STRATEGIES OF SOCIAL LEARNING IN EFL CONTEXT

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*ABSTRACT:*With the progress of learner-centered education learning strategies as conscious actions taken by learners to improve their learning have been prolific field of research. However, few researchers have addressed the issue of educational and socio-contextual factors influencing the types and frequencies of social leaning strategies. This survey investigates social learning strategies in EFL context of Iranian non-governmental English language institutes. Based on social learning strategies' questionnaire data from two different language institutes of more than 180 language learners in different levels were collected. Based on the research findings different strategies almost had different frequencies and Asking Questions was the most prevalently used ones but Cooperating with Others was the least used strategy type. The research indicated very narrow or no relationship between demographic features and the types of social learning strategies unlike proficiency level and language learning duration. Interesting findings and pedagogical implications are discussed at the end.

Key words: Constructivism, Social Learning Strategies, EFL context

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Second language acquisition or learning has largely been regarded as the major field of research in both general and applied linguistics to study how additional languages are acquired. The history of academic SLA dates back to before 20th century when grammar translation was dominant followed by Direct Method (Audio-lingual), Behaviorist's S-RR(Skinner), Universal Grammar and LAD(Chomsky and Krashen), Information Processing Method (Anderson and McLaughlin), and lastly social interactionism(Vygotsky and Halliday). All of these can be categorized under three main approaches according to (G. Hall) as Linguistic approach emphasizing language structure and accuracy, cognitive approach underpinning personal and universal features of learning psychology, and ultimately sociocultural approach converging on language application in social contexts which is the point of departure for this study.

Constructivism: Social – Cognitive Based on constructivism perspectives

learning is an individual matter reflecting that based on our unique experiences and prior knowledge we construct unique reality. Social constructivism driven from constructivismhas prioritized social context affecting the process of learning in two ways of cultural systems and social interactions with more knowledgeable one (Pritchard and Woollard 45-50).

Social constructivism introduced by Vygotsky mainly developed in the midst of the crisis between naturalistic and humanistic perspectives on human development which insisted on the psychological (individual) and environmental (social) elements of second language learning(Lantolf and Thorne, 3-59).Based on this theory human being is endowed with two definite levels of low-level biological foundations and higher-level abilities through applying them like cultural tools for instance language, numeracy, literacy, logic, etc., we can gain control over consciousness. Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL), for instance, mainly developed by Halliday (Introduction to Functional Grammar3-43) emphasized on language function as a social semiotic system and a resource for meaning across variety of contexts to achieve particular goal rather than its structure. Based on Halliday in "towards a language based theory of learning" language is not a domain of human knowledge but it is the process of transforming experience into

knowledge as the essential condition of knowing.

Pritchard andWoollardbelieve that social constructivists base their multi-faced theory mainly on their three common conceptions as: reality, knowledge and learning. According to this perspective on learning reality is co-constructed through human social interactions not waiting to be discovered and is uniquely formed as an individually shaped matter. Knowledge in the realm of social constructivist as a humanistic creativity is constructed through applying social and culture factors. When it comes to learning they assume it neither individual nor passive but an active social process resulting from real engagement when the receiving input is related with the pre-existing knowledge so learning is distributed, interactive, contextual, resulting from real participation in the community of learning.

Pritchard and Woollardalso suggest that learning happens quite naturally unnoticed in many ways and in difference with what we may call "formal learning". Laboratory and classroom researches have increased our knowledge of the process of learning. While the former have done break through discoveries on the subject of brain the latter have been doing studies concerning learning strategies like questioning techniques or the immediate influences of environment on this process. At the end variety of approaches to question of learning process has led us to accept that there is no clear cut fitting answer to the question of how we learn and how should our teachers teach but at least they can know how to improve and enhance the learning experiences and outcomes of their learners through their changes in their planning and teaching.Piaget, the main advocate of cognitive constructivism, assumes learning as an actively engaged process and implies that if learner is showed how to do rather than actively engaged in discovering how to do learning process may be inhibited.

Cognitive growth is biological, age-related and developmental and children cannot extend their capabilities beyond their current developmental stage. Based on Piaget's theory mastery occurs at various paces for different learners and maturation and development have to be considered into curriculum and instruction planning. Knowledge is a self-regulatory not imposed from outside, a dynamic process based on built in blueprints. For Piaget intellectual growth as the number and complexity of interconnected schema is adjustment or adaptation to the world. This process happens through assimilation while applying an existing schema to new situations, accommodation by adapting inappropriate schema to new conditions, and equilibration as the force driving the learning process into new situation when existing schema cannot help and learner has to make a new balance (McLeod).

