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**A Bilingual Research Journal of
Jorhat College Teachers' Unit**

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Dr. Gitartha Goswami**

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Teaching along with Systematic Instruction of Language Learning Strategies: A Proposal for the English Class

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Abstract:

Research into strategies employed by successful language learners gave rise to the thought that language teaching should also be complemented by explicit teaching of learning strategies. Researchers have argued that an integrated approach (language teaching and strategy training) can help English learners in an effective way. Further, strategy researchers found out that the choice of strategies depend on the tasks in hand, the context and the goals of the learners and so the impetus was on the growth of the learners' self-

management skills. This paper aims to propose an integrative approach – assimilating teaching and strategy instructions for learners of English as a second language largely based on the CALLA (Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach) model of Chamot and O'Malley.

Key words: English, strategies, CALLA (Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach)

1. Introduction:

Griffiths (2013, p. 15) defines language learning strategies as activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning. The ultimate goal of every language learner is to move beyond the school and college syllabus, to become autonomous learners by taking responsibility for their own learning. Griffiths (2013, p.31) further notes that Holec (1981) first applied the term autonomy into language learning. Referring to a number of theorists and experts in the field of language learning strategies –Chamot, Cohen, Macaro, Oxford, Rubin and Wenden – Griffiths (2013, p.39) asserts that language learning strategies are a factor in successful language learning. So perhaps, the employment of learning strategies makes a learner more cognitively engaged than a learner who does not make use of strategies while learning.

Chamot et al. (1999) in the very introductory chapter of *The Learning Strategies Handbook* makes a crucial point:

“This book is for teachers who believe that all students can learn. It is for teachers who believe that they can help students become more successful learners” (p. 2). It has been observed by the paper writer from his decade long experience of teaching English at the tertiary level that some students have aptitude for language learning, there are students who – despite coming from non – English medium backgrounds – have successfully developed their English language skills. Now the question is whether the majority of students in our schools and colleges who remain so afraid of English be given systematic instructions of language learning strategies based on a well-researched theoretical framework. The task may not be an easy one but it is nevertheless worth trying.

The Dibrugarh University Regulations for the Under Graduate Academic Programmes in the CBCS, 2018 requires the learners to learn at their own pace, make their own choices of electives, adopt an interdisciplinary approach in learning, and make use of expertise of the faculty members. It is worth noting that in the new system, it is the student who is the key player – s/he is being given the freedom to learn what s/he wants at his/her desired pace and, most interestingly, should make use of the teacher’s knowledge for his/her own benefit. In other words, the learner has an advantage – at least theoretically – than those enjoyed by students in the older system. The change of system warrants a change in approach in teaching – it may be timely to experiment with model of teaching where the learners are given an inclusive package of

teaching with specific strategy instruction.

2. Research Problem:

It is a fact that although students study English an L2 as a compulsory paper in school, they hardly develop the required confidence and competence in the language and that reflects pathetically in their performance at the tertiary level. The paper proposes a systematic intervention on the part of the English teachers with strategies instruction parallelly with the usual language teaching broadly based on the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) originally developed by Chamot and O'Malley (1994) but with scope for making suitable adaptations.

3. Methodology

The paper follows a method of close reading of available primary and secondary sources for literature review and developing the theoretical framework.

4. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework:

It has been already been stated in the introduction that strategy users are better at cognitive engagement with the language task than those not using any strategies. Citing experts in the fields of language learning like Anderson, O'Malley & Chamot, and Larsen –

Freeman, Griffiths (2013, p.39) asserts that language learning is not a passive act but a rigorous activity demanding

a conscious participation where the learner regulates his/her own learning according to the individual goals and situation. He adds that language learning in the cognitive framework is not merely a matter of habit formation as in the Behaviourist model but a process where information is processed and acted upon.

Chamot et al (1999, p.157 - 159) theorize that learning strategies instruction alongside regular teaching activity is an exercise that draws its rationale from two major learning theories – 1. Cognitive Models of Learning and 2. Social Cognitive Models of Learning. The Cognitive approach to learning views learning as an active, dynamic process involving learner's selection of incoming information, encoding it into long term memory and retrieving it when required. Cognitive theory postulates two types of knowledge stores in long – term memory:

1. Declarative Knowledge – information regarding facts, beliefs and events;
2. Procedural knowledge – knowledge of how to perform skills and processes.

They note that the cognitive learning models throw light on the process through which learning strategies work: information processing, schema theory and Constructivism. The information processing theory suggest that learning requires processing new information by organizing, elaborating and connecting with original knowledge. The schema theory suggests that pre-existing knowledge is stored

in organized structures called schemata, learners can draw upon the relevant information when required. And Constructivism further builds upon the schema theory – learners use their background knowledge to create a frame of reference and use it to understand and accommodate the new information.

The Social – Cognitive models of learning asserts that learning does not take place in a vacuum and that the social setting has a big role in learning. Bandura's Social – Cognitive Theory as noted by Chamot et al., (1999, p. 159) states that learning is based on complex, 5 reciprocal interactions among behaviour, environment and personal factors. That social affective strategies like self-talk gives the learner much needed personal motivation in developing self – efficacy to continue with the learning process. They note (p. 160) that theorists have worked on Bandura's model to create a comprehensive approach towards Self-Regulated Learning. Another crucial concept in language learning is Vygotsky's Social – Cognitive Theory which points out that learners develop mature thinking by observing how teachers and other experts approach learning tasks. That learners can operate in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) with the help from proficient people – teachers, guides, parents and peers. Vygotsky's theory supports the crucial role of modelling and scaffolded guidance to help students become independent learners.

