which started in my mind as a method of remembering new vocabulary, evolved into a method of remembering comprehension information as well.

Preparation. I decided to prepare students similarly to last time, where students try doing something without learning about the strategy first, and then learn how to apply it to the language task. Preparation for this strategy began after we had read the informative story about the West African country, and discussed answers to the questions they had come up with before reading the story. Without warning, I gave them a short test of three questions, which were taken directly from the list of questions I had collected from students and written on the board before reading it. Needless to say, they were immediately frustrated and disbelieving, so I did not continue very long before telling them that it was not a real test.

Presentation and Practice, Part 1. I then presented a lesson about how to *test yourself* to remember important things about the story. I modeled the process I wanted them to use with an outgoing student, where one person asks the questions and the other person tries to

answer the questions. I then gave students time to practice the strategy in pairs using the same questions.

As I reflected in my teaching self-evaluation form, I realized that the instruction of this strategy up to this point had a number of problems. First of all, it was a mistake to try to expand on the questions that we had developed during the previous unit. As mentioned earlier, I had begun to realize that these questions did not encompass the whole story very well, and some were not easily answerable. They would have been acceptable as prereading questions to help the reader think about the story, but not as comprehension questions that would evidence understanding of the story. Secondly, and more importantly, I took what would have been a very simple, straightforward strategy (such as using flashcards or lists to remember vocabulary words) and turned it into something much more complicated (trying to remember specific answers to specific questions). In fact, the students tended to interpret the task as one where they needed to memorize, perhaps word-for-word, answers that I had written for specific questions that I had chosen. This led not to deeper understanding of the story, but to regurgitating whatever the teacher said, which is not a concept I wanted to communicate in any context.

Presentation and Practice, Part 2. Recognizing those mistakes, I made a second attempt to teach this strategy with the next story. This time, I focused on learning vocabulary words, which is much simpler and more direct. Although I liked the lists of new words that I saw some students make, with the English word in one column and the translation in another, I decided to start with flashcards instead. Flashcards are much more tangible and manipulative – when one word has been learned, it can be removed from the stack, and the

other words can be repeated as long as necessary. Additionally, although I encouraged students to use translations if it was helpful to them, it was impossible to use translations as a whole class – not only could I not test their knowledge without knowing all their languages, but some students did not know how to write in their native language, or did not have access to a dictionary that gave them the translation of a word. Besides, learning English definitions for English words provides even more practice using English.

So, using vocabulary words from a new story, I demonstrated the process of making flashcards, and then modeled using them, going through the stack of flashcards and pretending to struggle with guessing the definition for each one. However, the stack of flashcards proved to be overwhelming for most students and I realized once again that I continually needed to break the process down into simpler steps. For example, instead of going through all of the flashcards at once, it is best to start with just a few flashcards. When those are learned, one more can be added, and after those are learned, another is added, and so on. Only when all the words are familiar can the entire stack be reviewed at once.

Evaluation. According to the anecdotal records, most of the students told me that they had not used this strategy before. When I was still focusing on answering comprehension questions, many students had a hard time understanding what was expected. However, when I focused on using flashcards to remember new words, the response was more positive, and several students told me it was a helpful strategy. Not all the students were excited about it – in some ways, using flashcards is fairly tedious, especially when it also requires creating the cards out of folded paper. However, I did note in the anecdotal records that there was significant improvement in many students' test scores – even for those

that did not take it as seriously (perhaps partly because they were forced to work with the material more than they otherwise would have.) In an effort to demonstrate another way students could use repetition to remember new words (which was also less time-consuming and therefore more likely to be used in the future), I also demonstrated using a list, such as some students already made. However, I never required students practice that method, which would have been beneficial.

Expansion. If I had started this strategy unit by using *testing yourself* to learn new vocabulary words, I could have expanded into using that strategy to prepare for a test at this point. Although the idea of using comprehension questions to *test yourself* in preparation for a test was not executed well in the beginning, I decided to give it another try a few weeks later. This time, I focused on having students *test themselves* by trying to predict questions that would be on the test. In hindsight, although this strategy did seem to fall under the category of *test yourself*, it is so different from the original strategy of *repetition* that it could have been taught in an entirely different unit altogether.

After we had read a story, I presented this method by brainstorming with the class a few questions that could be asked on the test. The students practiced the strategy by working in small groups to write down several more questions that could be on the test. It was challenging for them, and a few of the students apparently did not fully understand, even though I tried to explain it numerous times. However, most of the students seemed to understand the main point. The next day, I told the students that all of the test questions would be taken from their papers, and students spent some time asking each other their questions. At first, they seemed to have a hard time mingling and talking to each other, but

later I noticed that there seemed to be a number of serious discussions about their papers. I also wrote the best twenty or so questions from their work on the board so we could discuss them together. I eventually put about a dozen of those questions on the final test. Although this process was quite different from the original *test yourself* with vocabulary, and it was very challenging for students, it seemed to go over fairly well overall. It was especially good for the more advanced students in the class who needed an extra challenge.

