



ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS' STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP THEIR COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Received: 02/08/2020	Abstract
Accepted: 02/09/2020	<i>Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) are specific actions, behaviors, steps, and techniques that the learners use to improve their performance in second /foreign language learning and teaching. These strategies are as affecting factors on success or failure of the language learning process. This paper explores English language learners' learning strategies to develop their communicative competence within the theoretical stance of Oxford's 1990 LLSs. The study was qualitative in nature where four participants were interviewed to understand their ontological perspectives and practices of different LLSs to improve their communicative ability in English. The findings show that the learners are usual strategy users. However, social, affective, and metacognitive strategies are frequent strategies for developing their communicative competence. It further depicts learners are not always aware of the influence of consciously using specific LLSs for making their learning quicker and more effective. Finally, the study suggests that teachers need to help their students develop language learning awareness strategies and enable them to use a wider range of appropriate strategies for enhancing their communicative competence in English.</i>
Keywords: Communicative approaches, communicative competence, interactive activities, learning strategies, L2 learning.	

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication takes place through oral, written, or even non-verbal means. The knowledge of language and skills to use it in real-life situations develops communicative competence in the users. Developing competence in a foreign language especially in English, is a valuable means in today's globalized world. It opens the door to the whole world in the way of knowing, understanding, and communicating with other cultures. For this, the learners need to adopt different learning strategies or techniques to achieve their communicative goals or desired outcomes. For Chamot (2004), language learning strategies are conscious thoughts and actions where learners take to achieve a learning goal. In recent years, there is a change in emphasizing language as a set of forms to be practiced as a functional system for communicative purposes.

There are even views that the main purpose of language teaching is to make learners able to communicate in the target language. Accordingly, developing the communicative competence of EFL learners is the initial and ultimate goal of English language teaching in Nepal. It can be oral, written, or even nonverbal. It refers to possessing the knowledge of the language as well as the skills to use the language in real-life situations for fulfilling communicative needs. Communication strategies need to be applied in an EFL context like

Nepal which helps to negotiate meaning through linguistic structures and sociolinguistic rules (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Further, they facilitate learners' communicative competence in a foreign language focusing on interactive classroom activities. In the same way, strategies fulfill the conditions like "making learning easier, faster, enjoyable, self-directed, effective, and transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). As a result, learners will be able to determine, guide, manage, and direct their learning process which helps to foster their communicative skills in the target language. When the learners acquire the skills of the language and manage to use them efficiently and aptly based on their contexts where they involve, we can say that they achieve the required level of communicative competence in the target language.

Learning strategies enable students to become self-dependent, autonomous, lifelong learners (Allwright, 1990). In the Nepalese Context, these strategies of teaching communicatively seem to be important to enhance learners' communicative ability. "Whenever the learners consciously choose the strategies that can fit their learning styles in the language learning process, these strategies become useful tools for active, conscious, and purposeful self-regulation of learning" (Oxford, 2003, p. 2). Further, it leads their learning process easier, faster, enjoyable, self-directed, and transferable. Thus, learners need to acquire a general communicative ability, which will enable them to cope up with every-day situations (Littlewood, 1981). In addition, learning strategies as learning processes that the learners consciously select to enhance the learning of a second or foreign language through retaining, recalling, and applying the information about that language (Cohen, 1998).

Later, these strategies result in action to enhance the learning process to develop learners' communicative competence in the target language i.e. in English. In view with the previous definition, language learning strategies have a key role in language teaching and learning process since they give some clues about the learners' learning styles and techniques. Rubin (1975) suggested that learning strategies are the techniques or devices that a learner may use them to acquire knowledge. Oxford (1990) further categorized LLSs under two main groups as direct and indirect strategies and each category has three subtitles: Direct strategies, dealing with "language itself in a variety of specific tasks and situation" (p. 14) consist of memory, cognitive and comprehension strategies, on the other hand, indirect strategies, "the general management of learning" (p. 15), consist of metacognitive, affective and social strategies. she classified learning strategies into six groups: memory strategies (relates to how students remember language), cognitive strategies (relates to how students think about their learning), compensation strategies enable students to make up for limited knowledge), metacognitive strategies (relates to how students manage their own learning), affective strategies (relates to students' feelings) and social strategies (involves learning by interaction with others).