The CALLA (Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach) instructional framework developed by Chamot and

O'Malley (1994) has five steps:

1. **Preparation:** It is the first phase of the CALLA model of instruction and in this phase the teacher prepares the students for instruction by identifying what prior knowledge they already have, they current level of language proficiency, and their current use of learner strategies;
2. **Presentation:** In this phase the teacher gives a demonstration of the new learning strategy and explains when and how to use it;
3. **Practice:** the learners are given practice of strategy with regular classroom instruction;
4. **Evaluation:** the learners evaluate their use of learning strategies;
5. **Expansion:** the learners transfer the strategies learnt to other learning tasks outside the class or academics.

5. A Proposal for the English Class:

For language learning strategies instruction to be successful - a) the students must believe that can become proficient self-dependent learners with the use of effective strategies with or without language aptitude; b) the teachers must also have full faith in the fact that students can develop their language skills with appropriate strategies instruction. Learners remain passive in a teacher fronted classroom, but in a strategies-based instruction model – the learner is

independent, takes risk, is metacognitively aware of his/her thought process and the teacher becomes an effective classroom manager creating the right kind of ambience for learning and also thinking about learning.

Making students think about their learning may provide them with new windows to their own understanding process not previously explored. For learners to become aware of the importance of strategies, they must be given tasks that are difficult enough to challenge them to think and impel them to make a choice of strategies. If the task is too simple then the learners may not feel motivated enough to use strategies.

Chamot et al (1999) talk about a metacognitive model of strategies learning which is quite comprehensive. The major steps are 1. Planning, 2. Monitoring, 3. Problem Solving, and 4. Evaluating strategies.

In the Planning phase, the learners:

- a. Set goals;
- b. Direct attention to the task (avoiding distraction);
- c. Activate background knowledge about the task;
- d. Predict what will happen;
- e. Engage in Organizational planning – planning the task;
- f. Engage in Self-management – how to create the right condition to help in learning and focussing.

In Monitoring phase, the learners:

- a. Ask if it is making sense;

- b. **Selectively attend – choose the point of focus;**
- c. **Apply deduction/induction;**
- d. **Personalize/ contextualize;**
- e. **Take note of important information;**
- f. **Use imagery;**
- g. **Act out – role playing, pantomiming;**
- h. **Self – talk: make positive statements to help face the challenging task;**
- i. **Cooperate – working with peers/teachers in solving the problem.**

In Problem – Solving phase, the learners:

- a. **Infer;**
- b. **Substitute specific words or phrases with what is available;**
- c. **Asks questions to clarify;**
- d. **Use resources like dictionaries, thesaurus, computer etc;**

In Evaluating strategies, the learners:

- a. **Verify predictions and guesses;**
- b. **Summarize;**
- c. **Check goals;**
- d. **Evaluates themselves to check as to how well they have understood or used the language;**
- e. **Evaluate the strategies employed – whether the choices made were perfect.**

6. "Trouble Shooting" - Strategies instruction in large classrooms with 100 – 150 students:

A very big challenge would be to introduce a learner centred approach in a classroom crammed with 100 – 150. Chamot et al (1999) propose a five-step model of strategies instruction process: 1. Preparation, 2. Presentation, 3. Practice 4. Evaluation 5. Expansion. The teacher/paper writer thinks that the five steps are crucial and indispensable; but depending on the scope and resources available, the teacher – strategies instructor must make suitable modifications.

Phase 1	Preparation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make the learners reflect on the processes of language learning and studying other subjects – how is language learning different? 2. A questionnaire-based assessment of the personal language learning goals of learners. 3. A questionnaire-based assessment of the self-efficacy of the students. 4. Make students seat facing each other by just making students of 1st, 3rd, 5th..., nth rows turn around;
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		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Teach them to 'Think Aloud' and also record their thought process; 6. Teacher can also use standard learning strategies questionnaire to assess their use of strategies in language skills.
Phase 2	Presentation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teacher explains the different crucial strategies steps – planning, monitoring, problem solving and evaluation. 2. S/he may also take help of allegory to explain the different steps.
Phase 3	Practice	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Give tasks to assess learner's skills which would be followed by learners thinking aloud of their choice of strategies of answering questions in writing about their tactics in solving the problem. 2. The teacher may also ask to create a repertoire of strategies for reference.

Phase 4	Evaluation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There may be a class discussion among learners about their choice of learning strategies. 2. The teacher may also provide the learners with checklists/ learning logs journals and diaries etc
Phase 5	Expansion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In this phase the learners try to expand their awareness to other academic subjects etc.

7. Conclusion

The 'teacher cum researcher cum strategies instructor'

- a. has to be immensely motivated for strategy-based instruction,
- b. has to make meticulous plans regarding the amount of time to be spent in each class for strategies instruction,
- c. has to give the learners assurance at the very outset that they can expect every possible help from the teacher if they promise to be good learners,
- d. and has to take teachers of other subjects (Political Science, Education, Sociology etc) into confidence so that the benefits of strategies instruction in

English can also be assessed in other subjects.

A teacher with a taste for adventure may try attempting strategies instruction in the English Honours Course as well under the CBCS programme, note the effects and also publish it for future use and reference by the teaching community.

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