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***Strategy Instruction in The Language Classroom: Issues, Concerns and Possibilities.***

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**ABSTRACT**

*Despite the enthusiasm in the language learner strategy domain, the field has been criticized for a number of issues including those related to definition and terminology, theoretical underpinnings, and methodology used. Out of these, issues regarding methodology are of major concern. Some of these criticisms are leveled at the methodology adopted to elicit, measure, and classify strategies while some others are directed at the methodology used in assessing the effects of strategy instruction. The focus of the present paper is to discuss some of these issues and concerns and to report how a longitudinal intervention study attempted to address some of the methodological issues in learner strategy research, mainly in the area of writing. The study adopted a pre-test post-test true experimental research design and used both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection and data analysis. Strategy questionnaires, stimulated recall protocols, and diary entries were used as instruments for data elicitation on strategy use. The paper provides insights into how strategies can be elicited and how the impact of strategy instruction can be assessed.*

**Key Words: Strategy Instruction, L2 Learner Strategies, University Students**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language learner strategies (LLS) have been the focus of much researchers during the past three decades. Most of these studies focused on identifying strategies used by different learners in different contexts and classifying those into different categories. The ultimate aim of strategy research, however, should be the development of knowledge that can be utilized to enhance language learning and teaching. Even though some researchers have shown interest in learner strategy instruction, the area is still in its infancy and not many researchers are interested in carrying out research in this area due to constraints of time and energy it demands. This paper discusses the issues related to definition and classification of strategies, strategy based instruction and issues related to evaluation of the impact of strategy instruction.

## 2. ISSUES RELATED TO DEFINITION OF A STRATEGY

The definitions for LLS by early researchers have been criticized for not being able to come to a consensus and for not having a sound theoretical foundation (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Ellis, 1994). As defined by some of the early researchers, strategies are special actions or thoughts that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information and which make their learning easier, more effective and more self-directed (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). As Cohen (1998) defines them, second language learner strategies are 'steps or actions consciously selected by learners either to improve the *learning* of a second language, the *use* of it, or both' (p. 5, italics original). Thus Cohen groups language learner strategies as language learning strategies and language use strategies. Language learning strategies, according to Cohen, are learning processes which are consciously selected by the learner and they include strategies for identifying the material to be learned, distinguishing it from other material if necessary, having repeated contact with the material and formally committing the material to memory when it does not seem to be acquired naturally. This view, however, has been criticized by Dörnyei (2005) saying that it does not distinguish normal learning behaviors from strategic learning behaviours. Language use strategies, according to Cohen, are processes that are used to retrieve and rehearse material in the learners' repertory and those that are used to compensate for gaps in the target language and those that aid communication.

Dörnyei (2005) criticizes language learner strategy research for not having a solid theoretical foundation and "he has contributed to the debate on the theoretical status of language learning strategies by suggesting a reconceptualization of the construct within the self-regulation paradigm, which in his view, can solve part of the prevailing views of strategies". Cohen and Macaro (2007), addressing this criticism suggest that the researchers in the

field need to strive towards a 'definitive model of a strategy within a cognitive framework' or they should state clearly the theoretical framework on which they base their research on (p.283).

Macaro (2006) proposes a framework in which a strategy occurs in working memory of the brain. The nature of an individual strategy does not change and the learners select and orchestrate clusters of strategies to meet the demands of a particular task. He also stresses that it is not the frequency of strategy use but the orchestration of strategies available to a particular learner that results in successful learning. Graham (1997) too in her study of strategy use of Advanced Level students learning French and German found that the more effective language learners employed a combination of strategies that were appropriate to tasks. According to her, the combination of strategies and the manner in which they are employed are more important than the number and range of strategies.

Using the above views on learner strategies, Macaro (2006) defined learner strategies as "conscious mental activity, employed in pursuit of a goal, often with problem-solving as its primary aim within a learning situation and an activity which is 'transferable to other situations and tasks'."

