

THE IMPACT OF STRATEGY TRAINING ON ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY'S LEARNERS OF FRENCH

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Abstract: Research in second language learning has shown that learners who use learning strategies are more likely to achieve effective learning, and has highlighted the importance of strategy training in language education. The principal objective of this research is to evaluate the impact of a 14 hours training module to language learning strategies integrated in a conversation class for the benefit of Assumption University's students of French. The research was organized in three stages: (1) an identification of the language learning strategies used most commonly by a sample of 25 Assumption University's learners of French. The data were collected through the Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for language learning (SILL) questionnaire. (2) The implementation of strategy training elaborated from the Cohen's (1998) Strategy-Based Instruction (SBI) model and adapted to students of French. (3) An evaluation of the impact of the training through a second administration of the SILL questionnaire to the participants at the end of training. The evaluation showed an overall increase in the mean scores strategy uses. It is hoped that this research will provide teachers with tools that will enable them to help students become more effective and independent language learners, and offer new perspectives on strategy training in second and foreign language class.

Keywords: French, Language Learning Strategy (LLS), Strategy Training, Learner-centered Approach, Quantitative Approach, Second and Foreign Language Acquisition, SILL, Strategies Based Instruction (SBI)

Introduction

Since their conception by Joan Rubin in 1975, it is recognized that language learning strategies (LLS) play a significant role in second and foreign language acquisition. In order to learn and use a second or foreign language, learners use a wide range of conscious and unconscious strategies that help them learn more efficiently, and become more independent learners.

The LLS research has shown that it is crucial to improve learners' ability to learn a second language through the use of efficient and suitable strategies. According to this view, it appears that a strategy training class is an essential component of any language instruction class, and deserves special attention.

This research focuses on the use of LLS and on the impact of LLS training on Assumption University's (AU) learners of French.

Three observations are at the origin of this research:

1. No research on use of LLS has been conducted in AU's Business French department;
2. No work of integration of LLS in class has not yet been carried out in AU's Business French department;
3. A certain number of AU's Business French department's students experience difficulties in learning French. We can observe these difficulties are most often due to a lack of how-to-learn skills, or learning methodology.

Objectives

Based on these observations, this research aims, at identifying what LLS are used by students of the AU's Business French Department, and how frequently.

It aims at organizing a LLS training with the purpose of helping students to use more strategies more efficiently and possibly to remediate the lack of LLS.

It proposes, finally, to evaluate the effectiveness of the LLS training that has been implemented in class.

The research has been divided into three steps:

1. A first collection of data at the beginning of the semester, in order to determine the strategic behavior of AU's learners of French, and their needs in matters of LLS;
2. The implementation of the strategy training;
3. A second collection of data in order to evaluate the impact of the training on learners' strategic behavior.

The two first sections of the article examine the body of work related to LLS and strategy training and outline the conceptual framework of the research. The third section provides a description of the chosen methodology and of the designing of the LLS training. The third section reports the results of the quantitative data collected in the research, and is followed by a discussion of these results.

Literature Review

Within the field of second and foreign language education, various researchers have provided definitions of learning strategies and have studied their impact on learning process. With the emergence of the learner-centered approach, the notion of LLS and LLS training gradually became a central aspect of language education.

In their research on good language learners, Rubin (1975), and Stern (1975) suggested students who succeed in their learning use learning strategies (for example seize opportunity to speak with native speakers). Later, Rubin (1987) defined learning strategies as a way to "contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly".

Oxford, (1990a) provided a definition and a classification of LLS. She stated that LLS enhance language learning, help develop language skills, and

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