

*Empowering Language Learners with Learning Strategies through Weaving a Strategy Training into the Language Course*

*A Reading Strategies Training for Business English Learners as a Sample*

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**Abstract**

*Ce papier de recherche vise à évaluer l'efficacité de la formation en stratégies de lecture à travers son tissage dans un cours d'anglais afin d'habilitier les apprenants de la langue avec les stratégies cibles. Afin de réaliser cela, un cours a été conçu conformément au profil d'entrée du participant impliquant une formation sur les stratégies de lecture tissées à travers les différentes étapes de chaque leçon. Les participants sont un groupe d'étudiants en sciences commerciales qui ont été choisis au hasard pour entreprendre le cours. Avant de commencer le cours, le chercheur a conduit un interview avec les participants afin de savoir s'ils ont subi une formation en stratégies d'apprentissage, suivi d'un questionnaire de stratégies de lecture dont le but est de vérifier les stratégies de lecture déjà connues et utilisées par les participants et leurs fréquence d'usage. Finalement, et après l'achèvement du cours, le chercheur a fait usage du même questionnaire pour pouvoir dévoiler l'évolution en usage des stratégies conséquent à la formation en stratégies à travers la comparaison des résultats obtenus.*

*Mots clés: cours de langue, lecture, stratégies de lecture, formation en stratégie*

**Abstract:**

*This research paper aims at assessing the effectiveness of weaving a reading strategies training into a course of English to empower language learners with reading strategies. For this purpose, the researcher chose a set of reading strategies representing the training content and designed an English for General Business Purposes (EGBP) course through which the strategy training was introduced. The EGBP course was designed in accordance with the participants' entry profile, as they are a group of 1<sup>st</sup> year LMD commercial sciences students at the Department of Commercial Sciences at the University Of hassiba benboulaï in Chelf; who were randomly chosen. Before starting the course, the researcher, first, conducted an interview with the participants in order to know whether they have ever experienced a strategy training, after that, he surveyed the reading strategies they already knew and their frequency' use.*

*Eventually, and after the completion of the course, using the same reading strategies questionnaire, the researcher surveyed the reading strategies used*

*by the participants and their frequency' use in order to assess the efficiency of the strategy training through the comparison of the results revealed by the questionnaires.*

**Key words:** *Language course, Reading skill, Reading strategies, Strategy training*

## **Introduction**

Learning strategies instruction is said to help all students to be better language learners. Students' understanding of their own learning process and ability to control it, give them more responsibility for their own learning (Paris & Wino Grad, 1990 in NCLRC: 9).

Research has reported that students who think strategically are motivated to learn (Paris, 1988 in NCLRC: 9). Strategic learners perceive themselves as more able to succeed academically than their peers who do not know how to use strategies effectively. Those who expect themselves to succeed in learning tasks generally succeed; and each successful learning experience increases motivation (ibid: 9).

While most research on language learning strategies were descriptive; a number of intervention studies were conducted. Intervention studies have sought to teach language learning strategies and to measure their effect on students. These experimental studies have taken place in classroom settings in which teachers or researchers have provided more or less direct strategies instruction to students to help them become better language learners. The effects investigated include performance on language tests, increase in reported use of learning strategies, attitudes, and self-efficacy (Chamot et al 1999: 167).

## **1. Review of the literature**

### **1.1 Defining Language Learning Strategies**

Learning strategies are those thoughts or actions used by learners to complete learning tasks. In the same way that teachers use strategies in their teaching to assist their students in learning, like using visuals to introduce new ideas, activating learners prior knowledge before introducing new concepts, learning strategies are those tools that learners can use to complete the learning tasks. Learners can have their own strategies that they use for retaining new vocabulary items. Using drawing next to the word as they copy it to their notebook is an example of these strategies (NCLRC website, Sailing the 5 Cs with Learning Strategies).

Chamot defines learning strategies as being procedures or techniques used by learners to facilitate a learning task. While some learning strategies such as taking notes or making graphic organizers are observable, other strategies are mental processes that are not directly observable (Chamot et al, 1999: 2).

## **1.2 Classification of Learning Strategies**

Researchers have suggested a set of categories under which they classified language learning strategies. The main categories they came up with are: cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective strategies.

### **Cognitive Strategies**

Cognitive strategies involve the mental or physical manipulation of the material or the language to be learned. O'Malley and Chamot say that "cognitive strategies operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning" (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 44). Cohen (1998) gives a more explicit definition as he states that learning strategies include those of identification, grouping; retention, storage of language material, retrieval; rehearsal and comprehension (Cohen, 1998: 7).