According toVygotsky,main founder of social constructivism, learning happens when learner is actively engaged and develops while internalizing social experience gained through appropriate help. It is mediated socially through the role played by more knowledgeable other by the means of scaffolding suggesting that a learner can do tomorrow what he is able to do today with the opportunities needed for a learner's development in the ZPD (in the zone of proximal development) not in age based strict activities. Accordingly our activities occur mediated by language and other symbolic systems which can be well-understood if their historical development is studied in their specific cultural contexts. Vygotsky emphasized the dynamic interdependence of personal and social processes by introducing two main issues in his approach to learning, mediation and meaning.

-Learning Strategies

Instead of embarking on new teaching methods newly gained momentum towards learnercentered education has led to increasing

researches and profound theories concerning the most efficient learning strategies, learners' role and responsibility in learning, and answering the question of how learners approach the task of learning and why? (Abhakorn; Cohen, Strategies in Learning, Strategy Training; Oxford, "Language Learning Styles and Strategies").

The Main Research Questions:

What types of social learning strategy were used by second language learners and with what frequencies?

What kind of relationships were between the types of social learning strategies and demographic feature and proficiency level of the second language learners?

Method andMaterials

Data collection procedure was based on 30 item-questionnaire developed using Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) of Oxford, Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know, and Phothongsunanin which each item was scored on a Likart scale from one to four(1.rarely, 2. few times, 3.many times, 4.often).

In order to evaluate the construct validity of the questionnaire Confirmatory Factor Analysis based on SPSS was applied.

1. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling and Adequacy/Bartlett's Test ofSphericity: the test showed the acceptability of sample based on the Table A. Accordingly adequacy of 0.735 can be a good indication of sample adequacy for the study

Table A.KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.735
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1334.921
	df	435
	Sig.	.000

2. Anti-image Matrices: Based on Table B the majority of responses were factor 1, 2, and 3 which accounted for 18 items

respectively related to Asking Questions and Empathizing With Others as main social learning strategies in Iran.

Table B. Total Variance Explained

Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Initial Eigenvalues			
Cumulative %	% of Variance	Total	Cumulative %	% of Variance	Total	Component
19.645	19.645	5.894	19.645	19.645	5.894	1
28.501	8.856	2.657	28.501	8.856	2.657	2
34.488	5.986	1.796	34.488	5.986	1.796	3
40.034	5.547	1.664	40.034	5.547	1.664	4
44.785	4.750	1.425	44.785	4.750	1.425	5
49.427	4.642	1.393	49.427	4.642	1.393	6
53.872	4.445	1.334	53.872	4.445	1.334	7
57.727	3.855	1.156	57.727	3.855	1.156	8
61.351	3.625	1.087	61.351	3.625	1.087	9
64.689	3.337	1.001	64.689	3.337	1.001	10
			67.687	2.998	.899	11
			70.595	2.908	.872	12
			73.326	2.731	.819	13
			75.866	2.541	.762	14
			78.335	2.468	.741	15
			80.758	2.424	.727	16
			82.891	2.132	.640	17
			84.962	2.071	.621	18
			86.846	1.884	.565	19
			88.720	1.874	.562	20
			90.307	1.587	.476	21
			91.710	1.403	.421	22
			93.094	1.384	.415	23
			94.381	1.287	.386	24
			95.640	1.259	.378	25
			96.705	1.064	.319	26
			97.754	1.050	.315	27
			98.695	.940	.282	28
			99.391	.696	.209	29
			100.000	.609	.183	30

Results and discussion

In 4tables the mean and the percentage for every strategy (in Table-1, 2), mean for every category (Table-3), the relations between learning strategies and demographic and proficiency are presented (Table-4).

Table-1: (ESO: empathizing and seeking opportunities, ASSO: asking questions and seeking opportunities)

The type of social strategy, item on the questionnaire	Main category	mean
1. If I do not understand something in English I ask the other to slow down or repeat.	Asking questions	2.43
2. To improve my language I try to watch English movies.	Emphasizing	2.73
3. To improve my language I try to watch all English programs on T.V as much as I can.	Emphasizing	2.37
4.To improve my language I try to listen to English songs.	Emphasizing	2.69
5. I try to sense others feelings when they write to me in English	Emphasizing	2.49
6. I pay close attention to the thoughts and feelings of others when I interact with them.	Emphasizing	2.74
7. I read extra books or sources in English.	Emphasizing	2.48
8. I try to use what I have learned from teachers or peers.	Emphasizing	3.12
9. I try to ask my questions in English in class.	Asking questions	3.16
10. I read and try to understand English signs and directions.	Emphasizing	2.86
11. I try to sense others' feelings when I speak English face to face	Emphasizing	2.89
12. I have regular language learning friends.	Cooperating...	2.35
13. I keep in touch with native English speakers or foreigner friends on internet.	Cooperating...	1.89
14. I try to find opportunities to speak and socialize with native English speakers or foreigner friends.	Cooperating...	2.61
15. I ask others whether they have understood me when I speak with them.	Asking questions	2.48
16. After reading a text if I do not understand I ask others.	Asking questions	2.98
17. I try to ask for general help in language from advanced learners	Asking	2.66