Strategy #3: Self-monitoring (Stop and ask yourself, "Does it make sense?")

The next strategy I chose to teach about was *self-monitoring*. I wanted students to be as aware as possible of how they were responding to what they were reading, and to know what to do if they did not understand something. I was not sure how much the students already used self-monitoring, especially since it is often carried out internally or even subconsciously. I had noticed that when I asked the class if they understood a story we had just read, some would say "yes," many would give me a blank face or indicate that they understood some of it, and some would say "no." But then when I asked them if they had any questions, they rarely asked me anything. It seemed that students read the story, understood it to whatever degree they understood it, and then stopped there without trying (or knowing how) to pursue it any further. I wanted students to take seriously the idea that they had to figure out what they did not understand and ask about it or find a way to figure it out. This fit the strategy of *self-monitoring* precisely.

Preparation. I found it difficult to devise a good method of preparing students for learning this strategy. It did not seem appropriate to prepare students by having them attempt a language task without the strategy training, as I had done with the other two strategies I had

taught thus far. Instead, I just encouraged them to think about what happened when they did not understand something, which is something they readily related to, and asked them what they did about it. They did not have many ideas.

Presentation. I told them about the next strategy, which I titled, *stop and ask yourself, "does it make sense?" while you read it.* We discussed the phrase "Does it make sense?" which seemed to be familiar to them. Then I helped them brainstorm suggestions for what to do when something did not make sense. They came up with a number of ideas: read it again, guess, check in a dictionary, ask the teacher, and ask a friend. I added: underline it so you can come back to it later.

We then began a new story, which was an informative story about Thanksgiving. I frequently stopped to ask students if everything made sense. It turned out to be a fairly easy story, because there was not all that much to be confused about. But students did ask about several words, including ones that I had not predicted would be difficult, and a couple of times I asked them about something specific which they did not understand, as it turned out. After the story, we revisited all the words we had talked about, and I wrote down definitions for them on the board. Then several students asked questions about other words from the story that we had not discussed yet, including a number of questions from a student who rarely spoke in front of the class, which was very exciting to see. I wondered why they had not asked about those words before, when we were reading that passage. Perhaps they were still warming up, or waiting to see if the more outgoing students would ask about those words. Either way, I was delighted to see those students proactively asking questions about

things they did not understand. In the end, this presentation probably would have worked even better if the story had been more difficult to begin with.

Practice. As I approached the practice piece of this strategy unit, I wanted to give students concrete tools for employing the strategy. I decided that I could distinguish between two types of confusion they were experiencing: one, when there is a specific word that is new and not understood, and the other, when it may be difficult to pick out a specific word to ask about, but a whole section (such as a sentence or paragraph) is not understood. Using a new reading, which was an informative story about rain forests (and a little more difficult than the story about Thanksgiving), I encouraged students to deal with new words they encountered by underlining them, so that they could come back to them later. Secondly, I told them that after reading each paragraph, they should put a check mark if they understood the general idea of the paragraph, and a question mark if they did not understand it. After reading the story, they should go back to the underlined words and question marks, and read them again to see if they could figure it out after a second try. If they still did not understand, they should ask me. I modeled this with the first paragraph of the reading, and then asked the students to finish the story independently. I did not read the story for them first, and I did not introduce the story other than asking them to look at the title and the pictures and *ask themselves questions* about it before they read it.

As they were reading the story to themselves and underlining and writing check marks and question marks, I walked around the room and noted which words they were underlining and which paragraphs they did not understand. Most of them did not put many question marks – only check marks. Afterward, I told them to ask me questions about the

reading. Without too much additional prompting, they covered all the words I had noted and then some, which I described and discussed with them as they asked me.

In subsequent stories, some of the students consistently underlined new words without being prompted, especially the students who tended to be more successful, and those who were not usually as successful but were eager to do everything they could to become more successful. Other students needed a little prompting to underline the words they did not know. By the end of the semester, most of them used the strategy without prompting.

In retrospect, having students use question marks to note larger pieces of the material that they did not understand was not as useful. Perhaps students did not understand what I was asking them to do, or perhaps it just did not seem as helpful to them. It is hard to know how to respond to a question mark. Saying, "I don't understand" does not provide an answer that is as concrete as the question, "What does ____ mean?" Asking for a definition is finite, and it points precisely to the problem area. A general question mark does not help the student know exactly where the problem is. If the problem area can be reduced to an actual word, it is much more specific and fixable. In addition, students were usually able to narrow down their confusion to a single word, especially since the texts were written specifically for low-proficiency ESL students and did not use complicated grammar, sentence structure or idioms (in which case the students may have understood each individual word without understanding the whole meaning.) It was more simple and concrete for students to focus simply on underlining words they did not know. In the end, I abandoned emphasis on the use of question marks.