Strategies for Communicative Competence

Language learning strategies are oriented toward the goal of developing communicative competence which requires realistic interaction among the learners using meaningful, contextualized language which helps learners participate actively in different interactive activities. Oxford (1990) state that the aim of learning strategies is to develop communicative competence of the learners. Talking about Nepalese context, enhancing communicative ability of English language learners from diverse communities is the main motto of language teaching. More specifically, adopting different learning strategies and making students able to communicate and interact with others in English without hesitation is a key factor to develop their communicative ability in English. Furthermore, students can practice the strategies like storytelling, oral conversation, and dialogue, using language acquisition games and videos, listening to the English songs, performing dramas, composition writing, role-playing, asking

questions for clarification, repetition, consistent reading, etc. It is difficult to apply a single L2 methodology that could possibly fit an entire class filled with students who have a range of stylistic and strategic preferences.

In preference to choosing a specific instructional methodology, L2 teachers can employ as instructional approaches especially the syllabus of communicative approaches that combines both form and fluency. This approach allows for deliberate, creative variety to meet the needs of all students in the class to enhance learners' communicative ability in English. In the same way, teachers need to start with strategic interventions such as helping L2 learners learn to analyze words and guess meanings from the context, rather than following full-scale strategies-based instruction. Hence, strategies-based instruction is not a separate approach rather it is sound strategy instruction that is intertwined with communicative language teaching (Oxford, 2003). Similarly, Regina and Chinwe (2014) used strategies like oral conversation, storytelling, drama, composition writing, role-playing, dialogue, using language acquisition videos and audiovisual aids, consistent reading and language games, repetition, internal monologue, etc. are found useful in developing communicative competence of EFL learners.

Achieving such an aim depends on many factors related to teachers, syllabi, teaching situations, environment, and learners. There are many learning strategies or activities that enhance the language learning process communicative and interactive based. Project-based learning, task-based language teaching, problem-solving activities play an important role in developing communicative competence of learners. Further, they enable communication skills in comparison to those strategies of imitations, memorization, and repetition drills and their concerns are only language and structures rather than the use of language. There has been a new trend in the last third of the last century was the emergence of the communicative language teaching approach that recommends teaching English through a communication or by using it where the teaching-learning process should be communicative and interactive-based. However, it didn't get succeeded in different contexts. Ahmed and Pawar (2018) applied teaching strategies such as oral conversation and dialogue in pairs or groups, teacher-student and student-student interaction, simulation and role-play activities, using literature, computer-assisted classroom activities, reading English news and watching English TVs, investing social media like e-mail, WhatsApp and Facebook, etc. and found essential activities to develop learners' communicative competence.

Communicative competence is indispensable for learners to interact with peers and to have a query with the teachers to clarify the difficult terms/issues in the classroom. In the Nepalese context, English language classrooms have been shifted from teacher-centered to student-centered where teachers are supposed to remain as facilitators, and learners are expected to be more interactive but the context is not as anticipated. However, it has not been sufficiently practiced in real contexts where Bista (2011) said the professional teachers of English in Nepal mostly rely on traditional approaches of teaching English-lectured methods and grammar-translation methods owing to a large number of students in different educational institutions. Similarly, Zang and Wang (2012) interpret that teachers only focus their eyesight on the teaching and learning English in class spending a lot of time dealing with the textbooks in class and direct their students' views still onto the textbooks by asking them to review what has been learned or do the exercises from the textbooks. Extracurricular reading and speaking activities often have been ignored given in the textbooks. It seems learners are good only for the sake of examination but surely, weak in the integrated quality and later it results in achieving communicative competences. Therefore, Students' communication and interaction practices are limited and their impact on their learning is not well explored.

