

NATIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY/ CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

High School Foreign Language Students=Perceptions of

Language Learning Strategies Use and Self-Efficacy (1996)

Introduction

This study investigated the relationship of language learning strategies use and self-efficacy of high school Chinese, German, Japanese, Russian and Spanish foreign language students. Through two questionnaires, The Language Learning Strategies Questionnaire and The Self-Efficacy Questionnaire, researchers were able to collect and analyze data on 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 students 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 beginning level high school foreign language programs in the Washington DC/Virginia metropolitan area. 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.

<b>Learning Strategies and Self-Efficacy Questionnaires</b>	
<b>Language and Level</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>
Chinese 1	21
German 1	15
Japanese 1	49
Russian 1	27
Spanish 1	23

Instruments. Questionnaires were developed to elicit students' perceptions of their strategies use and sense of self-confidence. Table 2 summarizes the instruments developed and administered.

<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Administration Dates</b>	<b>Information Collected</b>
Learning Strategies Questionnaire	Spring 1994	Self-reported retrospective types and frequencies of strategies use for different language modalities
Self-Efficacy Questionnaire	Spring 1994	Students' degree of self-confidence in their abilities as language learners

### Learning Strategy Questionnaire (LSQ)

The Learning Strategy Questionnaire was used to collect data on the types of strategies students report using and the frequency with which they use them. The format of the questionnaire was modeled on measures previously developed by the researchers to identify students' use of learning strategies reflecting strategies use for each of the four modalities: reading, listening, writing, and speaking as well as learning vocabulary. Questionnaires were identical across languages and administered by the classroom teacher with a maximum time of 25 minutes for completion. A set of focal strategies was determined based on student interviews and teacher input with the most frequently mentioned and taught strategies included. Learning strategies were selected to represent the process of planning, monitoring, problem-solving and evaluating for each modality. Students responded to the questionnaire by marking whether they used a *strategy almost always, usually, sometimes, rarely, or never*. Student responses were given numeric values and entered into the computer spreadsheet program Quattro Pro and analyzed using SPSS. Entries were verified by a second researcher for the statistical analysis. (See Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire.)

### Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (SEQ)

The SEQ asks students to indicate on a Likert-type scale their level of self confidence in performing language learning tasks in the four modalities (reading, listening, speaking, writing) as well as in learning and remembering vocabulary. For each item students were asked to indicate how sure they were that they could do the task. A sample item for reading is: **A**Circle the number on the line below that shows how sure you are that could read a text in *language* and figure out the main topic or gist. Response choices were on a scale from 0 to 100 with 0 meaning not sure

and 100 meaning completely sure. This instrument is modeled on a similar questionnaire developed by the researchers in the previous study. (See Appendix B for a copy of the questionnaire.)

Questionnaires were identical across languages and administered by the classroom teacher with a maximum time of 25 minutes for completion. A set of focal tasks was determined so that they ranged from general (e.g., main idea) to more specific (e.g, details). The last item under a modality asked students how sure they were they could do the task in a real life situation. Student responses were given numeric values and entered into a computer spreadsheet program. Entries were verified by a second person for the statistical analysis.

Results. Analysis of the questionnaires revealed that across the languages studied a positive correlation exists between strategies use and self-efficacy. Students who reported a greater frequency of strategies use also perceived themselves as more confident in their language learning abilities. The data was then analyzed for each language. This analysis showed that the LSQ/SEQ correlations were positive for each language with the exception of Spanish level 1.

Table 3 reports the coefficients for correlations.

Reported Learning Strategies Use and Self-Efficacy Correlations					
Across Languages	Chinese	German	Japanese	Russian	Spanish
r=.4624 (137)	r=.6808 (21)	r=.5447 (15)	r=.5094 (49)	r=.5012 (27)	r=.1809 (23)

p=.000	p=.000	p=.018	p=.000	p=.004	p=.204
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### 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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