Evaluation. Students responded positively when asked about the usefulness of this strategy (although again, I was not convinced that they would have told me otherwise). In my own observations, *self-monitoring* did seem to give students increased control over their learning in a tangible way. Rather than teacher-guided reading activities, such as previewing new vocabulary before the story and listening to the teacher read the story the first time, students were able to read the story independently from the beginning, and ask about what they did not understand.

Expansion. I expanded this strategy primarily by using more difficult stories, which students had more questions about. I gave very little introduction to the two stories, since I wanted them to do both the prereading (*asking questions first*) and the *self-monitoring* themselves. Eventually, they seemed to have a solid understanding of *self-monitoring*, and they did a fairly good job of independently underlining new words and asking me about them when I gave them the opportunity.

Strategy #4: Summarizing

This strategy was the most cognitively challenging strategy that was taught. It is challenging in a couple of ways. First of all, *summarizing* requires the use of original words, which is always challenging for students at this level. Students often view the words used by a teacher or author as better than their own words. This is partly because the teacher or author's grammar and spelling are bound to be more correct than their own, and partly because students are often accustomed to repeating the teacher's words, rather than thinking originally. Also, summarizing requires telling the main points, but not all the details, which

necessitates a lot of choices about what is important and what is not. It is not common to expect students at this level to be able to summarize a story, which requires relatively high-level thinking skills. However, I felt that the students not only needed to be challenged (especially since it was close to the end of the semester, and they were preparing to move on to the next level), but that *summarizing* was also a very important skill that would only get more important as they moved up to higher levels. Moreover, I believed that with enough modeling and practice, they were capable of learning this strategy and would meet the challenge.

I assumed that this concept was quite new to students, which meant they were not likely to know any English words that would describe this strategy better than the word *summarize*. I wanted them to learn that summarizing includes not only the concept of telling what happened in a story, but also using original words and making it more condensed. So, I decided to teach them this new word to describe the strategy.

Preparation. I prepared students for this strategy by having them just try it. I reminded them again about the other strategies that we had been learning about, and then I gave them a new, fairly challenging narrative story and had them read it to themselves without any support on my part. Then, after discussing their use of *setting a purpose* and *self-monitoring*, and going over new words they had underlined, I told them to put away the story and summarize it. None of them had heard the word *summary* or *summarize* before, so I told them that it meant they should tell what happened in the story with their own words, in only three to five sentences (later I saw that three sentences was not enough, given the types of sentences a few of them came up with). It was definitely a challenging assignment – many

of them seemed boggled at first, and they had a strong tendency to want to copy sentences directly from the story. But it also seemed that once they got going, their brains were working really hard. When I read the summaries the next day, most (maybe 70 or 80%) did a fairly good job of covering all the important information in the story. However, many of the summaries were quite long (far surpassing the three to five sentence guideline), and since the story was quite short, their summaries more closely resembled retellings. Obviously, they were having difficulty with the concept of choosing the main points but leaving out the details.

Presentation. In presenting this strategy more thoroughly to students, I explained it in a couple of different ways. First, I wanted them to realize that it was more important for them to understand the ideas in the story, rather than remembering the specific words used in the story. I described how it is possible to have a mental idea which is not the same as the words used to talk about the idea. Sometimes, it is difficult to find the right words to describe an idea even in the native language, let alone a second language. However, the same idea can be expressed in different words, so it is not the actual words that are important, but the idea. I used the example of the plant in my room that had wilted during winter vacation – I could say "My plant looks sad," or "I think it's sick, or "It didn't get enough water," but all of those words are an attempt to describe the same general idea in my head.

I also decided to try to illustrate the difference between a summary and details by creating a picture on the board with various objects – different pencils for hair, erasers for eyes, a post-it note for a nose, and a rubber band for a mouth. As I taped each object on the board, I asked them to describe it (i.e. a short green pencil with a white eraser). But when it

was finished and they saw that it was a face, I asked them to try to think about a good summary statement (i.e. it is a face made out of different objects, or that it is a face on the chalkboard that looks like a student from our class.) On the other side of the face I wrote the word "details", which was also a new word for them, and I wrote down a few detailed sentences (i.e. The eyes are pink erasers that make the face look angry). Their assignment entailed writing down three more details about the face, and also three details about the story. This assignment was quite challenging, but I think it was helpful to most of them in their understanding of the idea of summary and details.

It seemed that the analogy of the face went over fairly well, perhaps because it was kind of humorous, but it was also a very simple and tangible way to describe a very abstract concept. Previously I had not considered that the concept of a detail was as new to the students as the concept of a summary. This analogy was a good introduction to the idea of a summary vs. details, even if the students did not understand it completely, and it was beneficial to focus on the contrast between the two.

Practice. The students were given more opportunity to practice the strategy with a new story, which was quite similar to the previous one. I asked them not only to summarize the story, but also to list three details. It was a very challenging assignment, especially for some (there was still some confusion about the difference between summary and details, for example) but generally students did a better job of summarizing than they had on the first story. Later, however, when students were given a test about the two stories and asked to summarize each story in three to five sentences, I was astounded at how well almost all of them responded. They did a wonderful job of telling the important points of the beginning,

middle, and end of each story, in a limited number of sentences. The students quite exceeded my expectations.

