In recent years language-learning research has sought to determine the factors which may affect the language learning strategy choice among the learners. In studies done by Cohen (1990), Macintyre and Gardner (1989), Reid (1987) and Ehrman and Oxford (1989) these factors have been identified as motivation, gender, learning style and previous experience, language learning strategies and cognitive styles. In this paper only two of the above factors are highlighted which are language-learning strategies and field dependence (FD)/independence (FI) which are one of the cognitive dichotomies. This study tries to find out the answer to the following questions:

1. What types of strategies do field dependent/independent learners’ use?
2. Do the students’ cognitive styles (FD/FI) affect their choice of learning strategies?

Successful language learners tend to select strategies that work well together in the language-learning task (Chamot & Kupper, 1989). Rubin and Thompson (1994) found that the use of appropriate language learning strategies often results in improved proficiency or overall achievements or in specific skill areas. It is supposed that the choice of particular learning strategies by the student is closely related with being field dependent/independent.

In all learning environments, choosing the appropriate learning strategy can give positive direction to the learning task. Oxford and Nyikos (1989) defined learning strategies as a combination of behaviors, which are used by the learners to assist in better learning, storing and recovering of information. In addition, learning strategies have been defined as the specific tactics that the individual used to overcome the learning task. These tactics have been defined and classified by Oxford and Nyikos (1989). The present study seems to be the first study of its kind concerning the area of language strategy selection of the Persian students in learning English; this study evaluates whether FD/FI enhance or hinder language-learning strategies of Persian students.
In this study, the researchers tried to concentrate on the language learning strategies, which have been conducted by the field dependent/independent students in the EFL environment.

The term field dependence has been defined by Brown, 2000, p. 114) as “the tendency to be dependent on the total field such that the parts embedded within a field are not easily perceived, though that total is perceived more clearly as a unified whole”. “The term field in general may be perceptual or it may be more abstract in referring to a set of thoughts, ideas, or feeling from which the field independent individual task is to perceive specific relevant subsets” (Brown, 2000, p. 114).

Some researchers suggest that there is the third group which is called field intermediate (FIM). They believe this group of learners carries the characteristics of both FD/FI groups. They are somewhere between these two groups. Meng and Patty (1991) defined “FIM as subjects who scored within one half standard deviation of the mean are considered to be field dependent.

CHARACTERISTICS DIFFERENCES IN FD/F

Based on research findings and theories forwarded by various researchers such as Witkin, Moore, Goodenough and Cox (1977), and Jamieson (1992) the Table (1) summarizes the differences between FD and FI learners.

Theories of learning try to explain the way people learn and what common characteristics there are in all learning. While all humans inherited the potentialities of learning; every individual approaches a problem or learns a set of factors from a unique prospective. One of the major reasons for the above statement is due to cognitive variations in learning a foreign language that are employed by individual and are labeled under three major titles which are 1-processes 2-strategies 3-styles (Brown, 2000).

LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

Many researchers have defined the word language learning strategy. Wenden and Rubin (1987) defined the language learning strategies as …any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information.

Richard and Platt (1992, p. 209) believed that language-learning strategies are “intentional behaviors and thoughts used by learners during learning so as to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information.”

O’Malley and Chamot (1990) described learning strategies as particular ways or abilities which the learner adopts to analyze the information for the purpose of better understanding and making better use of it.

Bialystock (1985) thus defined learning strategies as the actions employed by the learner intentionally or unintentionally to show the real ability of the learner in analyzing the linguistic issue or the related things to this area but under specific related conditions.
Kouraogo (1993) quoted in Wenden and Rubin (1987) conceptualized learning strategies in three aspects relating to:

1. The language learning behaviors that learners actually engage in to learn and regulate the learning of a second language.
2. What learners know about the strategies they use.
3. What they know about aspects of their language learning, for example, about personal factors facilitating L2 learning and about general principles to follow for successful learning (Kouraogo, 1993).

Strategies may be classified into two major categories, namely, direct strategies and indirect strategies. Direct strategies involve the target language in the sense that they require mental processing of the language” (Oxford, 1990, p. 37). She classified the direct learning strategies into three main groups. Each group approaches the language differently and for different functions.

(a) **Memory strategy**: They entail the mental processes for receiving the new information into the memory store room and for regaining it when required.

(b) **Cognitive strategy**: Process the target language and finding the link between new information and the former knowledge to enable them to classify and analyze it.

(c) **Compensation strategy**: Assist the learners to overcome their deficiencies in their existing knowledge and abilities.

Indirect strategies, “provide indirect support for language learning through focusing, planning, evaluating, seeking opportunities, controlling anxiety, increasing cooperation and empathy and other means” (Oxford, 1990, p. 38). She classified the indirect strategies as below:

(a) **Metacognitive strategy**: They help the learner to direct their own learning and handling their learning task.