Similarly, many teachers were not familiar with learner-centered techniques in the Nepalese EFL classrooms. As a result, teachers still pay attention only to the language form for the sake of exam-oriented education. Yet, in real teaching practice, they tend to resume the

old road although they're equipped with the new teaching philosophy, they still use lecture techniques. The adequate learning strategies have not been employed in the English classroom in most of the schools even though most of the teachers are more qualified and trained. Consequently, the teaching and learning activities have not been running smoothly due to the students' socio-cultural background, the heavy course-load to the teachers, time limitations in the classrooms, etc. However, If the teachers are skillful and competent in employing learning strategies and they have positive attitudes towards learning strategies of developing communicative competence, obviously learners can develop communicative competence in an easy way.

Talking about the EFL classrooms of the Nepalese contexts, learning English is to enable learners to communicate in the target language. Kadel (2015) depicts learning strategies are known to develop communicative competence of learners as it helps learners to learn through peer and group talking, thinking some issues critically, self-monitoring their own pace of learning, and creative production. The researcher believes that interactive classroom activities are important components of language courses to develop learners' language ability (Ur, 2008), where communicative competence is context-specific and it always takes place in a particular context (Savignon, 1983). However, issues of developing communicative competence of English language learners are often ignored in our EFL classrooms. Therefore, the Current scenario has to be exposed to discursive practices. Along with the significance of language learning strategy, Oxford (1990, p.18) asserts that

language learning strategies-specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques those students (often intentionally) use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills then they facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language. These strategies are tools for the self-directed involvement o develop communicative ability.

Strategic competence is useful in developing learners' communicative ability which embraces learners' knowledge of both learning and communication strategies. Such as confirmation check, comprehension check, clarification request, and repetition requests are also the strategies to make oral communication successful. Similarly, the learners can enhance speaking proficiency through inferring, predicting, guessing, paraphrasing, circumlocution, repetition, planning as well. In this study, the researcher has reviewed the strategies of Oxford (1990) like cognitive, metacognitive, compensation, social, affective, and memory strategies to know the real practices of applying these strategies by the learners. For this, the learners need to have the immense knowledge of how to start and end the communication with the interlocutors effectively through the use of LLSs, and as so these are crucial to develop learners' communicative competence in English. Thus there is still dearth to carry out the research on language learning strategies adopted from the students' perspectives to develop their communicative competence, and as a result, this study explores the strategies to develop learners' communicative competence from their practices and perspectives and based on this purpose, it seeks to question how do English language learners try to develop their English language communicative competence.

Method

This paper follows the qualitative approach as its research design. Following this, it analyzes the participants' perspectives on using different Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) to develop their communicative competence in English. In-depth interviews were conducted with four participants from Rupandehi district who are studying at the secondary level in private institutions. They were interviewed using open-ended questions based on the purpose of the study, the theoretical stance of learning strategies by (O'Malley et al., 1985; Rubin, 1987; Oxford, 1990; Stern, 1992) and the research question.

In carrying out this study, the researcher explored the perspectives of the students by taking long interviews twice each to generate information. Further, interview guidelines were used to acquaint them with the study, as well as to elicit information about their backgrounds, practices, and contexts. The researcher asked open-ended questions believing that the student participants would get sufficient place to share them with research issues and he recorded all the sharing recordings to the prior consent of the student participants.

Data were transcribed and analyzed from recordings to identify significant opinions, practicing different learning strategies in school and home, attitudes, experiences, and comments about those strategies to develop learners' communicative ability. Then researcher presented those analyzed data in the table questions-wise followed by coding and at last, researcher generated the themes and further, those themes were generated based on Oxford's (1990) LLSs who has categorized LLSs into various categories such as memory, cognitive, meta-cognitive, communication, Communicative-experiential strategies, interpersonal, management and planning, social-affective, compensation strategies. Moreover, it has been acknowledged by many researchers that Oxford's classification is more detailed and gives a clearer picture of LLSs. The classification by Oxford was adopted in this study due to its importance in LLSs field as it is comprehensive and combines the most useful strategy that the learners follow to improve their target language.

