

THE CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstrak

Dewasa ini belajar merupakan kata kunci dalam pendidikan. Demikian juga belajar adalah kata kunci dalam pembelajaran bahasa. Mengetahui konsep dasar belajar secara khusus menjadi begitu bermanfaat. Dalam pembelajaran bahasa, pembelajar sungguh membutuhkan seperangkat strategi belajar. Strategi belajar adalah seperangkat cara atau taktik khusus yang digunakan pembelajar bahasa. Strategi belajar mengungkapkan bagaimana kinerja mental berfungsi, memproses pemerolehan kompetensi yang diinginkan.

BASIC CONCEPT OF LEARNING

The fall and rise of the schools of psychology of learning has to be viewed as a dynamic development of the concept of learning itself. Basically, the fall and rise of schools of psychology can not be only seen as failure of one and the success of the other, but it indicates that each has complementary function of one to the other. The new psychology of learning enriches the existing concept of learning as proposed by the previous one, in that it adds new basic principles of learning without totally rejecting the concept of learning from the previous schools of psychology. Many experts have been in their greater interest to uncover what learning is all about. By such of dynamic discussion, learning has become the most meaningful word which plays its crucial roles in education so far.

Since the era of Skinner (1953, in Stern, 1983: 291), the most leading figure of the behaviorist psychology, learning has become the pendulum. Learning has spread and dominated the education world. On the basis of Thorndike's test (in Hill, 1963: 57) on how a cat tried to escape from the cage in order to eat the fried fish nearby, the concept of stimulus-response and reinforcement became the concept of learning which influenced almost all learning processes worldwide.

Of the behaviorist psychology, Littlewood (1948) summarizes that there are four pillars, namely: imitation, reinforcement, repetition and conditioning, habit formation. Concretely speaking, learners learn by imitating what others do. Be it good or not, correct or not, learners will imitate all. The imitation will overtly be observable. The imitation is then reinforced by society and hence repetition of what has been imitated takes place. Finally this leads to the building of learner's habit.

In practice, the behaviorist concept has been transferred into the teaching and learning activities. For language learning, for instance, the learning of foreign language was done by having learners to imitate and repeat some prepared sentences several times until they were memorized and their forms were mastered. By doing such "imitation-repetition" activities, learners were believed to be able to use them automatically.

In its development, the stimulus-response underlying the behaviorist concept of learning has been found to reduce man to merely a robot which has to be spoon-fed. The finding has led to the birth of the cognitive psychology.

Cognitivists view that man is a creature who is endowed “mind”. Human mind is said to function as the main processor for learning (Conway, 1977; Pinker, 1998). Cognitivism believes that the “how learners learn” is in the responsibility of the learners’ “mind.” Hence, mind is the most powerful and influential processor of human being in learning. It is the inner force that activates learners to learn by exercising their given creativity as a part of their own, of those their never learn or hear. Chomsky has been one of the most important key persons to the cognitive psychology.

According to Lev Vigotsky, the Russian, that cognitivism, in addition to the concept that mind as human innate processor, it (human mind) is undeniably shaped by culture. In his social cognition concept, he argues that culture plays the most crucial role upon every individual learning development (Conway, 1997; Massche, 2003; Ryder, 2003).

Vigotsky also contributes to the birth of constructivism (Ryder, 2003). He believes that man with his mind processes and simultaneously constructs the raw input he receives into some principles and integrate them into his permanent stock of knowledge. This is a clear indication that constructivism is not a discrete psychological concept of learning, but rather a continuum with that of the cognitive psychological of learning.

Constructivism has its strong link to cognitivism. Constructivists believe that “mind” plays a very significant role that enables learners to construct principles of knowledge based on their experience in relation to their social life. Bruner (1973), a leading constructivist views “learning as an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current or past knowledge.”

Bruner’s aforementioned thesis is, indeed, as that of Chomsky’s. Chomsky (1965: 58) believes that learners are endowed with their innate capacities enabling to acquire the language by themselves from surroundings, even though language input is inadequate.

