

Investigating the Strategy Investment and Self-Confidence in Second Language Learning*

ZHANG Xin, LONG Shaoyun
Jiangxi Normal University, Jiangxi, China

In principles of language learning and teaching, Brown talks about 12 principles of second language learning on which our teaching can be based. The authors chose two principles to further discuss and would give some practical suggestions. The principle of strategic investment is related to cognitive theory. Brown equates the learner's "methods"—a position of equal importance with teacher's methods. In other words, it emphasizes that a learner successfully masters the second language due to a large extent to his/her own personal "investment" of strategies. Thus, English teachers need to guide the learners to use different learning strategies. Another principle is the self-confidence. Self-confidence belongs to affective principles. Self-confidence has been directly connected the situation that a person believes in his/her own ability to accomplish the task. Self-confidence is the first step in learning English well because a confident student often play an active role in class and think quickly. This paper mainly discusses the functions of the self-confidence and strategies investment principles in students' learning and English teaching in second language. This study aims to encourage English teachers to employ the two principles during teaching process and enable students to enjoy the English learning. In the end, the authors also give some pedagogical implications to second language teaching.

Keywords: strategy investment, self-confidence, autonomous learning

Introduction

The second language learning has lately received an increasing interest of many language teachers and researchers. There are still some problems in the course of English teaching, such as so-called "forced-feeding method of teaching" and low confidence of students. The reason why students cannot study English well is that there is few theoretical guidance on how to improve students' English learning in practice. Besides, this condition requires teachers to find out the basic influence factors and connected them with reality. Hence, the teacher needs to be acquainted with a comprehensive knowledge of these teaching principles and the ability to use it. It is the teacher's responsibility to improve students' study efficiency and build up their confidence.

A Discussion of Strategy Investment

Ever since the 1970s, learning strategies have been studied by foreign language researchers. Cohen (1998)

* **Acknowledgement:** Author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The work for this paper has been made possible by a special research fund from Jiangxi Visiting Scholars Projects for Ordinary Colleges-and-Universities Young and Middle-aged Teachers Development (Ganjiao Gaozi [2013] No. 29).

ZHANG Xin, Master, Foreign Language College, Jiangxi Normal University, Jiangxi, China.

LONG Shaoyun, Master, professor, Foreign Language College, Jiangxi Normal University, Jiangxi, China.

claimed that

learning strategies refer to learners' conscious or semiconscious behaviors and their psychological activities and they have two clear goals. One goal is to make it easier to learn language and linguistic skills. The other goal is to use language or make up for linguistic knowledge of learners. (p. 74)

From this, we can know that learning strategy is a goal-directed and conscious decision-making process which can improve students' effectiveness and efficiency of learning. Cohen (1998) discussed the effect of different English teaching modes on the learning strategies adopted by English learners. It indicates that it attach significance for teachers to appropriate teaching modes to help students improve their learning strategies. Oxford and Nyikos (1989) claimed that appropriate strategic training can promote the development of independent learning ability in the process of English autonomous learning. Thus, the realization of independent learning is inseparable from strategic training. Many famous scholars have explored ways to improve learner autonomy by using learning strategies, both theoretically and practically. Hence, there is a close relationship between autonomous learning and learning strategies.

There are various classifications of learning strategies. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) divided strategies into three kinds: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social affective strategies. Metacognitive includes knowledge about when and how to use particular strategies for monitoring, self-adjusting, and the learning behavior or for problem solving, such as selective attention, self-management, and self-assessment. Cognitive strategies are the specific methods that people use to learn knowledge or solve problems, including the use of repetition, associations, or taking notes and summaries. Affective strategies related to the learners' control of their emotions while learning, such as cooperating and self-encouraging. Oxford (1990) classified learning strategies into two parts according to the interaction between it and language materials. They are direct strategies and indirect strategies. The direct strategies are divided into three subcategories: memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. Despite there are various classifications about learning strategies, they all include cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies.

As far as the source of learning strategies is concerned, learning strategies contribute positively to autonomous learning. Students who have a chance of learning strategies training can learn by themselves in a better way. If students can choose appropriate learning strategies, their learning efficiency is likely to improve remarkably. Therefore, it is much more desirable and beneficial to teach students as much as learning strategies as possible. But, methods in teaching are available, unlimited but worth selecting because of learning strategies are flexible. It required for teachers give students proper guidance.

A Discussion of Self-Confidence

Brown (2001) believed the eventual success that learners attain in a task is at least partially a factor of their belief that they indeed are fully capable of accomplishing the task. In other words, self-confidence relates to self-assurance in one's personal judgement and self-esteem is showed in language learning as self-confidence. Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978) described self-esteem as one's sense of worth or importance; it is an attitude-positive or negative-held about the self, and includes both cognitive and affective elements. Thus, positive self-esteem has been linked to factors, such as the affirmation of others and self-positive beliefs. On the contrary, low self-esteem has been associated with the outcomes of depression, the negation of others. As part of psychological quality, self-confidence is one of the affective factors. It plays an important role in

language teaching and learning. Why do students feel “they can’t do it”, “they are not good enough”? Most of these problems seem to have the same root: a poor self-confidence. Some students with low self-confidence may be excessively fearful and timid, unable to make decisions. So, students who lack self-confidence are often in poor class performance. Hence, it requires teacher to give students positive beliefs (for example, “you are competent”, and “you are worthy”).