### **Metacognitive Strategies**

Strategies that fall under this category are defined by Oxford as those which help learners manage themselves as learners, the general learning process and specific learning tasks (2001: 167). That is to say they are activities that encourage learners to reflect in thought processes. These strategies are described by Cohen as strategies that allow learners to control their own cognition by coordinating the planning, organization, and evaluation of the learning process (Cohen, 1998: 7).

In this respect, the main principles of metacognitive strategies include planning for learning, monitoring one's own understanding and production, and evaluating one's performance and comprehension.

### **Social/Affective Strategies**

According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990: 45) social/affective strategies include those related to interaction with other people as well as one's control over affective side. In other words, they are connected to interacting and cooperating with others in order to assist learning. In Cohen words, affective strategies are related to regulating one's emotions, motivation and attitudes, while social strategies are those actions taken by the learner in order to interact with other learners and native speakers (Ibid: 8).

## **1.3 Oxford's classification**

While Oxford (1990) considers the same strategies, she suggests other categories for their classification, they are: (1) indirect learning strategies under which metacognitive, social and affective strategies are included, and (2) direct learning strategies which, in addition to cognitive strategies, they include; memory strategies such as creating mental linkages, applying images and sounds, employing action; compensation strategies such as guessing intelligently, and overcoming

limitations in speaking and writing (Using circumlocution or synonym, switching to the mother tongue, etc.).

#### **1.4The Concept of Strategic Competence**

In the context of learning strategies it is important mention the concept of strategic competence, because it puts the relation between metacognitive and cognitive strategies in nutshell. As noted by Douglas, strategic competence consists of two primary types of cognitive processes or strategies, that he calls metacognitive strategies and communicative strategies.

Metacognitive strategies direct the user's interaction with the context while communicative strategies are called by the metacognitive strategies when the features of the context are specifically identified as communicative (Douglas 2000: 76-77). In other words, metacognitive strategies have control over other strategies.

#### **1.5Strategy based instruction**

"Strategy training" or "strategy instruction" are two terms used interchangeably in the realm of learning strategies to mean teaching learners how to use strategies in order to qualify them for being strategic learners. Thus, the aim of strategy instruction is to train learners on learning how to use strategies.

Research claim that strategy training should not be theoretical but highly practical, as noted by Oxford, and on this basis, in the present research; the strategy training is tackled on the basis of explicit strategies teaching.

Research suggests many strategy training models, such as: Oxford's model, Vigotsky's and Chamot's CALLA model. The latter is the one chosen by the researcher as framework for teaching the strategies.

#### **1.6The CALLA Strategy Training Model**

Chamot (1999: 7) presents learning strategies into a metacognitive model. This model is referred to as the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) created by Chamot and O'Malley (1994). It is an instructional model that provides explicit instruction in learning strategies that is meant to assist students in meeting national curriculum standards, learning both language and content, and becoming independent learners who evaluate their own learning. This model is designed to accelerate academic achievement for English language learning (ELL) students and has been applied in ESL, EFL, and foreign language instruction. The theoretical Framework of CALLA, as stated by Chamot (idem), is a social cognitive learning model that focuses on the role of students background knowledge, the importance of collaborative learning, and the development of metacognitive awareness

and self-reflection. Chamot states that the CALLA framework for learning strategies emphasizes explicitness, metacognitive knowledge, and scaffolded support as the teacher and students work through these phases (the five phases of the model). The five phases are recursive, which means the teachers can move between phases as needed to help students develop skills for understanding and using learning strategies (Chamot 1999: 7).

The model is recursive in nature. That is to say, the four strategic processes are not strictly sequential but may be used depending on the requirements of the task and the interaction between the learner and the task.

In case of reading, for instance, which is the one of this study, the student needs to **plan** by setting his goals or thinking about what he wants to get out of the text and making predictions about the text based on the title and his prior knowledge of the topic. Then he moves to the **monitoring** process, and as he reads he checks if what he is reading is making sense. Nevertheless, while he reads he may decide to go and revise his plans, based on new information in the text. He may need to change some of his prediction and bring in new background knowledge, or even change goals, while these actions are part of the planning process. He continues reading and then decides to stop and **evaluate** himself after having read only a part of the text. In case where he feels that he did not understand an important phrase or idea, he may go to the **problem solving** process. That is to say, he is using each process as it is needed during the task, as the processes are not necessarily sequential.