Evaluation. When I asked students to evaluate the strategy of *summarizing*, they responded that it was very difficult, but they also seemed to recognize that it was useful in helping them understand the story. From my own perspective, I believed that as difficult as the strategy seemed to them, they were doing it, and doing it quite well for students at this level.

Expansion. I expanded on this strategy partly through giving them an informative story instead of a narrative story, and partly by asking them to summarize each individual paragraph before summarizing the entire story. It was hard for them to summarize the paragraphs without just copying selected sentences. I used the first paragraph of the story to model the task, but more modeling (both of individual paragraphs and the entire story) would have been beneficial.

Review of Data Collection Tools During Instruction

Throughout the instructional stage of this research, data was collected primarily through three sources: lesson plans, anecdotal records, and teaching self-evaluation forms. The lesson plans were effective at documenting what I did, how I did it, and how things went differently than I expected at times. They were definitely a helpful data source. Furthermore, the teaching self-evaluation forms, which provided an opportunity for me to reflect on each unit during or after its completion, came to be one of my most valuable sources of data. It aided my reflection of both the instruction and the general reaction of the

students, including our interactions in the classroom and the work that they produced. In fact, the process of filling out the teaching self-evaluation forms often played a significant role in giving me the reflection opportunity I needed to enable me to adapt and improve the strategy instruction as I went along.

However, the anecdotal records were not nearly as helpful, and did not provide nearly as much data as the lesson plans or self-evaluation forms. This is partly because it was difficult to take thorough records of even a few selected students while I was simultaneously trying to keep the class running and give individual attention to every student in the class. Also, a couple of the students that I started keeping records on had to leave the class for different reasons. By the end of the instructional stage I was keeping records on only one student. However, it was profitable to see how even that one student struggled at times but overall progressed throughout the semester, and to note tangible evidence of that progress.

Questionnaires

A pre-questionnaire, given before strategy instruction began, asked students about the frequency with which they used several different strategies. (See Appendix A.) In each question, the strategy was simplified or rephrased to aid students' comprehension, often using the same "title" that I gave the strategy later during instruction. For example, the question about the strategy *setting a purpose for reading* asked, "Before you read a story, do you first ask yourself questions about it?" In order to find out if students had additional comprehension strategies, the final question asked, "What else do you do that helps you understand what you read, or remember new words?"

Before giving the pre-questionnaire to the students, I tried to give a reasonably brief introduction to the concept of learning strategies, including examples. While students were responding to the questionnaire, I explained each question as much as possible. However, many students seemed to struggle with fully comprehending the questions.

The responses from the pre-questionnaire were compared with responses from a similar post-questionnaire, which was given after the strategy instruction finished. (See Appendix D.) In the case of one strategy, the questions were not the same in the pre- and post-questionnaire, for reasons that are explained later, so they could not be compared. Questions from the pre-questionnaire that concerned strategies that were not covered during the instruction were omitted in the post-questionnaire, and two other sets of questions were added for each strategy: "Did you learn more about this strategy during this class? Was the teaching helpful?" and "Do you use this strategy more now (in January) than before (in September)? Will you use this strategy a lot in the future?" (See Table 9.)

Results did not vary significantly among the different strategies that were taught in the class. According to the first question, which was used as a comparison between the pre- and post-questionnaire, students indicated that they generally used the strategies slightly more at the end of the instruction than at the beginning. For the first additional question that was on the post-questionnaire, which asked about whether students learned more about that strategy, answers were very positive – an average of eleven students answered "yes" and three answered "some." For the second additional question on the post-questionnaire, which asked about whether they used the strategy more at the end of the instruction than at the

beginning, answers were also very positive – again, an average of eleven students answered "yes" and three answered "some."

Table 9: Results of the Questionnaires

Strategies

1: Setting a purpose for reading

2a: Test Yourself – Memorizing vocabulary

2b: Test yourself – Predicting test questions

3: Self-monitoring

4: Summarizing

Question	Response	1	2a	2b	3	4
Do you use this strategy?	always	8 / 9 *	5**	7	4 / 6	11 / 10
	sometimes	5 / 6	9	7	11 / 8	4 / 5
	never	1 / 0	1	1	0 / 1	0 / 0
Did you learn more about this strategy in this class?	yes	11	11	11	10	13
	some	3	3	4	5	1
Was the teaching helpful?	a little	1	1	0	0	1
	no	0	0	0	0	0
Do you use this strategy more now than before?	yes	13	10	9	11	12
	some	1	3	4	3	2
Will you use this strategy in the future?	a little	1	2	2	0	1
	no	0	0	0	1	0

* *before / after strategy instruction*

** *after strategy instruction only*

In response to the question on the pre-questionnaire which asked about any other strategies that students used, students suggested things such as reading many times, asking the teacher or a friend for help, using a dictionary, guessing, or writing a word over and over again in order to remember it. All of those were strategies that I had written on the board as examples while giving the introduction to learning strategies before the questionnaire was given.