As far as the source of learning strategies is concerned, it indicates that confident students develop enthusiasm for learning and urge themselves to learn English well. Students who suffer from low self-confidence are greatly unable to reaching their learning potential. Inversely, a self-confident person will find English learning much easier and more interesting than one that holds a gloomy view on one’s own ability. So, it takes time to encourage students to build up self-confidence and inspire them to improve their study.

Pedagogical Implications of the Strategy Investment

Learning strategies are not only a sign of learning to learn, but also a bridge to develop independent learning and lifelong learning ability. For teachers, firstly, they should attach importance to the training of language learning strategies and select the appropriate training for students with different characteristics. Those who have received learning strategy training prove to be more successful in their autonomous learning. Secondly, teachers should give students opportunities to study independently, and let them to learn how to learn. That is to say, teachers need to change students’ attitude of “want me to learn” to “I want to learn” and help students to be responsible for their own English learning. It can cultivate their autonomous learning awareness and habits. Thirdly, teachers are required to consciously integrate English strategy teaching into classroom teaching activities in order to enhance the students’ ability of using learning strategies. Therefore, it is much more advisable to teach students as much as learning strategies as possible, such as metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and affective strategies.

Hence, when you teach, the first thing you should do is to encourage students to use affective strategies to reduce language anxiety in order to enhance English learning interests. Then, leading students to use cognitive strategies to solve problems and guiding students to use metacognitive strategies to achieve self-adjusting. Finally, you are required to encourage students to learn to use emotional strategies, to seek help in the process of learning English.

In short, English teachers must refresh their teaching concepts. It requires to change the traditional teacher-centered knowledge-feeding pattern to the student-centered mode. In addition, teachers should teach students in accordance with their aptitude in order to suit the needs of student.

Pedagogical Implications of the Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is self-affirmation which means you have a correct appraisal of yourself. It is important for teachers to build up students’ learning confidence. Firstly, teachers should be genial enough to his students. In the teaching process, it requires teachers to establish a harmonious teacher-student relationship and create a favorable teacher-student interaction atmosphere. For example, in classroom, teachers need to say “thank you very much” to the students who answered the questions in order to show teacher’s gratitude and respect. This is a good way to make students feel respected. Teachers’ encouragement is also essential, such as the praise words of “excellent”, “wonderful”, “fantastic”, or the trustful eye contact. These incentives can awake the

self-confidence of students. Secondly, teachers should treat students' language mistake reasonably. If teachers cannot handle students' mistake properly, it is very easy to hurt the students' self-esteem and further affect their self-confidence. So, teachers need to keep a certain level of tolerance and take a positive attitude in correcting the students' mistakes. Thirdly, it requires teachers to create chances of success for students and let students experience the success in the process. For example, teachers can specially put forth a simple question for weak students. Finally, teachers should help students consolidate the language foundation, which can reduce students' depression of learning.

Thus, when you start teaching a new group, you would better, first of all, create a positive relaxed classroom atmosphere. And then you should treat students in a kind way and encourage them into active interactions. Finally, in the beginning of a lesson, you might as well to use simple activities and then move on to more complex ones. The proper activities in pairs and groups are good for building confidence. Within the group, students are free to exchange their idea and opinions about problem-solving tasks. Especially for shy learners, they prefer to face a less threatening environment.

Conclusion

This paper has introduced two language teaching principles and put forward some feasible suggestions for language teaching and learning.

For the learning strategies, the authors found the use of different kinds of learning strategies is not easy for students. Teachers can integrate learning strategies into the classroom and use different methods to train students' learning strategies. Those who have received learning strategies training prove to be more successful in their autonomous learning. We can see that learning strategies contribute positively to autonomous learning. If students can find whatever suitable learning strategies, their learning efficiency can boost. So, teachers need to guidance students to find learning strategies suitable for themselves in accordance of their aptitude.

For the self-confidence, self-confidence to study English is crucial to students' success. Positive affective factors, such as great self-confidence can facilitate students' English learning, while negative affective factors, such as high anxiety, lack of confidence may hinder students' English learning. The self-confidence to learn English comes not only from the individual, but also can be influenced by external factors, especially teachers. So, teachers should always be patient and approachable. In other words, teachers are required to maintain a teacher-friend relationship with students. It is also vital to create a comfortable learning atmosphere. Enough attention should provide to individual differences and emphasis on affective factors.

References

- Bialystock, E. (1980). *A theoretical model of second language learning: Readings on English as a second language*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Cohen, A. D. (1998). *Strategies in learning and using a second language*. London: Longman.
- MacIntyre, P. D., & Noels, K. A. (1996). Using social psychological variables to predict the use of language learning strategies. *Foreign Language Annals*, 29(3), 373-386.
- McDevitt, B. (1997). Learner autonomy and the need for learner training. *The Language Learning Journal*, 16(1), 34-39.
- O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. (1990). *Language learning strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. (2001). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. China: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

- Oxford, R. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. New York: Newbury House.
- Oxford, R., & Nyikos, M. (1989). Variables affecting choice of language learning strategies by university students. *Modern Language Journal*, 73(2), 219-300.
- Rosenberg, M., & Pearlin, L. I. (1978). Social class and self-esteem among children and adults. *American Journal of Sociology*, 84(1), 53-57.
- Stern, H. H. (1983). *Fundamental concepts of language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.