Findings

The findings of the study were drawn based on Oxford's (1990) LLSs.

Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies

Cognitive and metacognitive strategies are considered as steps or operations used in learning or problem-solving that requires direct analysis, transformation, or synthesis of learning resources. It further involves an interaction with the subject being taught, mental or physical manipulation of this subject, and an application of the specific techniques in the accomplishment of learning tasks given in the classrooms. The student participants seemed to use these tasks such as repetition, resourcing, grouping, note-taking, deduction/induction, substitution, elaboration, summarization, translation, making mind maps, visualization, association, using clues in reading comprehension, underlining keywords, scanning and self-testing, and monitoring, transfer, inferencing, etc. In this regard, one of the participants said "my teachers try to make me learn English telling me to read the lessons and I present by summarizing as my own way and, they also give me other topics to practice speaking in English on those topics then I prepare accordingly and present in the classroom. If I do major mistakes, they give me correct feedback and it is easier for me to develop my communicative ability in English".

It seems that the students preferred to use cognitive and metacognitive strategies to develop their communicative competence. Akbary and Talebinezhad (2003), indicates that cognitive strategies are the most frequently used learning strategies and Sheorey's (1999) investigation of Indian learners of English claims that learners of English in India heavily rely on metacognitive and cognitive learning strategies. Alkahtani (2016) explored the LLSs of Saudi Arabian English language learners and found that metacognitive strategies were the most employed by the institute students followed by, social, compensation, cognitive, memory, and effective strategies. Likewise, Al-Khaza'leh & Ameer (2019) found metacognitive strategies were to be as important strategies for learning foreign or second language among the students where they noticed their English mistakes and use that information to help them do better. Thus, in this study, self-directed techniques for speaking and teachers' techniques for enhancing students' speaking activities, contents related interactions in the form of IRF, reading activities/students presentation, lessons/inquiry, use of pre-speaking activities,

dictionary/audio-videos/interactions with family and friends, English documentaries/ speaking practice, etc. come under cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies which are found to be supportive in developing learners' communicative ability. Likewise, Gómez (2010) mixed-method study also suggests independent reading, storytelling, roleplaying, information gap activities, and peer tutoring as effective strategies to improve ESL students' communicative competence. Same as, these, these actions are necessary for learners' comprehension and production in the target language as well.

Social and Affective Strategies

Social-affective strategies, among other strategy types, as the activities are consciously chosen by learners to regulate their own language learning (Griffiths, 2010). These strategies involve interaction with another person with the view to helping the language learning and the control of the affective dimension accompanying the learning process like questioning for clarification, cooperation, self-talk, self-reinforcement, etc. These strategies are mainly depending on communication with others are related to social-mediating activities and transacting with others. Asking questions for clarification and eliciting new information from others and cooperation can be considered as the main socio-affective strategies (Oxford, 1996). In this study, social strategies found to be helpful the learners to learn through sharing ideas and experiences with their peers and teachers publicly. Likewise, it is seemed to cultivate their learning by reducing anxiety, tension, fatigue, and boredom so these strategies are essential to brush up the intrinsic motivation for enhancing their communicative competence. Here, one of the participants says regarding the socio-affective strategies:

My friends and teachers always motivate and inspire me to speak English telling like "You have to speak English; your English is very good and it will be better if you practice it more." Except for Nepali teacher, I speak in English with my teachers and friends. Sometimes I speak in Nepali with my friends and teacher while gossiping and making jokes, after that, I feel I had to speak in English which could be helpful to improve my communicative ability English. Similarly, students are directed to use question-answer techniques, engaging in completing tasks and classwork in pair and group work, doing individual works and after the completion of it, they need to present personally in the classroom and these activities are occurred helpful to them to improve their communication ability in English. In the same way, the students said, our teachers let us interact and talk fluently without worrying too much about mistakes and accordingly we also practice that's why we can talk somehow fluently than before. For this, regarding the usefulness of socio-affective strategies to develop learners' speaking abilities, Indriana (2019) carried out research on socio-affective strategies used by the students to improve their English-speaking skills in Indonesia and found to be crucial strategies to enhance students' speaking ability in English. In the same way, Xue's (2013) qualitative study investigated Chinese international students' attitudes to group work and the results revealed that their involvement in group work had a positive impact on their communicative abilities. Thus, socio-affective strategies are found to be also helpful in developing learners' communicative competence.