Although the results from the questionnaires were positive overall, there were a number of problems with this data collection method in this context, which limit the

reliability of the results. First of all, the English proficiency of the students severely limited the accuracy of the results. Even though questions on the pre-questionnaire were simplified as much as possible, students still did not have enough background knowledge about learning strategies to understand the questions accurately.

Another problem which may have decreased the accuracy of the results was that students were probably not accustomed to thinking so metacognitively and verbally analyzing their own needs and habits. Of course, they may already have been doing this subconsciously or even consciously to a certain extent, but they were not used to talking or writing about it, especially in English. The English classes they had taken thus far had not given them much experience in this type of self-analysis, and it is impossible to say how much experience they had with it previously.

A third problem I encountered when writing the post-questionnaire was that not only did I not teach all of the strategies that I had asked about in the pre-questionnaire, but even with the ones I did teach, I ended up adapting their descriptions so much that the question did not seem to fit any more, which made comparison between the pre- and post-questionnaires difficult. For example, predicting that I would teach the strategy of *self-monitoring*, I described it in the pre-questionnaire with the question, "While you read a story, do you stop and ask yourself, 'Do I understand?'" By the time I got well into teaching that strategy, however, we were focusing on the much more tangible *underlining words you don't understand as you come across them*. When students read the original question, which was repeated in the post-questionnaire, they may not have been likely to associate it with *underlining new words*, even if they did understand all of the language being used.

Additionally, in the case of the strategy of repetition, the original question of "When you want to remember a new word, do you test yourself and think 'what does this mean?'" seemed quite different from the two different things we did in class, including *learning to use flashcards (or lists) to memorize new vocabulary* and *predicting questions that could be on a test*. In that case, I decided to eliminate the original question entirely on the post-questionnaire, and replace it with two separate questions that were more closely aligned with what was done in class.

Furthermore, numerous misunderstandings on the questionnaires were evident. In the pre-questionnaire, for example, many students answered "always" in response to "Before you read a story, do you first ask yourself questions about it?" which corresponded to the first strategy we learned, *setting a purpose for reading*. However, when I asked them about it after we had worked on that strategy in class and they really understood what the strategy was, I asked a couple of students about it, and they said they had never used that strategy before. Also, when I compared the pre-questionnaire to the post-questionnaire, there were nine cases where answers were conflicting. In response to the question about how often they used a particular strategy, some of the students indicated a lower frequency (such as "sometimes") after the instruction than before (such as "always"). But in response to the question on the post-questionnaire that asked, "Do you use this strategy more now than before?" the same students responded "yes."

Overall Patterns

During this research project, a number of patterns emerged regarding factors that influenced the process of strategy instruction in this context:

- Communication: Some of the strategies were concrete and easy to demonstrate, such as using flashcards to remember new words. Other strategies, however, and many of the concepts that I wanted to get across, were much more abstract, and therefore required more sophisticated, academic language. The strategy of *summarizing*, for example, which is not the same as copying or even retelling, was challenging to explain. The general concept of learning strategies was extremely challenging to explain as well. It was also difficult for students to explain to me what they did not understand, or even to tell me what they did understand at times. Instead of being able to ask me a specific question about the process, all they could say was, "I don't understand" (or simply shake their heads), which made it difficult to know specifically how to help them. It was also very difficult to check their understanding by asking comprehension questions.
- Feedback: Closely related to communication difficulties was the challenge of getting good feedback in general. It was time and energy consuming to get good feedback from individual students, which meant it was challenging to get enough feedback for anecdotal records and questionnaires. It was also difficult to trust the feedback I did get, perhaps in part because students were likely to want to please the teacher by giving overly positive responses, and also because of linguistic misunderstandings, such as those evidenced in numerous cases with the questionnaires.

- Task performance: A number of the tasks involved in using the strategies required specific language skills, which meant that students not only struggled with the concept of how to do the strategies, but with the actual task of doing them. For example, knowledge of how to form questions in English was required for *ask questions first* and *test yourself* (when creating questions for the test). A significant amount of language was also required for *summarizing* in one's own words.
- Use of higher level thinking skills: Many strategies required students to use higher level thinking skills. This was complicated not only by the limited academic language required for expressing oneself, but also by students' previous experience in using higher level thinking skills in school. It is impossible to know how much experience students had in their former countries; it can be assumed that their experiences probably varied a great deal. It is likely, however, that in the previous English classes these students had in our school, they were not required to do much higher level thinking, for the simple reason that they were still learning very basic English, and higher level thinking requires more abstract thinking and therefore more difficult language. In the strategy *summarizing*, for example, students must not only retell the story, but also make choices about which information from the story is significant and which should not be included in the summary, which was difficult for most students at first. The strategies *asking questions first* and *testing yourself by predicting test questions* also required higher level thinking skills, which may have been part of the reason those strategies were difficult for many students as well.