By the active process, it is meant that in learning learners are actively constructing concepts or ideas based on what they see, hear, read and experience. Jaworsky (1991) cited Von Glasserfeld’s statements as follows: (1) knowledge is actively constructed by learners, not passively received from the environment. (2) “coming to know” is a process of adjusting based on and constantly modified by a learners’s experiences of the world.

In addition, Explanatorium (1996) introduces nine basic principles of constructivism, namely: (1) learning is an active process, (2) people learn to learn as they learn: learning consists both of constructing meaning and constructing systems of meaning, (3) the crucial action of constructing meaning is mental: it happens in the mind, (4) learning involves language: language we use influences learning, (5) learning is a social activity, (6) learning is contextual, (7) one needs knowledge to learn: schemata makes learning better to assimilate new knowledge, (8) it takes time to learn, (9) motivation is a key component in learning.

In brief, the three schools of psychology of learning above contribute two important insights about the concept of learning. First, learning is viewed as conscious endeavour of learners to obtain knowledge from learning. This is particularly relevant when it is connected behaviorism. Second, learning is more of subconscious endeavors of learners in order to obtain knowledge from learning. This belongs both to cognitivism and constructivism. Lately, however,

some principles of learning show that there is a possibility of mixing both conscious and subconscious endeavors of learners to gain knowledge from their learning (Ellis 1986).

CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

It contains basic ideas of how to learn or to acquire a foreign language. Hence, it is, indeed, the ideas as the underlying concept of the current research. This section comprises Chomskyan Concept of Language Learning and second language Acquisition.

a. Chomskyan Concept of Language Learning

Chomsky, the foremost figure of modern linguistics, is also a leading figure who influences theories of language learning. His most powerful concept of Language Acquisition Device (LAD) in his *Aspects of the theory of Syntax* (1965: 59) has marked the new theory of language learning. LAD refers to innate capacity of a man which enables him, at least, to pick up a language with ease. Basically, the Chomskyan LAD refers to L1 learners' born with capacity. Although, the Chomskyan concept of LAD is confined only to the description and explanation of first language (L1) acquisition, later, scholars in second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) learning draw some principles based on the Chomskyan concept of LAD to account for the acquisition of L2 or FL.

In relation to L1 learning theory, Chomsky states that children acquire their L1 with ease, although the available data as linguistic input of their L1 are inadequate. Chomsky (1956:58) writes: "A consideration of the character of grammar that is acquired, the degenerate quality and narrowly limited of the available data. "Moreover, he asserts that children pick up their L1 without anybody's instruction. They, as a matter of fact, do not learn their L1 grammar formally. To this, Chomsky, by citing Humboldt's idea which was proposed in 1836 (Chomsky, 1965) asserts: "one can't teach language but can only present the conditions under which it will develop spontaneously in the mind in its own way."

Chomsky has propounded a very powerful term, the so called "acquisition" which brings about debates among the experts on L2 and FL. Here the Chomskyan acquisition refers to a subconscious process L1 learners undergo in their way to a complete master of their L1.

LAD has been such a mystery that language learning theorists have continuously endeavored to find what it is like. LAD has been seen as the innate processor or that processes all language input from outside learners leading to "intake" it and store it in learner's permanent memory (Ellis, 1968).

b. Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

The term "acquisition" belongs to Chomsky (1965) and the term "learning" belongs to learning psychologists as described earlier.

Krashen (1987: 10-11) distinguishes acquisition from learning. He argues that acquisition refers to the process by which children master their language (L1). Such process takes place subconsciously. On the other hand, with learning, he argues that it is a conscious attempt learners do in order to master the language they are studying. Littlewood (1984), Ellis (1986), Brown (1987), Sharwood Smith (1994) suggest that there is no need to distinguish acquisition from learning. The two words can be used interchangeably for the same notion.

