

Review Of The Research On Second Language Learning Strategy Training At Home And Abroad

Nie Shuqin and Diyana Kamarudin

Abstract – This paper reviews the researches on L2 learning strategy instruction at home and abroad from since 1990s. The common view is that strategies are teachable and can be trained to help learners improve their awareness of strategies and to enhance their autonomous learning ability. It first examines the definitions and goals of language learning strategy instruction, then mainly introduces ways of strategy instruction, compares and analyzes several current training models and frameworks, and makes comments on certain researches. The paper intends to summarize and review on the research of strategy training from four aspects: (1) the definition and purpose of strategy training; (2) the way and effect of strategy training; (3) the model and framework of strategy training; and (4) the main research results. It finally suggests that strategy instruction be made part of L2 teaching curriculum, and strategies-based seminars be held for L2 teachers.

Key words – L2 learning, strategy instruction, strategies-based instruction, effectiveness

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of second language and foreign language learning strategies began in the mid-1970s. For more than 40 years, researchers at home and abroad have conducted extensive research in this field and achieved a large number of research results, but also faced with many differences and disputes, one of which is the issue of strategy training. Now the common view is that strategies are teachable and can be trained to help learners improve their awareness of strategies

and to enhance their autonomous learning ability. However, strategy training is also a complex and multi-dimensional process,

which does not simply teach all learners to use the same strategies, but should consider all kinds of learning according to different teaching environments, learners' factors and socio-cultural factors, choose the strategy training model and framework suitable for specific learners.

This research delves into different literatures and reviews on second language learning strategy training at home and abroad since 1990s. The literature mainly comes from the works of well-known foreign strategy training researchers, well-known foreign language academic journals and core language journals at home and abroad. This paper intends to summarize and review on the research of strategy training from four aspects: (1) the definition and purpose of strategy training; (2) the way and effect of strategy training; (3) the model and framework of strategy training; and (4) the main research results.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

With regard to the concept of "strategy training", the early literature used more terms such as "strategy training" and "learner training", but now it is more inclined to use "strategy instruction" (Cohen & Macaro 2007), but the academic circles have not yet reached an agreement on the definition of strategy training. Some researchers believe that learning strategy training is "a cognitive-based teaching method that aims to help learners learn some skills more consciously so as to better understand, acquire and consolidate new concepts and learning methods" (O'Malley & Chamot 1990: 96). Some classify learning strategy training as intervention studies, that is, to conduct strategy training experiments for learners, in order to influence their strategy, use through training, so as to improve their learning effect and language ability (Macaro 2001).

Nie Shuqin, Yichun University, China (Email address: 191632917@qq.com).

Diyana Kamarudin, City University Malaysia, Malaysia (Email address: diyana.kamarudin@city.edu.my).

Since the 1990s, the research on second language learning strategy training has attracted the attention of foreign researchers (O'Malley & Chamot 1990; Oxford 1990; Wenden 1991; Cohen 1998).

Cohen believes that if students can enhance their awareness of strategies through training and use various strategies more skillfully in the learning process, they will complete classroom tasks more effectively, understand their learning needs more clearly, and take more responsibility for their own learning. Therefore, strategy training is especially important for second language teaching. The specific objectives of strategy training are: "to help students expand the scope of strategy choices, create personalized learning strategy systems, and learn to use appropriate and effective strategies according to different tasks, so as to help them explore more effective second language learning methods, encourage them to self-direct and self-evaluate the whole process of learning, and ultimately promote their autonomous learning" (Cohen 1998: 69).

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The early research affirmed the necessity of strategy training, but there were different opinions on how to carry out the training and the effect of the training. Most researchers believe that clear strategy training (explicit instruction) should be adopted (O'Malley & Chamot 1990; Oxford 1990; Cohen 1998; Chamot et al. 1999; Chamot 2004); others point out that training should be integrated into classroom teaching as far as possible (Oxford 1990; Cohen 1998; Chamot 2004). When carrying out specific training, the instructors should tell learners the significance and purpose of learning and using new strategies in as much detail as possible, introduce how to transfer strategies to other learning tasks, how to evaluate their effectiveness, and further strengthen strategies through embedded activities, so that learners can use strategies more freely.