- Cultural background / previous experience in formal education: Students' expectations about teaching and learning, shaped by both culture and previous educational experiences, also impact their receptivity and readiness to understand learning strategies. For example, if they were taught that learning means being able to repeat what the teacher says, or produce an exact answer that was predetermined by the teacher, then it is harder for them to learn to be creative and open-minded. This may explain some of the difficulties students had learning strategies such as *asking questions first, summarizing, and testing yourself by predicting test questions*, all of which required a significant amount of creativity.
- Inconsistent attendance: Another challenge that impacted this research, which may or may not apply to other contexts, was inconsistent attendance. Although all of the students were still in high school, many of them had life circumstances that were not common for mainstream high school students, such as shifting job schedules (which they needed in order to support themselves and/or their families), various circumstances related to raising children (from sick kids to maternity leave) and a plethora of appointments that are common for immigrants (such as health concerns and various government-related tasks). This had a direct impact on the number of students that took both the pre- and post-surveys, for example, which was significantly less than the number of students who were typically in the class at a time, as well as students' ability to understand what was going on in class because of continuity.

Conclusion

This chapter described an action research project that attempted to find ways of making language learning strategies accessible for low-proficiency learners. The strategy instruction was narrated, pre- and post-questionnaires were analyzed, research methods were evaluated, and overall patterns were described. The following chapter, the Conclusion, summarizes what was learned through this research, considers implications and limitations of the research, and recommends possibilities for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

In order to learn more about how to make language learning strategies more accessible and usable for low-proficiency students, this research studied the findings of other experts in the field, developed a method for conducting a classroom research study, and analyzed the results of that research. In this chapter, I give my general impressions about the study, describe what I learned in the process of carrying it out, and indicate limitations of the study and possible areas for further research.

Implications

A number of implications about teaching language learning strategies to low-proficiency learners have emerged through this research.

- **Start simple**: Teach the simplest strategies first. Take every process and break it down into simpler processes. Although I had simplicity in mind, it was surprising to me that I had to keep revising my instruction to make it even more simple. For example, I should have started with *underlining new words (self-monitoring)* or *testing yourself* by using flashcards to remember new words, rather than *asking questions first*, which requires more language skills and more abstract thinking. I

should have always started with narrative stories, which were simpler and more predictable, before moving on to informative readings, which were more abstract.

When modeling the use of flashcards, I made the mistake of going through the whole stack at once, rather than starting with a few cards and building on those. I felt like I was constantly moving backwards during instruction, trying to go back to something simpler than what I was attempting.

- Make it concrete: Many strategies may not seem very abstract to a teacher, but they can still be abstract to a student at this level, and there are often ways to make them more concrete and tangible. The goal at this level is not to make sure students understand the full breadth of a strategy, but to be able to use it, or at least part of it, thoroughly. Simpler language, specific forms for producing each strategy, and visuals were all helpful ways of making strategy instruction more concrete. For example, I learned that the idea of *self-monitoring* was fairly abstract and difficult for the students to grasp, but *underlining new words* is much more concrete, and students responded much more positively. When I was trying to make the strategy of *summarizing* less abstract, and compare it with the concept of details, it was helpful to use the analogy of the face. In helping students understand how to *test yourself* on new vocabulary words, the use of flashcards made it much more tangible.
- Modeling and examples: In order for students to understand what is expected of them, it is crucial to provide lots of modeling and examples. This also adds definition to abstract concepts. When I was teaching about *setting a purpose* for reading by *asking*

questions first, the students noticeably modeled their questions after the questions I had modeled during the presentation of the strategy.

- Provide lots of practice and expand slowly: By starting out with simple, concrete forms of strategies, and providing lots of practice, new and more difficult ways of applying a strategy can be built on a firm foundation. For example, in the first strategy of setting a purpose for reading, I went from using a narrative story to an informative story too quickly, and the students were confused. They needed more time to practice what they had just learned with similar stories before expanding into different types of stories. In the second strategy of *testing yourself*, I should have started with *testing yourself on new vocabulary*, and then expanded it in new ways, such as *predicting test questions*. In general, I kept finding that I needed to slow down and not give students too much to work on all at once. It is important to choose a limited number of strategies to work on explicitly (although sometimes others can be integrated when appropriate, such as helping individual students learn to use bilingual dictionaries.)
- Include linguistic instruction to support strategy instruction: Specific language instruction sometimes needs to be incorporated into strategy instruction. For example, I realized that it would have been helpful to teach more about the formation of English questions before teaching the strategy *ask questions first*. It also would have been helpful to discuss which types of questions are appropriate for which types of stories. It may seem that this point counters research that warns against basing curriculum on strategy instruction (Wenden, 1995). However, adding linguistic

instruction that specifically supports a particular strategy does not take away from the main curriculum, but adds to it. Integrating various aspects of the language can provide students with increased understanding of the core curriculum.