		questions	
18. I try to attend extra-curricular programs at language institute.	Seeking oppor...	2.11
19. I ask teacher or learners to correct me when I make mistakes in language.	Asking questions	2.78
20. I communicate with natives or friends to practice, review and share information	Cooperating...	2.37
21. I try to learn more about native speakers, culture.	Emphasizing	2.89
22. I use internet to know about English language, natives and their culture.	ESO	2.66
23. I ask teacher or friends to correct me when I write to them	Asking questions	2.83
24. I play games in English with myself or friends.	ESO	2.70
25. I try to speak in English with my friends	ASSO	2.55
26. I attend extra activities related to language of the institute.	Seeking oppor...	2.09
27. I attend free discussion classes in English.	ESO	2.27
28. I use English movies or CDs to improve my listening.	Seeking oppor...	2.68
29. I try to gain more information about native's culture and customs	Emphasizing	2.89
30. I use new social networking facilities like Face book, viber...to improve my English language.	Seeking oppor...	2.72

Table- 2. percentages of every social learning strategy

| | Cases | | | | | |
| | Included | | Excluded | | Total | |
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
q1	183	99.5%	1	0.5%	184	100.0%
q2	183	99.5%	1	0.5%	184	100.0%
q3	182	98.9%	2	1.1%	184	100.0%
q4	183	99.5%	1	0.5%	184	100.0%
q5	179	97.3%	5	2.7%	184	100.0%
q6	183	99.5%	1	0.5%	184	100.0%
q7	184	100.0%	0	0.0%	184	100.0%
q8	180	97.8%	4	2.2%	184	100.0%
q9	180	97.8%	4	2.2%	184	100.0%
q10	184	100.0%	0	0.0%	184	100.0%
q11	183	99.5%	1	0.5%	184	100.0%
q12	184	100.0%	0	0.0%	184	100.0%
q13	181	98.4%	3	1.6%	184	100.0%
q14	183	99.5%	1	0.5%	184	100.0%
q15	182	98.9%	2	1.1%	184	100.0%
q16	183	99.5%	1	0.5%	184	100.0%
q17	182	98.9%	2	1.1%	184	100.0%
q18	184	100.0%	0	0.0%	184	100.0%
q19	182	98.9%	2	1.1%	184	100.0%
q20	183	99.5%	1	0.5%	184	100.0%
q21	181	98.4%	3	1.6%	184	100.0%
q22	183	99.5%	1	0.5%	184	100.0%
q23	184	100.0%	0	0.0%	184	100.0%
q24	184	100.0%	0	0.0%	184	100.0%
q25	183	99.5%	1	0.5%	184	100.0%
q26	181	98.4%	3	1.6%	184	100.0%
q27	180	97.8%	4	2.2%	184	100.0%
q28	184	100.0%	0	0.0%	184	100.0%
q29	183	99.5%	1	0.5%	184	100.0%
q30	182	98.9%	2	1.1%	184	100.0%

Table- 3: Mean of every category of social learning strategies

The type of social learning strategies in the questionnaire	Mean
1. Asking Questions	2.76
2. Empathizing with others	2.74
3. Seeking opportunities	2.40
4. Cooperating with others	2.30

Table-4 The relationship between social learning strategy types and demographic features and proficiency level (Based on Chi-square or Pearson's R)

Chi-square	age	gender	Leaning duration	Language level
Asking questions	-0.004	0.061	-0.001	0.018
Empathizing	-0.068	-.256	0.160	0.101
Seeking opportunity	-0.018	-.045	0.032	0.068
Cooperation	-0.106	-.156	0.166	0.124

Conclusions

Halliday,Language as Social Semiotic,in his revolutionary approach to language "return to language" insisted that language shapes the way we see the world and because of its richness as meaning making resource enables us to shape our world. In the era of postmethod the hope for miraculous method to answer all questions of theorists and practitioners of pedagogy faded but opened a new horizon to see learners rather than teachers.

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