

NATIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY/ CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Elementary Immersion Students=Perceptions of Language Learning Strategies Use and
Self-Efficacy

Introduction

This study investigated the relationship of language learning strategies use and self-efficacy of French, Japanese and Spanish elementary immersion students. Previous and concurrent research conducted by the National Foreign Language Resource Center indicated that secondary level foreign language students show positive correlations between the amount of learning strategies use and level of self-efficacy. However, no research has investigated whether this correlation is also positive with younger students. Through two questionnaires, The Immersion Language Learning Strategies Questionnaire and The Immersion Self-Efficacy Questionnaire, researchers were able to collect and analyze data on elementary students= reported use of strategies and self-confidence to address the research question: **ADo students who show greater use of language learning strategies perceive themselves to be more effective language learners?@** Results revealed that younger students, grades 4-6, who reported greater strategy use also perceived themselves as more confident learners. This information provides incentive for teachers to teach and promote strategies use in the classroom as a way of increasing students= self-confidence as learners who may then be more ready to take on challenging learning tasks.

Learning Strategies and Motivation: Theoretical Background

Motivation plays an important role in all types of learning, including language learning. Highly motivated students work hard, persevere in the face of difficulties, and find satisfaction in

the successful accomplishment of a learning task. Strategies have been linked to motivation and particularly to a sense of self-efficacy leading to expectations of successful learning (Zimmerman & Pons, 1986). The development of an individual's self-efficacy, or level of confidence in successfully completing a task is closely associated with effective use of learning strategies (Zimmerman, 1990). Self-efficacy is at the root of self-esteem, motivation, and self-regulation (Bandura, 1992). Self-efficacious learners feel confident about solving a problem because they have developed an approach to problem solving that has worked in the past. They attribute their success mainly to their own efforts and strategies, believe that their own abilities will improve as they learn more, and recognize that errors are a part of learning. Students with low self-efficacy, on the other hand, believe themselves to have inherent low ability, choose less demanding tasks on which they will make few errors, and do not try hard because they believe that any effort will reveal their own lack of ability (Bandura, 1992).

Having access to appropriate strategies should lead students to higher expectations of learning success, a crucial component of motivation. An important aspect in viewing oneself as a successful learner is self-control over strategy use. This type of self-control can be enhanced if strategy instruction is combined with metacognitive awareness of the relationship between strategy use and learning outcomes. Students with greater metacognitive awareness understand the similarity between a new learning task and previous tasks, know the strategies required for successful problem solving or learning, and anticipate that employing these strategies will lead to success (Paris & Winograd, 1990).

Procedures

Identifying Subjects. Subjects for the study were drawn from Spanish and French full immersion programs and a Japanese partial immersion program in the Washington DC/Virginia metropolitan area. Students in the full immersion Spanish and French programs study all class subjects in the target language. In the partial Japanese immersion program students study math, science and Japanese language arts in the target language. Grades represented in the study include fourth, fifth, and sixth grade for the French and Japanese immersion schools and fourth and fifth grade for the Spanish immersion school which did not have a sixth grade at the time of data collection. Participation was voluntary by both teachers and students. Only students from whom parent permission was obtained were included in the results of the analysis. Table 1 shows the number of students for each language participating in the study.

Table 1.

Language	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
Japanese	20	12	13
French	19	27	14
Spanish	19	19	NA

Immersion Learning Strategies Questionnaire (ILSQ). The ILSQ was used to collect data on the types of strategies students use and the frequency with which they use them. The format of the questionnaire was modeled on previous measures developed by the researchers for identifying high school and college level students= strategies use. However, the instrument was

adapted so that it would be understandable to elementary school children. Researchers developed a scripted administration guide so that all children received the same set of instructions and had the same amount of time (30 minutes)for completing the questionnaire. (See Appendix A for a copy of the ILSQ.)

The questionnaire reflected strategies use for each of the four modalities: reading, listening, writing and speaking. Questionnaires were identical across languages with the exception of the Japanese instrument which, in addition to the four modalities, contained a section on learning and remembering kanji characters. Researchers met to decide on a set of focal learning strategies to be represented in the questionnaire and made decisions based on previous interviews with immersion students as well as classroom observations conducted by the researchers. Learning strategies were selected to represent the processes of planning, monitoring, problem-solving and evaluating for each modality. Table 2 gives examples of items for the reading task:

Table 2.

Process	Item
Planning	Before you read in <i>language</i> , do you try to figure out what it will be about?
Monitoring	When you read in <i>language</i> , do you imagine pictures in your head or imagine you are part of the story?
Problem-Solving	When you read a word you don't know, do you try to figure out its

	meaning by looking at the rest of the story?
Evaluating	After you read something in <i>language</i> , do you think about how well you understood it?

Students responded to the questionnaire by marking whether they used a strategy *almost every time*, *sometimes*, or *almost never*. These response choices were represented by circles: a filled circle for *almost every time*, a semi-circle for *sometimes*, and an empty circle for *almost never*. Students were first given practice items to complete such as **A**During a school day, do you have recess?[@] to ensure that all students understood how to respond to the questionnaire.

A class of fourth grade students not participating in the actual research study was chosen as a pilot test site for the ILSQ. Results were analyzed for reliability and the questionnaire was revised accordingly. In addition, the questionnaire was given to fourth, fifth, and sixth grade teachers to check for readability. The revised questionnaire was then administered to the target student population in spring 1996.