## 2. Methodology

As the present study is an interventionist one, it was conducted throughout two main phases: the first one is concerned with the design and teaching of the EGBP course into which the strategy training is woven; and the second is concerned with the evaluation of the strategies learnt by the participants. That is to say, the researcher designed an EGBP course that he adapted later by integrating reading strategies into it. Learners' existing strategies at the pre-course phase were assessed, and then more strategies were taught explicitly within the language course. Eventually participants reading strategies were assessed again to check the efficiency of the strategy training.

### 2.1 The Participants

The participants of the research are 1<sup>st</sup> LMD Commercial Sciences students at the university of Hassiba BenBouali in Chlef who are meant to undertake an English for General Business Purposes (EGBP) course. The researcher adapted the course content through the suggestion of lesson plans integrating the target reading strategies, each of these

strategies was meant to be explicitly presented at the appropriate lesson phase in order to make it more comprehensible.

## **2.2 The Research Questions**

In order to find out whether it is possible to empower learners with a learning strategies through weaving the strategy training content into the language course while caring about the credibility of the research, there were some aspects to consider, mainly the previous possible strategy training experiences and the already adopted strategies by the participants. Thence, three research questions rise:

- 1- Have the learners experienced any learning strategies training beforehand?
- 2- Do learners have any reading strategies that they already use?
- 3- Is it possible to empower learners with reading strategies through weaving a strategy training into the English language target course?

## **3.3 Hypotheses**

The researcher suggests the following hypotheses as answers to the research questions:

1. The learners have never experienced any strategy training beforehand.
2. The learners have some reading strategies that they use but they might not be ware of them as strategies.
3. It is possible to empower learners with a set of reading strategies through their inclusion into an English language course.

## **3.4 Data Collection Instruments**

For the sake of answering the rising research questions, the researcher used the following research instrument so as to obtain the necessary data:

### **3.4.1 The interview**

The researcher conducted an interview to check whether the learners have ever experienced a strategy training previously.

### **3.4.2 The Pre-course Reading Strategies Questionnaire**

The questionnaire contained a set of reading strategies targeted by the training. The reading strategies questionnaire is the one suggested by Chamot et al (Chamot et al 1999: 72) within the CALLA model (Metacognitive Model of Learning Strategies Training). It is noteworthy that this questionnaire was used for the purpose of assessing learners existing strategies in the pre-course phase, as a reading strategies checklist for learners to refer to, and as a strategies frequency use assessment instrument in the post-course phase.

The questionnaire contains 16 reading strategies including cognitive and metacognitive ones, presented in an order that goes with the lesson steps for the sake of facility of presentation and practice.

### **3.4.3 Post-course Reading Strategies Questionnaire**

The same questionnaire used in the pre-course phase was introduced in the post-course phase for assessing the frequency use of the strategies after having undertaken the course.

## **3.5 The procedure**

### **3.5.1 The Language Course and the Strategy Training**

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher, first, designed the EGBP course which was later adapted through the suggestion of practical lesson plans which included the target reading strategies, each of these was placed in the adequate lesson phase that allows its explicit teaching through the adopted recursive process suggested in the CALLA model.

### **3.5.2 Data collection procedure**

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher went through a set of steps using the instruments mentioned above. In the pre-course phase, he first conducted an interview with the learners to know whether they have ever experienced a strategy training beforehand. After that, he provided the m with a reading strategies questionnaire to assess their current reading strategies.

Eventually, in the post-course phase, he provided them with the same questionnaire used in the pre-course phase so as to assess the frequency use of the target strategies as a result of the training. Eventually, the researcher compared the data obtained via the pre-course questionnaire with that obtained via the post-course one in order to assess the efficiency of the training.

## **4. Data Findings and discussions**

### **4.1 Data findings**

#### **The Interview**

The interview conducted with the learners revealed that the learners have never had any strategy

training experience, and this confirms the hypothesis suggested by the researcher.

### **The Pre-course Reading Strategies Questionnaire**

The table below shows the data obtained via the pre-course reading strategies questionnaire.