(b) **Affective strategy**: Assist the learners in gaining control of their emotions and attitudes related to learning.

(c) **Social strategy**: Ways to achieve learning by using question, asking for cooperation and being culturally aware.

This study is based on the Oxford (1991) definition and classification for the language learning strategies. In Oxford’s (1991) strategy system each of these six was categorised into two levels, the first level containing 19 strategy sets, while the second level contained 62 specific strategies. Except for those studies that I had mentioned earlier, other researchers have been conducted in this area with the different objects and for different tasks. Naiman et al. (1978), Rubin (1981), Oxford (1991), Tarone (1997) and many more, have done language-learning classification.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Subjects**

The subjects who participated in this study are 140 Iranian female students majoring in English. All of them are junior students in Azad University center branch in Tehran and Fars. Due to incomplete responses; data gathered from 23 students were eliminated. The remaining 117 students were the main subjects of the study. These students received brief instruction on learning strategies based on Oxford and Burristock (1995) and O’Malley et al. (1985). The instruction involved some brief definitions for language learning strategies. In addition, some examples were presented to make subjects more familiar with these strategies.

**Instruments**

The two instruments used for the data collection in this study were:

(a) A test entitled GEFT (Group Embedded Figure Test)

(b) A questionnaire on language learning strategies SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning)

**Group Embedded Figure Test (GEFT)**

The GEFT was developed by Oltman, Raskin and Witkin (1971), and was used to assess subjects, their degree of field dependence
and field independence. According to Stanfield and Hansen (1983) GEFT is a group administered test that requires the subject to outline a simple geometric shape within complex design. The subject must locate or separate the relevant information from the contextual field in restructuring it to design the correct shape. The criterion validity of the GEFT with respect to the earlier Witkin’s Embedded Figure Test was reported satisfactory by Witkin et al. (1977). The reliability of the GEFT in Krishnaveni’s (1988) study was reported to be .82 and it was .85 in study done by McKenna (1991) for the same version of the GEFT. GEFT has three sections, regardless of the initial pages, which require students to fill in the identifying information. The initial booklet pages also contain accurate directions along with some examples to illustrate the procedure for subjects.

The first section, which has a time limit of 3 minutes, includes 7 easy problems for practice (this section is intended to familiarise students with this test. The items are not included in the total score. The second and third sections, which are the body of the GEFT booklets, include 9 items each with a time limit of 6 minutes. Based on the number of correct answers given by the students, the scores on GEFT may range from 0 (the most field dependent) to 18 (the most field independent).

SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning)

One of the common ways to assess the language learning strategies is using the SILL questionnaire by Oxford and Burrystock (1995). The SILL (Oxford, 1989) was first designed for assessing the frequency of strategy used by the students at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey. It has two versions; one version, which has 80 items, is mainly produced for English speakers who are learning a foreign language. The second version, which is used in this study, has 50 items, and it is designed for ESL/EFL learners.

SILL (the 50-item one) has been translated in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Thai, and Ukrainian. This showed the worldwide usage of the instrument. Students are required to answer these SILL items on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Never” or “Almost never true” to “Almost Always true”, or “true”.

The reliability of the SILL is based on Cronbach Alpha. According to Oxford and Burrystock (1995), the high internal consistency reliability reported for the SILL was ranked from .91 to .94 when it was conducted among learners. In this study, the Cronbach alpha was reported as .92. The SILL content validity was based on the experts’ judgment (Oxford, 1996).

To answer the research questions asked in this study, after conducting and scoring the tests, the raw data was coded for the analysis. The data analysis was completed with the use of various programs from the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS).

RESULTS

Cognitive Style and Learning Strategies

Table 2, 3 and 4 shows the mean strategy use in each of these categories for the entire groups. The tables show the mean and rank order of the frequency use of the language learning strategies. It can be seen that language learning strategies usage for overall use ranged from 2.7 (moderate use for affective strategy) which is defined by Oxford (1990) to 3.6 (high frequency for metacognitive strategy) among field dependent learners and from 3.1 (moderate use for effective strategy) to 3.9 (high frequency use for metacognitive) among FI learners. Although there are differences in level of strategy use by each group, all means for the six categories fell within the range of 2.7 to 3.9, which is defined by Oxford (1990) as medium use. It can be concluded that the use of the learning strategies is common among subjects used in this study.