In relation to Second Language Learning or Second Language Acquisition (SLA), numerous studies have been conducted. Since the early 1970s (Brown, 1987: 91) studies have been done, among others, by Gardner and Lambert (1972) who studied second/foreign language learners' attitude and motivation to the language they are learning. Kennedy, Monamara, and Richards (as in Oller and Richards, 1973) studied language learners' cognitive ability. Schumann (1976b, 1978) studied learners' social factors. Selinker (1972) studied learner language termed as interlanguage, Richards (1974) studied learners' errors in L2 or FL learning. Faerch and Kasper (1983) studied learners' communication strategies. And Bialystok (1990) also studied learners' communication strategies. Briefly, these mentioned studies have been devoted to prove how learners learn or acquire a second or foreign language. The findings are (1) learners learn a second or foreign language successfully because of their innate capacity and (2) their surroundings also have helped them learn it successfully. However, the mentioned studies have not tried to uncover how learners process their innate capacity or the so called their cognitive competence in acquiring a second or foreign language. More recent studies, since 1980s, have been devoted to uncover how learners operate their cognitive competence in acquiring a second or foreign language.

LEARNING STRATEGIES

Since 1980s, the focus of language learning studies has been more directed to revealing the role of learners' cognitive competence, the so called learners' mental operations of how to acquire and to build perception and or knowledge. Learners' mental operations involve some attempts as they have to perform and exert ways, tactics and the like in order to learn. In this context, they are referred to as learners' learning strategies.

The prime concept for such studies is that the fact shows that learners do not gain the same success in their learning. As matter of fact, some learners are successful in learning, but some others are unsuccessful. One of the reasons is that they operate different learning strategies. Oxford (1990), O'Malley and Chamot (1991) argue that some learning strategies are better, in that they help EFL learners achieve the goal of their EFL learning.

The concept of learning strategies has led the learning strategies experts to deeply prove the process of how learners operate their cognitive competence in their learning. Brown (1987), Wenden and Rubin (1987), Oxford (1990, 2002 in Carter and Nunan, 2002); Rubin (1981 in O'Malley and Chamot, 1991), Naiman, et al (1978 in O'Malley and Chamot, 1991), O'Malley and Chamot (1991), Wenden (1991), Brown (1994), have engaged themselves in studying EFL learning strategies.

a. Definition of Learning strategies

Wenden and Rubin (1987: 7) enumerate some possible specific terms that suggest what learning strategies definition is. They mention that learning strategies may be "tactics", "potentially conscious plans", "consciously employed operations", "learningskills", "basic skills", "functional skills", "cognitive abilities", or "language processing strategies".

Almost similarly, Rubin (in Wenden and Rubin, 1987: 19) defines learning strategies as "any set of operations, steps, plans, routines used by learners to facilitate the obtaining, storage,

retrieval and use of information, that is what learners do to learn and do to regulate their learning.

Weinstein and Mayer (1986: 315 in O'Malley and Chamot, 1991: 14) refer learning strategies as to learners having the goals as strategy used to affect their motivational and affective state or the way in which learners select, acquire, organize or integrate new knowledge.

Oxford (1990: 7-8) defines learning strategies as steps taken by students to enhance their own learning. Learning strategies are considered tools for an active and a self-directed involvement. Oxford argues that the word "strategy" originated from Greek – strategy which means "generalship" or "the art of war". The term characterizes the following: planning, competition manipulation and movement towards a goal (also see: Huda, 1999: 54).

Brown (1987, 1994; in also in Huda, 1999: 54) defines learning strategies as a subconscious "knack" for language learning that they are not consciously aware of. But often successful learners achieve their goals through conscious, systematic, application of learning strategies for capitalizing on the principles of a successful learning.

Wenden (1991: 18) indicates that, thus far there exists controversies regarding the definition of learning strategies. As what have been described in the previous paragraphs, it is clearly seen that there is difference. Except Brown (1987, 1994), the others claim that learning strategies refers to conscious ways learners are adopting in a language learning. Brown, in principle, claims that learning strategies as subconscious, but simultaneously, admits that some learners – notably the successful, often consciously adopt better learning strategies.