This definition covers most of the recent theoretical underpinnings in language learner strategies (e.g., Cohen, 2007; Gu, 2005; Macaro, 2006).

### **3. ISSUES RELATED TO CLASSIFICATION OF LANGUAGE LEARNER STRATEGIES**

In addition to the controversies among researchers regarding a proper definition of language learning strategies, there remain differences in classification of these strategies into groups. Rubin (1981) distinguished between direct and indirect strategies. Direct strategies according to her are those that directly contribute to L2 learning (clarification/verification, monitoring, memorization, guessing/inductive referencing, deductive reasoning and practice) and indirect strategies are those that indirectly support language learning (creating opportunities for practice and production tricks). O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Küpper, and Russo (1985a) developed a taxonomy of language learning strategies grouping 26 strategies identified by them into three categories: cognitive, metacognitive and social. Oxford (1990) expanded this to have six categories: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. These were regrouped into two main groups, direct strategies which include memory, cognitive and compensation strategies and indirect strategies which include metacognitive, affective and social strategies. Oxford's direct strategies are those that are directly involved in learning the target language and indirect strategies are the ones that are not directly

involved in learning the target language but useful in learning a language in general. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was designed by Oxford using the taxonomy given above. The individual items under each of the six categories in the SILL describe specific strategic behaviours and the scale descriptors ranging from 'never or almost never true of me' to 'always or almost always true of me' show frequencies of strategy use. As Dörnyei (2005) argues, it is impossible to assume a linear relationship between individual item scores and the total scale scores in the SILL and 'thus the scales in the SILL are not cumulative and psychometrically not justifiable' (p. 182). Although the SILL has been identified as a useful practical classroom tool it has been criticized for trying to combine both practical and psychometric considerations in order to be used as a research tool for which it is not fit (Dörnyei, 2005).

Seeing the problems in SILL, Hsiao and Oxford (2002) suggest the need to use other approaches to strategy classification and they suggest that the current strategy classification theories need to be modified. They stress the importance of consistency in the level of specificity when designing strategy items and emphasize the need to have a task-based inventory. As Chamot (2004) points out the types of learning tasks language learners engage in are determined by their goals, the educational / cultural values of the society and the context of learning. Learners use different strategies to suit the learning context and according to Chamot 'different sets of language learning strategies and hence, different or modified classification systems can coexist for researchers' (p. 6). Macaro (2006) proposes that these categories need to be reduced to include metacognitive and cognitive strategies only and suggests that future research needs to provide evidence for that division. However, the role of affective and social strategies cannot be undermined in a language learning context and Macaro rightly groups them under metacognitive and/or cognitive strategies.

Another typology of learning strategies developed by Nunan (1999) classifies those into five main categories: cognitive, interpersonal, linguistic, affective and creative. According to him, frequency of the use of given strategies may depend on the students' age and proficiency level, the skills being practised and the needs of individual learners.

Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) argue that a strategy cannot be cognitive, emotional, and behavioural at the same time and they propose that it has to be defined either as a neurological process, or as a cognitive operation, or as a behavioural action. Dörnyei (2005) shows his concern further about the lack of a clear definition for LLS and he levels his criticism against the two taxonomies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990) for being miscellaneous since the individual items in different categories overlap. This overlapping may occur because observable similar behavioural actions could be the result of different mental actions carried out in order to achieve different goals.

In response to the criticism of not having a sound theoretical basis for the language learning strategy taxonomies, Tseng, Dörnyei and Schmitt (2006) attempt to develop a new instrument, 'Self-regulating Capacity in Vocabulary Learning Scale' using the newer concept of self-regulation in educational psychology. This instrument has twenty items with four items each under the five subscales of self-regulation capacity: commitment control, metacognitive control, satiation control, emotion control, and environmental control. They believe that a questionnaire like this can provide a more psychometrically valid measure of strategic learning than the instruments which are in use now. This instrument, however, is limited to vocabulary acquisition and there is a need to develop instruments which specifically focus on different skill areas.