Researchers have proposed a variety of strategy training methods. Oxford (1990) introduces three training methods: strategy awareness training (awareness training), one-time strategy training and long-term strategy training. Oxford (1990) points out that strategy awareness training should be interesting and can inspire and encourage learners to know more about strategies. Cohen (1998) also describes various training methods in detail, and focuses on strategies-based

instruction(SBI), which combines strategy training with second language teaching. Each training method is different and has its own advantages and disadvantages. Teachers should choose appropriate training methods according to different teaching environments and different learners. They can adopt short-term concentrated training to improve strategy awareness and learn to use certain strategies through listening to lectures, hold seminars, setting up workshops. Strategy training can also be integrated into daily classroom teaching and become part of the second language curriculum.

After presenting various ways to conduct strategy training, the next step is how to design the training program. In this regard, Oxford (1990) introduced a strategy training model, including eight specific steps, each of which is clear and closely linked, involving the preparation and implementation of the training. Cohen (1998) puts forward his own strategy training model on the basis of Oxford (1990) model, which provides a very practical template and action guide for teachers to implement strategy training.

The two strategy training modes of Oxford and Cohen are shown in Table 1 on the following page.

TABLE 1: TWO MODES OF STRATEGY TRAINING

Oxford (1990)	Cohen (1998)
Determine the needs of learners and the time available	Identify the needs of learners and the resources available
Choose the strategy to be trained	Choose the strategy to be trained
Consider integrating strategy training into language teaching	Fully understand the advantages of integrating strategy training into classroom teaching
Consider the enthusiasm of students to participate in strategy training	Consider the enthusiasm of students to participate in strategy training
Prepare training materials and activities	Prepare training materials and activities
Implement strategy training	Implement strategy training
Evaluate the effect of strategy training	Evaluate and revise strategy training
Revise the content of strategy training	

The Oxford and Cohen models have a lot in common. First of all, both of them believe that the most important step in strategy training is to understand the current strategy use of learners, and then choose the strategies that are

suitable for them according to their characteristics and needs. Oxford advocates the integration of various strategies to train learners. Secondly, when implementing strategy training, both of them think that the most effective way is to integrate strategy training into classroom teaching. Cohen pointed out that strategy-based teaching can fully take into account the individual learning needs of learners, help them practice and strengthen the use of strategies in real language learning activities. Cohen recommends that learning tasks should be interesting, diverse and meaningful. Activities and exercises can be included in order to raise students' strategic awareness and strengthen specific strategies. Finally, both of them believe that continuous evaluation and revision of strategy training is the key to ensure its successful implementation.

IV. METHOD

A large number of literatures has been consulted and combed, summarized and analyzed the research on second language learning strategy training at home and abroad since the 1990s. The literature mainly comes from the monographs of well-known foreign strategy training researchers (such as Oxford 1990; Cohen 1998; Chamot et al. 1999; Macaro 2001; Cohen & Macaro 2007, etc.), well-known foreign language academic journals (such as Foreign Language Annuals, Language Learning, Language Teaching Research, RELC Journal, TESOL Quarterly, The Modern Language Journal, etc.) and core language journals at home (such as "Foreign language Teaching and Research", "Foreign language World", "Foreign language Teaching", "Journal of PLA Foreign Studies University", etc.).

V. FINDINGS

Reviewing the relevant research on second language learning strategy training at home and abroad since the 1990s, its content mainly involves the following aspects: (1) the effectiveness of strategy training; (2) the teaching of second language learning strategies; (3) workshops based on strategy training; and (4) teaching manuals based on strategy training.

The early strategy training mainly adopts the short-term training to learn to use some specific strategies, and the experimental method is used to measure the effect of the

training (such as Cohen & Apeh 1980; O'Malley et al. 1985; Carrel et al. 1989). Since the 1990s, the research has mainly conducted strategy training for students in a natural and real classroom environment. Quasi-experimental method is usually used to measure the effectiveness of strategy training, and to explore the impact of strategy training on students' strategy use and language proficiency.