Oxford (1990: 1) argues that learning strategies refer to specific behaviours or techniques that students use, often consciously or subconsciously, to improve their progress in internalizing, storing, retrieving and using the target language.

Rao (in Asian Englishes 2000: 42) asserts that "learning strategies have strong cultural components." To support, Gaffarella (1991: 178) contended that to understand the effects of strategies one "must consider the impact of the family, the educational system and the culture on what we know and how we come to know it. "in addition, BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), in its daily broadcast (Monday, 14 February, at 12.52 GMT, 2000) proposes that there has been an academic evidence of the impact of culture to the way learners learn. More specifically, it says "culture has big impact on pupils' attitude to learning, the way they learn" (The text from BBC: Monday, 14 February, 15.52 GMT, 2000), Nevertheless, since there is no research evidence about relating learning strategies to culture in Indonesia, there is a real need to have a relevant cultural concept by which learning strategies are to be explained.

b. Classification of Learning strategies

Although many learning strategies specialists have been interested in learning strategies studies and share an agreement that an individual learner of second language or foreign language employs his own way(s) or the so called strategies to learn more successfully, however, they, thus far, do not have a consensus regarding learning strategies classification.

Rubin (1981 in O'Malley and Chamot, 1991) founded her learning strategies classification as follows: First, strategies which include classification or verification, guessing,

inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning, and practice. According to her, these directly influence learning. Second, there are strategies which include creating practice opportunities and using communication tricks. Learners are provided opportunities to practice the language being learnt and simultaneously they use tricks in using the language being learnt.

Differently, Naiman, et al. (1978 in O'Malley and Chamot, 1991) classify learning strategies into five general categories as follows: (a) an active task approach, (b) realization of language as a system, (c) realization of language as a means of communication and interaction, (d) management of effective demands, and (e) monitoring of a second language performance. In addition, Naiman, et al. introduce a secondary classification which consists of: respond positively to learning opportunities or seek and exploit learning surroundings, add related language learning activities to regular classroom program, practices, analyze individual problems, make L1 and L2 comparisons, analyze target language to make inferences, make use of a fact that language is a system, emphasize more on fluency, seek communicative situations with L2 native speakers, find social-culture meanings, cope with affective demands in learning, revise L2 system consistently by making inferences or getting feedback from L2 native speakers.

In brief, the two mentioned classifications of learning strategies above are not really concerned with how learners' mental faculty works to help them acquire a second or foreign language learning.

Differently, Oxford (1990: 14) proposes a new classification of learning strategies. It is divided into two major categories: Direct Strategies and Indirect Strategies. The former refers to learning strategies which directly link to the target language learning. Here, the direct strategies indicate that Oxford's concept involves some mental processes which learners may employ in the target language learning. It comprises three sub-categories: memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies. The latter comprises metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies. Accordingly, memory strategies, indeed, belong to cognitive strategies. It is a part of it. And yet, compensation strategies may belong to social strategies.

Oxford's classification fails to have the explanatory adequacy of the proposed learning strategies classification. The failure lies in distinguishing between cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Rubin (1987, in Wenden and Rubin, 1987: 22) asserts that O'Malley and Chamot have been able to distinguish very clearly the two components of human cognition. Rubin writes: "O'Malley and Chamot provide the first clear contrast between cognitive and metacognitive strategies."

O'Malley and Chamot (1991) have been able to propound their learning strategies classification, comprising three components: metacognitive strategies – strategies having regulatory functions which are operational in nature. They refer to some specific ways, tactics or knacks learners employ to solve a learning problem they are facing in ongoing learning activities. For instance, an individual learner may consult his dictionary to look for the meaning of an unfamiliar word. The third is social mediation strategies – rooted deeply in the Vygotskian concept, O'Malley and Chamot claim that a learner may exert his/her social setting to solve their learning problem in ongoing learning atmosphere. Commonly, they either ask a question for clarification to peers and teachers or for cooperation with peers and teachers.