#### **4. ISSUES RELATED TO IDENTIFICATION OF LLS: RESEARCH TOOLS**

Learner strategies have been identified using a variety of tools. The most used research tools include questionnaires/ strategy inventories, think-aloud protocols, reflective journals/ diaries, interviews and stimulated recall protocols. Some of those instruments are described and their advantages and disadvantages are discussed below, with reference to studies that have employed them.

##### **4.1 Questionnaires**

Questionnaires are the most frequently used tools in language learner strategy research. Collection of data using questionnaires is an efficient method when the focus of the research is mainly to understand patterns of strategy use of a large sample. The Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), developed by Oxford (1990) is probably the most widely known measure in language learner strategy field and there is an abundance of descriptive studies all over the world which used this inventory as the main instrument for data collection from large samples (eg; Green and Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2003; Peacock, 2001; Wharton, 2000). Thus, the SILL has been used in the above mentioned studies and in many others but these researchers have not taken measures to check the comprehensibility of strategy items with their subjects or taken measures to help them in recalling the strategies they actually use. The SILL has also been used in studies which attempted to investigate the relationship between strategy use and an array of variables such as gender, language proficiency, discipline, learning style, culture, task (Green & Oxford, 1995; Griffiths, 2003; Peacock, 2001; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993; Oxford & Burry-Stock, 1995; Wharton, 2000). Hsiao and Oxford (2002) collected data from 517 students using the EFL/ESL version of Oxford's SILL and they claim that out of the three taxonomies they compared, Oxford's Taxonomy showed the most consistent fit with learners' strategy use. However, as discussed above, the scales used in the SILL have

been criticized as not cumulative and psychometrically not valid (Dörnyei, 2005). Hence these findings need to be interpreted with caution. Most of the above mentioned studies have not pilot tested the instrument with the informants and hence there may have been inaccuracies in the interpretation of the items.

Several studies illustrate the advantages that can be gained from using task-specific questionnaires. Cohen, Oxford, and Chi (2003) designed the Language Strategy Use Inventory for different skill areas consisting of items related to listening, speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, and translation. This inventory together with the Strategy Inventory for Learning Culture were found to be reliable and valid measures of strategy use in 'study abroad' contexts (Paige, Cohen, & Shively, 2004, cited in White, Schramm, & Chamot, 2007). These inventories have been piloted and revised and validated using a large number of students and hence the above claim could be accepted.

Some studies have attempted to address the problems in designing and administering a self-report questionnaire by selecting items after interviewing students in a similar context and piloting it with a similar sample (eg; Erler, 2007). Erler, however, has not taken steps to assist the students in recalling the strategies they actually use. The problem of recalling has been addressed by some researchers by administering the questionnaires soon after their informants attempted a task (Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999; Fan, 2003).

Questionnaires are thus useful in collecting data from a large sample within a short period of time and if measures are taken to minimize the disadvantages they can be used as valuable data collection tools.

#### **4.2 Verbal protocols**

According to Cohen (1998), verbal report has become a popular data collection tool because it 'provides data on cognitive processes and learner responses that otherwise would have to be investigated only indirectly' (p. 49). The main types of verbal protocols used in learner strategy research are think-aloud and stimulated recall.

In research that use think-aloud protocols, the learner is given a particular task and is asked to vocalize his/her thoughts while attempting the task. The researcher may provide prompts to help learners in verbalizing their thoughts. The responses are recorded and analyzed to identify learner strategies. Think-aloud protocols have been used in a number of strategy research projects as a data collection tool (see Cohen, 1998; Conti, 2004; Graham, 1997; Macaro, 2001; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) as they allow the researcher to collect real time data on the strategies the informants use while attempting a task. Some studies have found think-aloud useful in collecting data not easily identifiable with

questionnaires. For example, Graham (1997) using think-aloud protocols shows that students use combinations of strategies when attempting language tasks.

A main drawback in some of these studies (e.g; O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) is that the students were trained extensively to think-aloud which may have had an impact on their performance. The prompts used to elicit data may also have led the students to provide the researcher the desired answers.