Immersion Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (ISEQ). The ISEQ asked students to indicate their level of self-confidence for performing language tasks in the four modalities: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. The Japanese ISEQ also had an additional section on students' self-efficacy for learning kanji. For each question students were asked to indicate how sure they were that they could do the task. A sample item for reading is: **A**When you read in *language*, can you figure out what new words mean?[@] Responses choices included *no way*, *probably not*, *maybe*, *probably*, and *definitely*. This instrument is modeled on a similar questionnaire developed by the researchers for use in high school and college-level classes. It was adapted to be understandable

to elementary school children (e.g., responses items were changed from a likert-type scale to word phrases). The questionnaire addressed similar language tasks as the ILSQ so that correlations could be run between the two instruments. (See Appendix B for a copy of the questionnaire.)

As with the ILSQ, researchers developed an administration guide so all students received identical directions and had the same amount of time (30 minutes) for completing the questionnaire. The instrument was prefaced with practice items such as "Can you say the alphabet backwards?" so students could become accustomed to the items and response choices. The ISEQ was pilot tested in the same way as the ILSQ with a non-participating group of fourth grade students and participating teachers reviewed the instrument. The ISEQ was revised accordingly to the pilot testing and then administered to the target sample of students in spring 1996.

Analysis and results. Responses to the questionnaires were given numerical values, entered into a computer data spreadsheet and verified by another researcher. For purposes of this study the questionnaire data was collapsed across languages and then correlations were run using the statistical program SPSS. Table 3 gives coefficients for correlations of interest. All correlations were significant (including blank cells), except where marked not significant (NS).

Table 3
Correlations between Use of Learning Strategies and Self-Efficacy

	LSQ Overall	ILSQ Reading	LSQ Listening	LSQ Speaking	LSQ Writing	LSQ Kanji (Japanese)
SEQ Overall	r = .42 (n=134) p = .000					r = .33 (n=40) p = .020
SEQ Reading		r = .34 (n=134) p = .000				r = .39 (n=40) p = .006

SEQ Listening			r = .30 (n=134) p = .000			NS r= .10 (n=40) p=.269
SEQ Speaking				r = .29 (n=133) p = .000		NS r= .13 (n=40) p=.216
SEQ Writing					r = .35 (n=134) p = .000	r = .45 (n=40) p = .002
SEQ Kanji (Japanese only)	r = .27 (n=40) p = .043	r = .26 (n=40) p = .050	NS r=.257 (n=40) p=.055	NS r= - .03 (n=40) p=.418	NS r= .247 (n=40) p=.062	NS r = .16 (n=40) p = .155

Results show that students who showed greater use of language learning strategies perceived themselves to be more effective language learners. Self-efficacy and strategies use had moderate positive correlations overall and for reading, listening speaking and writing.

In Japanese classrooms, self-efficacy for learning kanji was not significantly correlated with strategies for learning kanji. Correlations between kanji items and other sections showed that use of strategies for learning kanji had a positive relationship with overall self-efficacy and with self-efficacy for reading and writing. Likewise, self-efficacy for learning kanji correlated positively with overall strategies use and with use of reading strategies; correlations of kanji-self-efficacy with writing and listening strategies approached significance.

Discussion/Implications.

The study has the following implications for the use of learning strategies in the foreign language classroom. First and most obviously, learning strategies should be explicitly taught in a methodical, progressive fashion. Some students will enter the classroom using appropriate

learning strategies, but many will not; strategy use should not be left to chance any more than any other type of basic knowledge. Even those students who know how and when to apply learning strategies can benefit from thinking about strategies use and learning new strategies. Learning strategies should be integrated into the curriculum, not taught in the abstract. Teachers should explicitly teach strategies and explicitly link them to specific language learning tasks. Teaching strategies explicitly requires that the teacher name, define, model each strategy and explain why and when it is effective. Explicit strategy teaching also requires that the teacher prompts students to think about, talk about, and use appropriate strategies while learning.

Secondly, strategy use should be considered part of the assessment process. Students themselves should be assessed and assess themselves on their use of strategies. The purpose of this is to explicitly link difficulties and successes in foreign language learning to strategies use. Students should not be penalized for using a **w**rong strategy,[@] but they must be aware that their use of strategies greatly impacts their language learning.

Third, teachers should consider using a framework which incorporates learning strategies such as previewing, recalling past knowledge, predicting, reviewing, scaffolding, and establishing relevance as a structure for lesson design and instruction.

Fourth, the issue of motivation should be addressed from the first day of class; it is unreasonable to expect that all students in foreign language classrooms actually want to be there, or really know why they are there. The instructor should consider an activity to let students express honestly (if necessary anonymously) why they are in the class and work from there trying to establish relevance and motivating reasons. Instruction, materials, and topics should all be viewed by the teacher not only from the standpoint of what students should know, but how to get

them interested in, involved in, and responsible for learning. This might require considering different ways to **Ask** the cat. For example, if the teacher wants the students to learn about French culture, s/he might consider getting students involved in determining which aspect of French culture they would like to learn about and the most **Fun** ways of doing so. All of this will require careful teacher guidance and support, but can result in far more satisfying lessons.

Finally, in assessing student work, the students themselves should be involved in the process, not simply given a letter grade with little or no feedback. While forcing students to grade themselves is of questionable validity, it is useful to let students report/reflect on how they feel about a piece of work, detailing why they feel the work was or wasn't successful or reflective of effort or ability. This process of evaluation should also include reflection on what the student would do differently on the next similar project. Again, this form of evaluation requires careful teacher planning and guidance and student involvement in assessment from the beginning. However, the benefits of increased student responsibility, involvement, metacognition, and motivation are a manifold return on this investment, both for student and for teacher.

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