The main concept underlying metacognitive strategies is that learners in general, EFL learners in particular, by nature, “actively seek information/ input and to build up mental operations to use acquired knowledge to construct new knowledge” (Ajiksumo, 1996: 26-27). This implies that EFL learners are in charge of managing their learning. Here, learning demands learners to use their mental operations actively, encompassing three self-regulatory mental properties, namely, planning, monitoring, and evaluation.

In general metacognitive strategies are learning strategies used to regulate any aspect of a cognitive enterprise or so called a metacognitive regulation concerning planning, monitoring and evaluation (O’Malley and Chamot, 1991). Active EFL learners use their mental operations to help themselves learn more fruitfully.

The way to know whether or not learners adopt metacognitive strategies in learning is to reveal by how learners demonstrate their learning behaviors. The use of metacognitive strategies is actualized in how learners demonstrate their learning, how they process their learning activities, how to monitor the learning they are doing, and how to evaluate their learning.

Table 2.1 shows divisions of learning strategies, major and specific learning strategies, and definitions of each of specific learning strategies.

Table 2.1 Learning Strategy Definitions and Classifications

Learning Strategies	Definitions
A. Metacognitive Strategies Planning	
Advanced organizers	Previewing the main ideas and concepts of the material to be learned, often by skimming the text for organization principle.
Directed attention	Deciding in advance to attend in general to a learning task and to ignore irrelevant distractions.
Functional planning	Planning for and rehearsing linguistic components necessary to carry out an upcoming language task.
Selective attention	Deciding in advance to attend to specific aspects of input, often by scanning for key words, concepts, and/or linguistic markers.
Self-management	Understanding the conditions that help one learn and arranging for the presence of those conditions.
Monitoring: Self-monitoring	Checking one’s comprehension during listening or reading or checking the accuracy and/or appropriateness of one’s oral or written production while it is taking place.
Evaluation: Self-evaluation	Checking the outcomes of one’s own language learning against a standard after it has been completed.
B. Cognitive Strategies	
Resourcing	Using target language reference materials such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, or textbooks.
Repetition	Imitating a language model, including overt practice and silent rehearsal.
Grouping	Classifying words, terminology, or concepts according to their

	attributes or meaning.
Deduction	Applying rules to understand or produce the second language or making up rules based on language analysis.
Imagery	Using visual images (either mental or actual) to understand or remember new information.
Auditory representation	Planning back in one's mind the sound of a word, phrase, or longer language sequence.
Keyword method	Remembering a new word in the second language by: 1) identifying a familiar word in the first language that sounds like or otherwise resembles the new word 2) generating easily recalled images of some relationship with first language homonym and the new word in the second language.
Elaboration	Relating new information to prior knowledge, relating different parts of new information to each other, or making meaningful personal associations with the new information.
Transfer	Using previous linguistic knowledge or prior skills to assist comprehension or production.
Inferencing	Using available information to guess meanings of new items, predict outcomes, or fill in missing information.
Note taking	Writing down keywords or concepts in abbreviated verbal, graphic, numerical form while listening or reading.
Summarizing	Making a mental, oral or written summary of new information gained through listening or reading.
Recommendation	Constructing a meaningful sentence or larger language sequence by combining known elements in a new way.
Translation	Using the first language as a base for understanding and/or producing the second language.
C. Social Mediation Strategies	
Question for clarification	Eliciting from a teacher or peer additional explanations, rephrasing, examples or verification.

a. Impact of Learning strategies

This section will discuss some positive effects of knowing and adopting learning strategies in language learning.

a) Greater self-direction for learner

Language learning strategies, according to Rubin (in Wenden and Rubin, 1987: 17) and Oxford (1990: 10), function to help learners perform their individual learning. Oxford argues that it is important to encourage language learners to do a self-learning because no teacher is available to guide them outside the class. They have to learn individually. Moreover, on the basis of learning strategies principles, learners, by doing active self-directed learning, will develop their ability of the language being learned.