As N.J. Anderson (2005) argues, the researchers are not only able to gather data on the process of strategy use but they can also capture the sequence of strategies informants use to complete language tasks. As Faigley, Chevy, Joliffe and Skinner (1985) point out, think-aloud protocols are useful in composition research as they offer 'the advantage of immediacy since writers report what they are thinking while they are writing, not afterward' (p. 169). However, the issue of validity in using think-aloud as a data eliciting tool has been raised by the same researchers. They argue that 'thinking-aloud protocols are intrusive, forcing the writer to speak and write at the same time' which may result in poor quality writing (p. 169). According to Tomlinson (1984), when thinking-aloud, the informants may not report on what they were actually thinking and they may use their background knowledge and opinions on the topic to fill in the gaps in their memory. Afflerbach (1986, as cited in Anderson, N.J., 2003) states that think-aloud protocols may be unable to reveal information about automatic processes. However, this argument may not be valid in strategy research since only conscious mental actions (not automatic processes) are considered as strategies. Cohen (1998) also raises the issue of validity in verbal reports and he proposes that the research reports need to include information about the instructions given to informants, training provided to informants for performing the task, and details of coding categories and inter-rater reliability of coding the protocols.

Issues in eliciting think-aloud data and transcribing those data have been discussed in detail by White, et al. (2007). According to them, the main issues in eliciting think-aloud data are training and prompting learners, especially the young informants, deciding on the language for prompting, and offering the choice of language for reporting. White et al. (2007) stress the importance of avoiding intrusiveness and carrying out think-aloud in authentic contexts.

### **4.3**    *Stimulated recall protocols*

Some researchers (Faigley, et al., 1985; Sasaki, 2000, 2002) believe that think-aloud is intrusive and some learners may find it hard to carry out thinking and vocalizing their thoughts simultaneously. Thus there may be a need to find less intrusive instruments for

eliciting data in language learner strategy research. Stimulated recall is one such instrument used in learner strategy research.

Bosher (1998) used stimulated recall to study the writing processes of three SouthEast Asian learners. He showed the students their video-taped writing behaviour and they produced stimulated recall protocols while watching the video. Sasaki (2000) used stimulated recall in her exploratory study to examine EFL writers' writing processes. The informants were shown their video-taped writing behaviour soon after they finished writing. This enabled Sasaki to induce their writing process and produce meaningful data which she believes would not have been possible with think-aloud. Sasaki (2002) also used the same stimulated recall method for data collection in her study which investigated Japanese EFL novice and expert writers' writing processes. Conducting the stimulated recall session immediately after the informants finished writing allowed Sasaki to elicit data on their writing processes while the event was fresh in their minds.

As Gass and Mackey (2000) point out, Stimulated Recall is one of the introspective methods that can be used to prompt the informants to recall the thought processes in operation while they were performing a task. The theoretical basis that underpins stimulated recall is 'an information-processing approach whereby the use of and access to memory structures is enhanced, if not guaranteed, by a prompt that aids in the recall of information' (Gass & Mackey, 2000, p. 17).

Stimulated recall when controlled for its limitations is useful especially in writing strategy research since the writing process and the written product can be used for data elicitation.

#### **4.4 Reflective journals/ diaries**

Reflective journals and learner diaries have also been used to identify language learner strategies. As Chamot (2005) points out, learners write personal observations about their own learning experiences and how they attempted to solve language problems in these journals/ diaries. Halbach (2000) used learner diaries as the main data collection tool in a study that investigated the strategy use of a sample of 181 undergraduate students who were following a course in English. The students recorded their problems in learning English and the events which were of interest to them in the English classroom. A major problem she encountered in using diaries as the only data collection tool is the low response from the students. Hence, the generalizability of the findings was a problem.

There is also a threat to validity in data as there is the doubt whether the diary entries are genuine thought processes or experiences of the writer or invented pieces of writing to please the teacher/researcher. However, Graham (1997) argues about the possibility of



encouraging subjects to express themselves 'honestly and unreservedly' and she stresses the importance of establishing 'an element of trust' in students (p. 47).