Strategies	Students' answers			
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Always
1. I decide in advance what my reading purpose is, and then I read with that goal in mind.	00	01	07	12
2. I decide in advance specific aspects of information to look for, and focus on that information when I read.	02	03	04	11
3. Before I read, I think of what I already know about the topic.	02	03	11	04
4. I try to predict what the text will be about.	02	06	06	04
5. While I read, I periodically check whether the material is making sense to me.	02	01	06	09
6. I imagine scenes or draw pictures of what I am reading.	03	06	06	05
7. I encourage myself, as I read, by saying positive statements such as, "You can do it".	02	11	05	02
8. I work with classmates to complete assignments or solve comprehension problems.	03	02	11	04
9. I use the context, like familiar words, pictures, and the content, to help me guess the meanings of unfamiliar words I read.	03	05	05	07
10. I identify what I don't understand in the reading text, and I ask precise questions to solve the problem.	04	10	05	01
11. I use reference materials (dictionary, textbook, computer program, and so on) to help solve comprehension problems.	02	08	09	01
12. After reading I check if my predictions were correct.	02	04	09	05
13. I summarize (in my head or in writing) important information that I read.	04	10	04	02
14. I rate my comprehension by reflecting on how much I	03	10	04	03



understood what I read.				
15. After reading, I decide whether the strategies or techniques I used helped me Often	16	00	02	02
16. I check whether I accomplished my goal for reading.	03	03	09	05

**Table 1: Pre-course Reading Strategies Questionnaire Results**

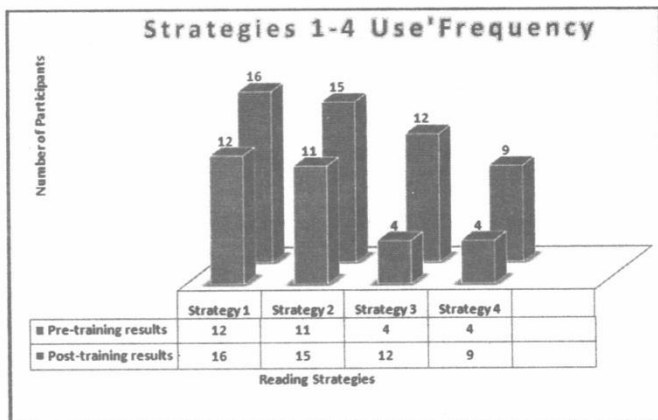
### **The Post-course Reading Strategies Questionnaire**

The table below shows the data obtained via the post-course reading strategies questionnaire.

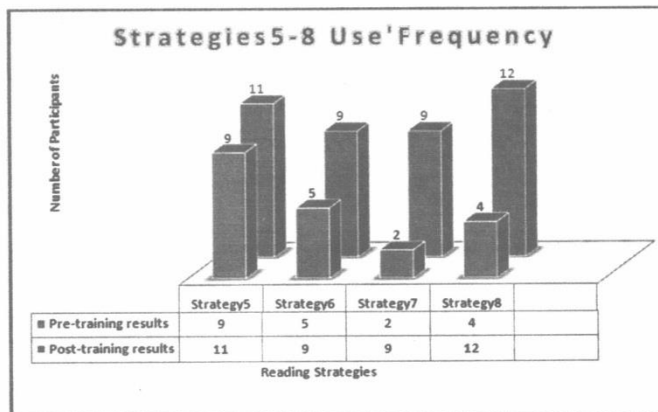
Strategies	Students' answers			
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Always
1. I decide in advance what my reading purpose is, and then I read with that goal in mind.	00	00	04	16
2. I decide in advance specific aspects of information to look for, and focus on that information when I read.	00	00	05	13
3. Before I read, I think of what I already know about the topic.	01	02	05	12
4. I try to predict what the text will be about.	02	02	07	09
5. While I read, I periodically check whether the material is making sense to me.	01	01	09	11
6. I imagine scenes or draw pictures of what I am reading.	01	01	09	09
7. I encourage myself, as I read, by saying positive statements such as, "You can do it".	00	01	10	09
8. I work with classmates	00	00	08	12

to complete assignments or solve comprehension problems.				
9. I use the context, like familiar words, pictures, and the content, to help me guess the meanings of unfamiliar words I read.	00	01	09	10
10. I identify what I don't understand in the reading text, and I ask precise questions to solve the problem.	00	03	07	10
11. I use reference materials (dictionary, textbook, computer program, and so on) to help solve comprehension problems.	00	01	08	11
12. After reading I check if my predictions were correct.	00	02	07	11
13. I summarize (in my mind or in writing) important information that I read.	00	02	10	08
14. I rate my comprehension by reflecting on how much I understood what I read.	00	02	09	09
15. After reading, I decide whether the strategies or techniques I used helped me.	00	02	11	07
16. I check whether I accomplished my goal for reading.	00	00	08	12