Most studies have proved that strategy training plays a positive role in improving students' language ability, but it also presents diverse results. The reason may be due to the inherent differences in various studies: (1) different teaching environments (second and foreign languages); (2) different types of learners (college students, junior and senior high school students); (3) different training contents (skillful strategies and metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, individual strategies and all strategies); (4) different training methods (decentralized and integrated). (5) the length of training time is different (short-term research and diachronic research); (6) the measurement methods are different (single and mixed); (7) the measurement content is different (result-oriented and process-oriented). Thus it can be seen that carrying out strategy training is an extremely complicated matter. How to better train learners to use strategies, or the overall effectiveness of strategy training, is still uncertain (Schmitt 2010).

How to implement specific strategy training in the classroom? Since the 1990s, many language learning strategy training frameworks have emerged abroad (such as O'Malley & Chamot 1990; Oxford 1990; Cohen 1998; Chamot et al. 1999; Grenfell & Harris 1999; Macaro 2001; Chamot 2004), but a unified standard has not yet been established. The following is the introduction, comparison and evaluation of several representative strategic training frameworks, as shown in Table 2.

TABLE II: SEVERAL REPRESENTATIVE FRAMEWORKS OF STRATEGY TRAINING

Cohen (1998)	Chamot (2004)	Grenfell & Harris (1999)	Macaro (2001)
Teachers describe, demonstrate and illustrate the use of certain strategies	Teachers' understanding of the current use of students' strategies	Understand the use of students' strategies and improve their awareness of strategies	Improve students' strategic awareness

Draw more examples according to the students' own learning experience	Teachers demonstrate and explain new learning strategies	Teachers demonstrate the use of new strategies and discuss their value	Explore various possible learning strategies
Lead group / class discussion, reflect on the reasons of strategy use, design specific activities and evaluate the effectiveness of selected strategies	Students practice using new strategies; in subsequent exercises, teachers gradually weaken their role to encourage students to use strategies on their own.	Students practice using new strategies in different tasks	The demonstration of strategies by teachers or students
Encourage students to try more learning strategies	Students evaluate their strategy use immediately after practice.	Students make action plans and choose appropriate strategies to achieve their learning goals.	Combine strategies according to specific learning goals or tasks
Integrate strategies into classroom teaching materials and embed language learning tasks in an explicit or implicit way, allowing students to practice using various strategies in specific situations.	Students transfer the strategies they have learned to new tasks, forming a combination of strategies and developing a library of learning strategies they love	Students carry out action plans to practice using selected strategies; teachers weaken their role so that students can use strategies freely. Students make a preliminary evaluation	Apply learning strategies through scaffolding support
	Teachers	Teachers and	Students make

	evaluate students' strategy use and its influence on language ability	students assess the success of the action plan; students set new learning goals	a preliminary evaluation
			Gradually remove the scaffolding
			Joint evaluation of students and teachers

These training frameworks all emphasize the importance of improving students' strategic awareness. The framework of Cohen (1998) integrates strategy training with classroom teaching. Teachers can choose appropriate strategies to embed in curriculum materials. They can design relevant exercises around the key strategies to be trained or they can insert strategy training at the right time according to teaching needs. In many cases, this kind of training is spontaneous, flexible and highly personalized. In this mode, with the improvement of students' self-awareness, teachers should adjust their roles in time. The framework of Chamot (2004) is a circular process so that teachers and students can return to the previous training steps if necessary. Under the framework of Grenfell & Harris (1999), students complete a strategy training cycle by formulating and implementing personal action plans, and then they can start a new cycle. The learning strategy training cycle model proposed by Macaro (2001) is similar to the action research model. This model encourages students to adopt different combinations of strategies and emphasizes the evaluation and monitoring of the effectiveness of learning strategies.