While some researchers prefer to give freedom to participants to note down whatever that comes to their minds (e.g. Nunan, 1996), some believe that a format might help the students in focusing on what to write (e.g. Graham, 1997). There are others who like to place their study half-way along this continuum and provide the students with more than one guideline to choose from and also encourage them to create their own if they need to do so (e.g. Halbach, 2000). Providing the students with a format or guidelines may help in controlling the irrelevance of data and reducing the volume of data produced as diary entries.

The use of e-journals is one of the most recent developments in LLS research methodology. This was used in a study (Paige, Cohen, and Shively, 2004, as cited in White et al., 2007) to find the impact of a strategy-based curriculum in a study abroad context. The students reported that e-journaling helped them to make links between the world of learning in the guide and their experiences in studying abroad. Thus e-journals can be considered a useful tool in accessing students' reflections on their experiences especially in a distance learning context.

As discussed above, using diaries or journals for data collection has advantages and disadvantages. Hence it may be necessary to use it not as the main data collection tool but as an additional one.

## **5. ISSUES RELATED TO STRATEGY BASED INSTRUCTION**

Strategy instruction (or training) can be defined as 'any intervention which focuses on the strategies to be regularly adopted and used by language learners to develop their proficiency, to improve particular task performance, or both' (Hassan et al., 2005).

Rubin, Chamot, Harris, and Anderson (2007) discuss a number of issues related to progression in intervention studies and stress the need to explore the possibilities in addressing these issues. According to them, some issues that future researchers need to focus on are:

1. The benefits and limitations of focusing on the strategies involved in one skill area as opposed to highlighting the overarching metacognitive strategies in any task the learner faces.
2. The choice of skill area on the basis of the age and proficiency level of the learner.

3. The selection of strategies within the particular skill area according to the age and proficiency level of the learner.
4. The relationship between the age, proficiency, and motivation level of the learners to the optimum number of strategies to be taught over the course of the SBI and even the number to be presented in any one lesson. (p. 156).

Rubin et al. also stress that it is necessary to develop tools that 'measure the learners' ability to self-manage language learning' (understand their own strengths and weaknesses and plan, monitor, and evaluate their language learning accordingly) and 'examine its relationship to a range of factors such as attainment, personality, and attitude' (p. 157).

However, in addition to developments in self-assessment, future strategy intervention studies need to provide sufficient scaffolding, modeling and enough practice for students.

Grenfell (2007) discusses the issues regarding learner strategy research and makes suggestions for future developments in the field of strategy instruction. As he points out, 'language learner strategies should not be seen as simply just another list of things to teach. ... We might begin to look at the way different linguistic exercises imply different strategic behaviours, which in turn give rise to particular linguistic outcomes' (p. 18). Grenfell claims that language learner strategy research has now broadened to include research on specific skills and on the symbiotic relationship between strategies and the quality of strategy use is receiving more attention than the quantity. Grenfell points out the importance of taking the social dimension into consideration when conducting learner strategy research in the future i.e. the interaction between the learners and their learning environment. He suggests that 'a strategically informed pedagogy' where an environment is created in the classroom to enable learners to develop their language learning 'strategically' would be better than just introducing learners to strategy instruction.

### *5.1 Issues related to evaluation of the impact of strategy instruction*

According to McDonough (1999), effectiveness of language strategy instruction can be evaluated based on four main alternatives. These include: a) the learners' use of particular strategies as taught; b) the use of a strategic approach which involves personal development of strategies; c) substituting less effective and lower-level strategies with more-efficient higher-level strategies; or d) increase in proficiency which could be attributable to strategy use (p.12). The first three alternatives, as Manchón (2007) rightly points out, are measures of effectiveness of strategy instruction through learner's quality of strategy use (effectiveness, level of sophistication, or personalization) while the fourth one measures the causal relationship between strategy use and language proficiency/ achievement. Empirical research is, therefore, necessary in the above areas.