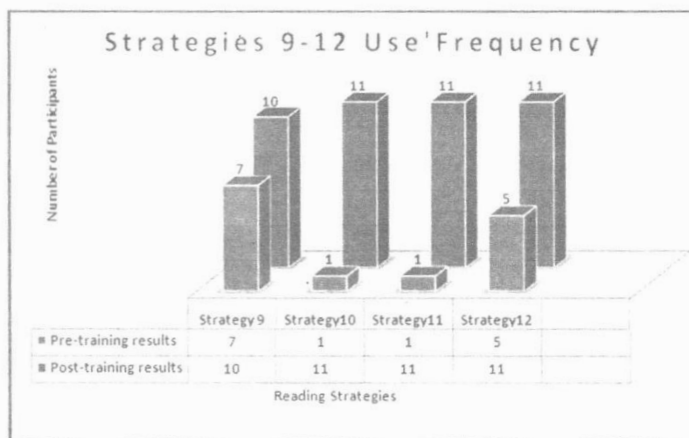
**Table 2: Post-course Reading Strategies Questionnaire Results**



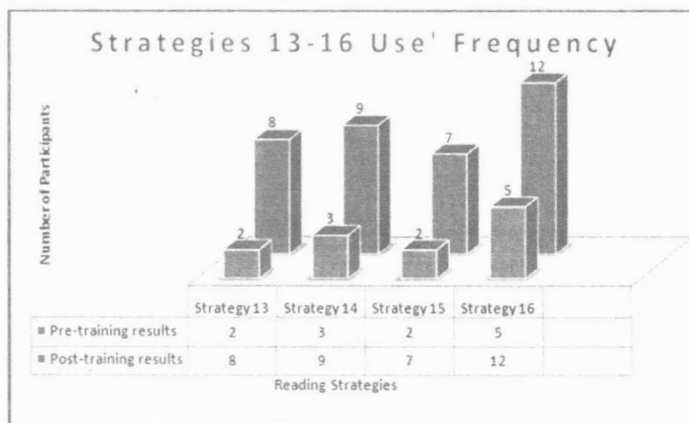
**Figure1:** Reading Strategies 1-4 Participants Always Use



**Figure2:** Reading Strategies 5-8 Participants Always Use



**Figure3:** Reading Strategies 9-12 Participants Always Use



**Figure4:** Reading strategies 13-16 participants always use

## 4.2 Discussion of the Findings

### The Interview

The results obtained by the interview answer the first research question by confirming the hypothesis saying that the participants have not had any previous strategy training experiences beforehand.

### **The pre- course Reading Strategies Questionnaire**

According to data obtained via the pre-course reading strategies questionnaire whose results are detailed in table1, some participants already possessed and used reading strategies before they undertook the training.

It was also remarked that the frequency of use of these strategies differs from one strategy to another and from one student to another, since there are some strategies that some students never use, others rarely, others which they use occasionally and others which they always use.

### **The Post- course Reading Strategies Questionnaire**

According the data obtained via the post-course reading strategies questionnaire whose results are detailed in table2, the participants made a remarkable progress in reading strategies use. For those strategies participants used before the course, there was a remarkable advance in their frequency use, in additions to those that are totally new to them and whose frequency use in the pre-course questionnaire appeared with the value "zero" (0), they appeared in the post-course questionnaire with higher values.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of the research confirm the hypotheses suggested by the researcher, as it was proved that the participants had never undertaken any strategy training beforehand, they had some reading strategies that they used but without being aware of them as strategies that can be used and shared; the research also confirmed that it is possible to empower language learners with learning strategies through weaving a strategy training through the language course.

### **Recommendations**

On the basis of the findings of this research, the researcher recommends the design of language courses through which learning strategies training is woven including the most useful strategies that characterize successful language learners' performance, targeting not only reading but the remaining language skills so as to obtain a maximum of learning capacity and autonomy from learners. Besides, a teacher training on strategy inclusion within available syllabuses and textbooks can be suggested for both ministries of national education and higher education so as to qualify the students' exit profile as "strategic learners".

### **Limitations of the research**

The research could have proved more language learning capacity development if the participants have had more time allocated to the language course, but having only one session a week, with 90 minutes per session made it impossible for the researcher to target other

language skills in parallel, limiting the research to the reading one as a sample.

In other language teaching/learning contexts, such as middle and secondary schools or university language departments, it is much more possible to adopt the strategy instruction approach.

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