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher noticed that being field dependent and field independent does not affect student’s choice of the language learning strategies. However, the focus of this study is to see the preferences of FD and FI students in choosing the language learning strategies. Table 5 presents the frequencies and percentages of the samples belonging to each group of the cognitive styles (FD/FIM/FI).
Table 2: Language Learning Strategies Preferred by FD Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor name</th>
<th>Frequency use</th>
<th>Ranking order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Memory</td>
<td>3.4 Moderate</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Cognitive</td>
<td>3.5 High</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Compensatory</td>
<td>3.1 Moderate</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Metacognitive</td>
<td>3.6 High</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Affective</td>
<td>2.7 Moderate</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Social</td>
<td>2.9 Moderate</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Language Learning Strategies Preferred by FI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor name</th>
<th>Frequency use</th>
<th>Ranking order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Memory</td>
<td>3.3 Moderate</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Cognitive</td>
<td>3.65 High</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Compensatory</td>
<td>3.56 High</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Metacognitive</td>
<td>3.9 High</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Affective</td>
<td>3.0 Moderate</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Social</td>
<td>3.60 Moderate</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Language Learning Strategies Preferred by FIM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor name</th>
<th>Frequency use</th>
<th>Ranking order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Memory</td>
<td>3.3 Moderate</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Cognitive</td>
<td>3.64 High</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Compensatory</td>
<td>3.61 High</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Metacognitive</td>
<td>3.9 High</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Affective</td>
<td>3.1 Moderate</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Social</td>
<td>3.5 Moderate</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Distinguishing the Different Groups of Learners Based on the GEFT Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scores</th>
<th>Field dependent 1-9</th>
<th>Field intermediate 10-13</th>
<th>Field independent 14-18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage %100</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>56.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purpose of comparing language learning strategies used by the three groups (FD/FIM/FI), the mean scores of the SILL were calculated. The language learning strategies were ranked according to language learners’ preferences. The data shows the ranking of the language learning strategies preferred by the groups of language learners (See Table 6).

Table 6: The Overall Language Learning Strategies Used by the Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors name</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard D</th>
<th>Rank order of use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metacognitive</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the results the researchers found that learners from the different groups of cognitive style (FD/FIM/FI) have their own preferences in choosing the language learning strategies. The results implied that there were no relationships between Field dependent/field independent and choices in language learning strategies among learners in this study. The students chose the learning strategies, which facilitate the learning task that help them to be better language learners.

Although the results pointed out that all groups had chosen metacognitive and cognitive strategies as their first and second language learning strategies, FD learners preferred memory and compensation strategies followed by affective and social
strategies, while FIM learners picked up compensatory, social, memory and finally the affective strategies for the respective categories. Meanwhile the FI learners’ utilised social, compensatory and memory followed by affective strategies.

The findings of this study have some implication for teaching and learning of English for the purpose of communication. Firstly, the findings suggest that language learning strategies should be taught to learners (regardless of their cognitive styles), in the classroom environment. Secondly, the teaching method should be compatible with language learners’ choices of language learning strategies, to enable them to use the appropriate strategies to acquire proficiency in English language. Thirdly, the examinations format should also be designed according to language learners needs. Finally, English teachers should recognise the student’s use of the language learning strategies.

It is very important to incorporate language-learning strategies into the language class. This could give the learners better chances to learn and to develop their skills in the use of language learning strategies; they will be able to practice their language skills. After practicing continuously, learners will be able to identify the learning strategies related to their learning task and will be able to direct their learning to overcome their problems in their language-learning environment.

However, the language learning strategies reflect the problem language learners face while learning the language. The language teachers can help their learners to find ways to solve their learning problems. Although the relationship between FD/FI and choices in the language learning strategies cannot be found in this research, teachers should still consider the need of each group of learners and choose the suitable teaching methodologies relevant to each group.

References


CHAPTER 8

Best Practices in Gifted Education Programs for Children Aged 4 to 8 in Australia and New Zealand

ONG DEE JEAN

In his 2007 NAGC Presidential Address, Siegle (2008) addressed the personal responsibility of talent development of gifted and talented (GT) children. Gifts and talents are the rights of the children and they must be informed. ‘Quality education is [thus] a right, not a privilege’ (VanTassel-Baska, 2006, p. 209). Recognition of the gifts and talents perpetuated a broader base for improving existing practices for talent development and collaboration from all stakeholders (VanTassel-Baska, 2007). The quest for rights urges parents to accept GT children as blessings and staff development planning at state level.

The purpose of this article is to discover the existing practices in Australia and New Zealand, ascertain their use with GT children, and learn from them what makes the best practices, and finally triangulate the evidence with informal conversations with gifted teachers and children, class observations and children’s work. The article concludes by contending that culturally, linguistically, ethnically and diverse (CLED) children, and second language learners (SEL) who are equally gifted, have a right to quality education, too.