Most of the effective strategy instruction studies reviewed highlight the importance of metacognition in learning. The key themes in the models of writing such as planning, formulation, monitoring and evaluation are the focus of metacognitive strategy instruction models and the researchers involved stress the value of clustering and orchestrating the relevant strategies in order to achieve the desired outcomes. The task-specificity in strategy use is also seen in some studies. Several studies also highlight the role of motivation and attitudes in language performance (e.g. Graham, 2007; Graham & Macaro, 2008).

The studies reviewed also provide useful insights into methods of data collection. A method that is able to elicit data on the process as well as the product may be of importance in a study on writing strategy use. Another point to emerge is the importance of using multiple complementary methods for elicitation, use of the same methods at pre-test and post-test, piloting of instruments and making them task-specific.

As Grenfell and Macaro (2007) state, the language learner strategy field has undergone three major developments: shifting its focus from good language learner strategies to task specific learner strategies, from quantity of strategy use to quality of strategy use, and investigating the relationship between strategy deployment and achievement.

A main issue that has not gained much attention in language learner strategy research is the methodology used in measuring the effectiveness or impact of strategy instruction on learners' strategy use and performance. Some studies are cross-sectional in design which makes evaluation of the development of strategy use of a particular group impossible.

Some studies evaluate the development in students' strategy use, using questionnaires or rating scales only. These instruments are not sufficient in investigating the effectiveness of the strategies used or the manner in which the strategies are used and thus, may not be able to reveal the true picture.

A problem with some studies (e.g. Conti, 2004) is the researcher's interpretation of the impact of strategy instruction as positive without having a nontreatment comparison or control group. In such studies, there is no evidence that the improvement in strategy use or writing performance resulted from strategy instruction rather than from practice over time.

Another issue related to strategy instruction which needs clarification is the level of explicitness in strategy instruction (the steps involved, scaffolding provided etc.) and yet another is the length of time spent on strategy instruction. Thus, evaluating the success of strategy instruction by comparing pre-post performance of participants may not be valid in some studies.

**6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRESENT STUDY**

The literature review showed that there were relatively few writing strategy instruction studies, especially studies which were experimental in design. Even fewer intervention studies have been reported on writing strategy instruction and on strategy deployment of students learning English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Most of the research in EAP has been carried out on second language learners in native English speaking environments. Not many studies have been reported on L2 learners studying in L2 medium universities in non-native English speaking environments.

Studies in second language writing were also found to be mainly focusing on one or two aspects of writing (i.e. planning or formulating) and the strategy intervention studies focused on either revision or error correction or dictionary use. Relatively few empirical studies that investigate the theoretical underpinnings of the strategy construct (i.e. how strategies are combined and orchestrated in order to achieve a goal) have been reported to date.

The present study thus attempted to address the gap in the learner strategy literature, by designing an intervention study of writing strategy instruction for English for Academic Purposes students at the Open University of Sri Lanka. The study focused on the skill of writing since research in this context showed that it was the skill that most of the students were weak in (Raheem & Ratwatte, 2001; Raheem & Wijetunge, 2009).

**6.1 *Minimizing the issues - Possibilities***

The present study attempted to minimize some of the issues discussed above, especially the ones regarding methodology. In order to address the issue of length of intervention, the study adopted a longitudinal design and was of six months duration. The study was true-experimental in design as the informants were randomly selected and randomly assigned to an experimental group and a control group. Each group consisted of an equal number of high and low attainment level students which enabled the researcher to see the differences in strategy use between different proficiency groups.

The study addressed the methodological issue of strategy elicitation by adopting three different research tools for data elicitation. A questionnaire was designed using information gained through a focus group discussion and was pilot tested with a similar sample. The questionnaire also included open-ended items. This part of the questionnaire helped the researcher to identify the strategies that were not easily identifiable or pre-determined by researchers. It also enabled the researcher to find out the strategies students used at different stages of writing.