Self-directed learning will help learners escape from their cultural background – e.g. Passive or instructed-based activity. By adopting learning strategies, learners are to rely more on themselves to obtain progress of their language learning. This demands from learners their own learning responsibility.

b) New roles for teachers

Knowing and employing learning strategies in language learning change the roles of teachers. Rubin (in Wenden and Rubin (1987: 16) (Oxford, 1990: 10; 2002: 126-127). The change brings new roles to teachers. Not like the traditional roles like being “parent, instructor, director, manager, judge, leader, evaluator and controller (Oxford, 1990: 10), the new roles will shift to be: facilitator, helper, guide, consultant, adviser, coordinator, idea person, diagnostician and co-communicator. According to Oxford (1990;2002); O’Malley and Chamot (1991) it does not necessarily mean that teachers totally abandon their traditional role as instructor, but teacher’s roles must be less dominant in classroom setting.

This change even makes teachers to see their new roles as to create the quality and importance of their relationship with learners. They have to push learners’ own responsibility to grow and to guarantee learning to occur which, at least, leads learners to gain success in their language learning.

➤ Factors Influencing strategy use

There are some factors which enforce the use of learning strategies. Rubin (in Wenden and Rubin, 1987: 15), for example, confirms that learner intelligence and learning styles are two factors which influence the strategy use. Oxford (1990: 13; 2002: 127), in addition to Rubin’s, asserts that the following are factors which effect the strategy use. They are: age, sex, nationality, ethnicity, general learning styles, traits, motivation for learning the language.

By mentioning the factors – most specially “nationality, ethnicity, general learning styles”-, there is, indeed, a cultural factor which also effects the use of learning strategy. It is because these factors are very closely related to cultures. Hayland (1993), Oxford and Anderson (1995), Rao (2002) advocate that learning strategies are significantly influenced by culture.

➤ Approaches in Learning Strategies Studies

Learning strategies have been studied both qualitatively and quantitatively (Cohen, in Wenden and Rubin, 1987: 31; Chamot, in Wenden and Rubin, 1987: 71; Oxford, 1990; O’Malley and Chamot (1991) view learning strategies as both conscious and subconscious mental processes of learners in their learning, it is, therefore, necessary that the researcher must have an approach of data elicitation. Cohen proposes his approach as “Verbal Report Data”. The approach contains three techniques to elicit data, namely: self – report, self – observation and self revelation. The first refers to learners’ description of what they do, characterized by general statements about learning behavior. For example: “when I have a word

I really want to learn, I say it over to myself several times and try to associate it with some other words I already know”.

The second refers to the inspection of specific language behaviour, either while the information is still in short term memory (introspective – while an event is going on) or after the event (retrospective – twenty seconds or so) or delayed (a few hours, days after the event). The third neither refers to the general statements about learning nor the specific ones. Data reported here are unedited and unanalyzed.

O'Malley and Chamot (1991: 90-91), very similar to Cohen's "self-observation", used the following four techniques: simultaneous introspection, immediate retrospection, delayed retrospection and predictive introspection. The first occurs with the think aloud-task, where learners are asked to report on the strategies being used while the task is being performed. O'Malley and Chamot assert that the advantage of using this data collection technique is that strategies of a task which has just been completed. The third can be used to elicit strategies of a task which has been completed in a quite longer time (several hours, days, and weeks). The last refers to what a learner will do with a language task in the future. Oxford (1990: 193) proposed that the elicitation of learning strategies adopted by language learners are observations, interviews, think-aloud procedures, note takings, diaries, and journals and self-report surveys. Rubin (1987) and Chamot (1991) have, meanwhile, done a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative research on language learning strategies.

In quantitative research, overt learning strategies are counted and likewise, the covert ones, on the basis of interview or the think aloud protocols are also counted and to relate them to learners' language learning achievement.

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