General Impressions

The things that I learned from this research may not be surprising to anyone who works closely with beginning students: things like starting simple, making things as concrete as possible, using lots of modeling and examples, and providing lots of opportunities for practice are all teaching approaches that many teachers probably use any time they are teaching beginning students. Those things also correspond with the general advice described in the literature review about teaching strategies to beginning students: start slowly, begin with what students already know, use lots of simple language and repetition, etc. (Chamot et al., 1999). However, perhaps one of the most interesting revelations of this study about strategy instruction for beginning students, from my own perspective, is simply the fact that it can be done, and done effectively. Indeed, even low-proficiency ESL learners *can* learn language learning strategies, even if their native languages cannot be used for instruction. As I reflect on this research, there are so many things that I can say I should have done differently. And yet, despite all the mistakes that I made, it is still possible to see that at least to some degree, the strategy instruction *was* effective. Students did gain positively from this experience.

One of the effects of this strategy instruction was that it seemed to give the students a lot of control over their learning. I have always tried to support students in their reading by

previewing new vocabulary, doing prereading activities such as asking them questions about it, and providing exercises that force students to process the ideas and words in the story.

But by the end of the semester, the students were reading fairly difficult stories with relatively little support from me and a great deal of independence on their part. Rather than being told which words they should focus on, the students themselves were taking the initiative to ask me questions about the words they did not understand. Although I did not lead them in many extra exercises to facilitate their comprehension, most of them were able to learn from the stories and understand them well enough to answer test questions quite well, and to be able to summarize the beginning, middle, and end of each story in their own words. Increasing students' autonomy was not something I specifically set out to measure in this research. However, as noted in the literature review, autonomy is a natural outcome of using learning strategies (Oxford et al., 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Stewner-Manzanares et al., 1985). The development of autonomy is also essential for students' future academic success. It was exciting to observe students fostering such an important skill.

Another delightful observation concerning this study came during a recent conversation with a colleague about one of the students who had been in my class during this research. I had had this particular student in my class before and she has always struggled immensely with literacy, and possibly an undetected learning disability as well. In fact, she had repeated this same level five times! As I was beginning my research many months ago, I thought about her a lot. To my surprise, however, few if any of the other students in this particular class seemed to struggle with literacy, so she seemed like an exception. Consequently, I did not focus on her specific needs as I was planning lessons and carrying

out the strategy instruction. I gave her attention when I could, whenever I was walking around the class to help individual students. However, since I wanted to make sure all students received enough individual attention, I did not spend much extra time with her, as I had often done in the past.

Recently, however, my colleague asked me about this student, who is now in her class in the next level. She wanted to know what I had done with this student, because she was so surprised at how well this student was doing now. The teacher had asked the student about it, and the student told her that she was doing so well because I had worked with her so much last semester. I was so surprised; I had not really worked with her more than I had worked with other students this past semester, and I had not designed lessons specifically to meet her needs. Perhaps, though, I can venture to say that this strategy instruction was more significant to her than I realized.

Personal Insights

When I began this research, I was wrestling with questions about how to help my students learn more about learning. I felt confident that my students were capable of getting more out of the learning opportunities they had, and taking more initiative and responsibility for their own learning. But I felt limited in my ability to help them do that.

Whether or not this research was beneficial for the students, I can definitely say that it was an enlightening experience for me as a teacher. It has given me more understanding about the process of learning, and the significance of learning how to learn. It has given me tools to approach strategy instruction, even to low-proficiency students. I can say with

confidence that I feel better equipped to help students move toward becoming more independent, effective learners.

This study has enriched me as a researcher as well, both in my classroom and outside of it. It has given me knowledge about how to watch students, to recognize their specific needs and abilities, and to diagnose how to help them. It has made me more inquisitive, and it has made me verify the evidence that lies behind assumptions that I (or others) make. And it has encouraged me to use examples for everything!

Limitations

This study was limited by a number of factors. First of all, only a small number of students were studied in this research, each of whom came with their own individual personalities, cultures, experiences, strengths and weaknesses, etc. In this class, a majority of the students were Hmong, and most of them had relatively high literacy skills in another language. So, the results of this study cannot necessarily be applied to other students. Secondly, although these students have been classified as “low-proficiency,” there is a significant range of levels that could be classified similarly. These students did have a fair understanding of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), but if they had not, results could have been different. Additionally, the study took place over a period of only thirteen weeks. Only a limited number of strategies were able to be taught during that time. If the study had been able to continue longer, other patterns could have been discovered as well. Finally, attendance issues that stemmed from various life circumstances also limited the results of this study.

Suggestions for Further Research

Much is left to be discovered about how to make language learning strategies more accessible for low-proficiency students. First of all, since this study focused only on reading strategies, it would be interesting to learn more about strategy instruction for low-proficiency students in other language skills, such as writing, speaking, and listening. Secondly, this study was heavily influenced by the fact that a majority of the students were Hmong. Research with students from other cultures would be intriguing as well. Given the existence of so many levels of proficiency that could all be classified as beginners, it would also be beneficial to study other levels of beginners. Perhaps even more significantly, most of the students in this study had relatively high literacy skills in another language. Learning more about strategy instruction for students with lower literacy skills provides another significant opportunity for further research.