In the present study, stimulated recall methodology was used by providing the informants with prompts (a videotape of themselves doing a writing task and the written product) to support them in recalling their thought processes while attempting the task and vocalizing them. To minimize the issues of validity that may arise, such as the informants forgetting what they were thinking/doing at that particular moment, it was decided to have the stimulated recall session within one and a half hours after they complete the writing task.

It was used in conjunction with other data collection techniques (Gass & Mackey, 2000) such as questionnaires and diary entries as a means of triangulation of data and as a tool for in depth exploration of the strategies employed by the students while writing in L2 prior to and after the strategy training.

The recommendations made by Gass and Mackey (2000) were taken into consideration when planning the pilot study and the main study. For example, the stimulated recall session was held within one and a half hours after the task (timing), video and the written products were used as prompts (strength) and no specific training was provided. In the present study, diaries were used as a means to collect additional data on strategies used by the informants. In the present study, to avoid the problem of producing irrelevant data and to motivate the students to write regularly, it was decided to provide them with a basic outline for their diary entries (see Figure 1). In the first column, students were asked to describe the task briefly and they were advised to tick column 2 if the task was assigned by the teacher and tick column 3 if it was chosen by the student himself/herself. They were also shown how to fill in other four columns. However, they were told that they had freedom to record other things that would be of interest to them, on the adjoining page using a different colour pen. The students were told that they could write in the diaries in their mother tongue and/or in English if they wish to do so.

Date and Task	Assigned by the teacher	Chosen by me	What problems did I have?	What strategies did I use?	How well did those strategies work?	What other strategies could I use?

Figure 1: Outline for Diary Entries

### The Strategy Instruction Programme

The experimental group was provided with a comprehensive writing strategy instruction programme designed by the researcher and the control group had the same number of teaching hours and followed the same course content except the strategy instruction. The control group was taught by a teacher who had qualifications and experience similar

to the researcher. The strategy instruction was conducted by the researcher and was spread out over a 24 week period. The instruction was provided during class time as a series of two hour workshops and in the form of homework assignments. The researcher provided explicit instruction of selected strategies during the first eight workshops and thereafter, the instruction was embedded into their daily writing activities. The control group teacher too devoted the same amount of time for teaching writing and the researcher observed some of her lessons and had informal discussions with her to understand her approach to teaching writing. The control group teacher's lessons were observed in order to find out whether she trained her students to use any writing strategies. It was found that the control group students received no training in the use of writing strategies.

The strategy instruction programme was found to be successful since the experimental group showed greater improvement (both quantitatively and qualitatively) in their writing strategy use and in their writing performance than did the control group.

The study also has implications for how writing strategy instruction needs to be carried out. In the present study, explicit training of strategies based on tasks was provided at the beginning and the degree of scaffolding provided was reduced gradually and the training was systematically integrated into day-to-day classroom activities. Since the learners benefited from this strategy training, the strategy training cycle used in the present study (Author, 2010) may be useful for future studies.

Measuring students' strategy use and writing performance in the midst of the programme may give the teachers an opportunity to evaluate their strategy training and make necessary amendments to the programme.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this paper is to discuss the issues related to strategy instruction, especially those related to strategy elicitation. The paper discussed some of the issues by reviewing studies in the field and it attempted to show how these issues could be minimized by careful planning and implementation of strategy intervention studies. Due to lack of space, the details of the strategy instruction programme and the findings will be discussed in a future paper. Future studies in strategy instruction need to pay attention to the content and the length of training and it would be better if evaluation of students' performance could be done at regular intervals. Future research could also investigate the possibility of providing strategy instruction to students through new technology such as audio-visual material and online training. These new resources supplemented by handbooks that describe different strategies in detail may be of optimal use for learners, especially for those who study in the distance mode. The effects of these on students' strategy use and

their performance in different skills in the target language are also areas that would demand future research.

Comparative studies on the effects of face to face strategy instruction and distance mode strategy instruction would also bring new insights into the field of language learner strategy research.

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