Compensation and Memory Strategies

Compensation strategies are used when there is a dearth of knowledge and as a result, the learners compensate it through body language, using synonyms, rephrasing, inferring or guessing meaning, asking for help, etc. This is valuable for language learners to solve the knowledge limitation problems both to understand and to produce language. Same as here in this study also somehow the learners are happened to use these compensation strategies to develop their communicative competence. It helped them make up for missing knowledge such as guessing from the context in listening and reading, using synonyms, gestures, or pause words

while their teachers let them read the lessons during teaching-learning activities. Later, it resulted to enable them to use the language for comprehending and producing language. Hence, one of the participants said:

I practice speaking English by looking at the mirror as I feel I am speaking with my friends. I also read English news-papers, new writings on social media, and whenever I have time, I do often watch English movies and, listen to English songs. These techniques are supportive to me to develop my communicative competence in English.

Regarding this strategy, Demirel (2012) examined the language learning strategies of university students to determine whether there are significant differences between the use of strategies in terms of gender and academic achievement and found that they mostly used compensation strategies rather than other language learning strategies. In the same way, this study also showed that the learners used compensation strategies for comprehension of the target language for the enhancement of communicative ability. When the learners do not know new words and expressions, they start to guess the meaning.

On the other hand, memory strategies are also called mnemonics which play a vital role to store the knowledge and to retrieve the information from the long-term memory. The use of memory strategies is most frequently applied in the beginning process of language learning in the lower level where learners apply the recitation and memorization techniques. Hence, the student participants said, "I use memory strategies when I face challenges learning vocabulary like words and phrases". Accordingly, these strategies are employed when a learner faces challenges of vocabulary learning like words and phrases associated with visual images that can be stored and retrieved for communication. It needs while ordering things, making association, and reviewing in course of language learning. However, these types of strategies are not well-used by the learners as they are the students of the secondary level.

Conclusion

Language learning strategies are inevitable to develop learners' communicative competence in the target language where they can be autonomous and self-regulated through LLSs. Accordingly, this study set out to understand learners' perspectives regarding the strategies to develop their communicative competence. It started with the exploration of learners' experiences and perspectives towards Oxford's (1990) LLSs to enhance their communicative competence in English. The findings showed that learners were aware and preferable to using LLSs. Hence, the learners used social, affective, and metacognitive strategies because of their practices, efforts, cultural and educational differences. In addition, functional participation in inter/ intra school activities, interactions with family and friends, watching English documentaries, making dialogue/conversations, inquiry based-instruction, project works, using ICT and internet, loud-reading, summarizing and presenting the lesson and story-telling are other common strategies were adopted for developing their communicative competence. However, it seemed the learners need to be made aware of their own learning strategies, and trained to consider the proper use of language within and outside the school systems. Thus, the findings of the study will help the students integrate language learning strategies for the development of their communicative competence.

This study was limited only on revealing students' perspectives and practices of language learning strategies for enhancing their communicative competence in English. It might not be enough to put the attention in the domain of other language learning strategies. Even though there are various influencing factors like gender, level, motivation, aptitude and attitude, teaching methods, learning styles, and preferences of the students. For this, other researchers can conduct the observations and interviews towards language learning strategies and select their participants' factors that have been mentioned before. Hence, Chamot (2004) depicted that there are various kinds of methods to observe students' language learning strategies to

enhance their communicative competence, such as through reflective and stimulated recall interviews, questionnaires, written diaries, and journals. Therefore, in the field of foreign/second language learning contexts, researchers have to focus on questioning how language learners themselves contribute cognitively, socially and psychologically to learning language concerning how language learners learn, comprehend, store language, and retrieve it for use to enhance their competence and performance level in the target language.

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