Conclusion

All students in all learning situations must grapple with the process of learning. Beginning ESL students like Fatima, Mai Lee, and Alberto, who were described in the introduction of this paper, are faced with learning a second language for the sake of survival, and are often set back by additional factors such as lack of previous education, needing to straddle cultural differences, etc. For these students, being able to learn a new language effectively is even more crucial than it may be for others. Helping students like these acquire more effective language learning strategies can be a significant step in that process.

APPENDIX A
Preliminary Questionnaire

Name _____

Date _____

LEARNING STRATEGIES PRELIMINARY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Before you read a story, do you first look over it and think, "What is the story about?"

never sometimes always I don't understand

2. Before you read a story, do you first ask yourself questions about it?

never sometimes always I don't understand

3. While you read a story, do you look for specific information?

never sometimes always I don't understand

4. While you read a story, do you stop and ask yourself, "Do I understand?"

never sometimes always I don't understand

5. After you read a story, do you ask yourself, "What is the story about?"

never sometimes always I don't understand

6. After you read a story, do you go back and read it again?

never sometimes always I don't understand

7. After you read a story, do you try to remember what it was about? (For example, write down the important information, talk about it...)

never sometimes always I don't understand

8. When you don't understand a new word, do you think about what type of word it is?

never sometimes always I don't understand

9. When you don't understand a new word, do you look at the rest of the sentence, and try to guess what it is?

never sometimes always I don't understand

10. When you want to remember a new word, do you test yourself, and think "What does it mean?"

never sometimes always I don't understand

11. When you want to remember a new word, do you say it to yourself over and over?

never sometimes always I don't understand

12. What else do you do that helps you understand what you read, or remember new words?

APPENDIX B
Anecdotal Records

ANECDOTAL RECORDS

Unit _____ Date _____

Student	Strategy	Context / Comments

Strategies:

p – predicting
 aq – ask yourself questions (set a purpose)
 sa – selective attention
 sm – self-monitoring
 sum – summarizing
 rr – rereading

rem – remembering what you read
 wt – word-type
 c – contextualization
 ty – testing yourself
 rep – repetition
 bk – activate background knowledge

APPENDIX C

Teaching Self-Evaluation Form

TEACHING SELF-EVALUATION FORM

Unit _____ Date _____

(Rating is on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is terrible and 5 is great)

	Rating	Comments
Step 1: Preparation		
Step 2: Presentation		
Step 3: Practice		
Stage 4: Evaluation		

Stage 5: Expansion		
organization of unit		
relevance to students' needs		
appropriateness to students' level		
students' understanding of strategy		
students' use of strategy		
students' overall response to unit		
other issues		

APPENDIX D
Post-Questionnaire

Name _____

Date _____

LEARNING STRATEGIES POST-QUESTIONNAIRE

1. STRATEGY: ASK YOURSELF QUESTIONS before you read it

Before you read a story, do you first ASK YOURSELF QUESTIONS about it?

never sometimes always

Did you learn more about this strategy during this class? Was the teaching helpful?

yes some a little no

Do you use this strategy more now (in January) than before (in September)? Will you use this strategy a lot in the future?

yes some a little no

2. STRATEGY: STOP and ASK YOURSELF, "Do I understand?" while you read it

While you read a story, do you STOP and ASK YOURSELF, "Do I understand?"

never sometimes always

Did you learn more about this strategy during this class? Was the teaching helpful?

yes some a little no

Do you use this strategy more now (in January) than before (in September)? Will you use this strategy a lot in the future?

yes some a little no

3. STRATEGY: TEST YOURSELF after you read it

After you read a story, do you TEST YOURSELF by quizzing yourself on the new words (using flashcards, repeating the new words and definitions, etc.)?

never sometimes always

Did you learn more about this strategy during this class? Was the teaching helpful?

yes some a little no

Do you use this strategy more now (in January) than before (in September)? Will you use this strategy a lot in the future?

yes some a little no

After you read a story, do you TEST YOURSELF by trying to figure out which questions the teacher will ask on the test?

never sometimes always

Did you learn more about this strategy during this class? Was the teaching helpful?

yes some a little no

Do you use this strategy more now (in January) than before (in September)? Will you use this strategy a lot in the future?

yes some a little no

4. STRATEGY: SUMMARIZE it after you read it

After you read a story, do you SUMMARIZE it by asking yourself, "What is the story about?"

never

sometimes

always

Did you learn more about this strategy during this class? Was the teaching helpful?

yes

some

a little

no

Do you use this strategy more now (in January) than before (in September)? Will you use this strategy a lot in the future?

yes

some

a little

no

5. OTHER QUESTIONS

What is your **native language**?

Can you read and write in that language?

Did you use that language in school? How many years?

Can you speak **another language**, besides English?

Can you read and write in that language?

How old were you when you first learned to read and write in that language?

How many years of school did you have, before you came to the United States?

What did you **like** about this class?

What did you **not like** about this class?

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