Generally speaking, these strategic training models and frameworks have their own characteristics and advantages, and they can be used to complement each other in the specific training process in order to achieve the maximum effect.

Compared with the complexity, diversity and uncertainty of foreign research results of strategy training, the domestic research results are more consistent, and most

studies support and verify the hypothesis of the effectiveness of strategy training. Ouyang Jianping and Zhang Jianjia (2008) conducted a one-year affective strategy training for non-English majors. The results show that the training can promote the coordinated development of students' cognition, emotion and skills, and gradually enhance their awareness of affective strategies. Gao Li et al. (2012) investigated the changes in the use of metacognitive strategies before and after strategy training for freshmen of English majors. The results show that the students' metacognitive level has been significantly improved after one year of strategy training and the training effect is still lasting half a year later. Liu Wenyu and Gao Rongtao (2011) used meta-analysis to explore the influence of metacognitive strategy training on Chinese students' English writing performance. Statistics show that training can not only improve students' English writing performance, but also indirectly enhance students' metacognitive awareness and improve their overall language proficiency. Xu Jinfen and Kou Jinnan (2011) explored the effectiveness of group interaction strategy training in college English classroom environment. The results show that the training helps to improve the learners' participation in classroom group activities. Shen Cuiping and Song Jie (2011) conducted oral English learning strategy training for adult students, which proved that the training can improve adult students' oral English proficiency and play an important role in promoting oral English learning.

The combination of strategy training and daily teaching produces a variety of teaching methods: strategy-based instruction (SBI), styles- and strategies-based instruction (SSBI) and cognitive academic language learning approach (CALLA). SBI and SSBI highlight the role of learning styles and learning strategies in classroom language teaching, while CALLA combines strategy training with content teaching and language learning activities based on cognitive learning theory.

There are few empirical studies on strategy teaching reported abroad, and the most representative one is the SBI experiment conducted by Cohen et al at the University of Minnesota (Cohen 1998). Chinese researchers have also tried strategy teaching. At present, domestic research in this area is still in its infancy, and the number of empirical research is seriously insufficient.

In the mid-1990s, strategic training-based workshops (SBI seminar) were carried out abroad. Cohen (1998)

believes that this kind of workshop based on strategy training is the most effective way to conduct strategy training for teachers and can become one of the contents of pre-service and in-service professional development training for second language teachers. China also held its first international workshop on "training and Research on English Learning Strategies" in August 2003. The workshop of strategy training and research has played a positive role in improving the strategic awareness of English teachers and exploring effective English teaching methods.

From the late 1990s to the early 21st century, some teaching manuals based on strategy training have been published one after another. The earliest manual is "The Learning Strategies Handbook" written by Chamot et al. (1999). This manual provides clear guidance and practical materials for second language teachers to carry out strategy training in the classroom. Gu Yongqi et al (2011) also compiled "Learning Strategy training in English Teaching: reading and Writing" based on their own research project materials, which provided readers with specific reading and writing strategy training materials and steps in the form of lesson plans.

VI. DISCUSSION

Although strategy training for learners is not generally successful at present (Ellis 2008), we obviously cannot ignore the positive effect of strategy training on second language teaching. The study of strategy training also gives us the following enlightenment:

First, strategy training should be included in the teaching plan of the second language course.

The current second language teaching should fully take into account the different learning needs of learners and cultivate students' ability of self-directed learning and autonomous learning. Therefore, strategy training should be integrated into classroom teaching to make it a part of the second language curriculum. When implementing specific strategy training, teachers should make a careful evaluation and comprehensively consider many factors, especially the learners' cognitive characteristics and psychological process.

Second, carry out teacher training activities based on learning strategies. The key to strategy training lies in teachers. In most of the previous studies, researchers rather

than front-line language teachers in the classroom directly provide strategy training for students, so how to train teachers' strategies is an urgent problem to be solved in this field. Future research should explore a variety of teacher training methods based on learning strategies, track and investigate how trained teachers carry out strategy teaching in their own classroom, and then evaluate the development and effectiveness of various teacher training activities.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper mainly summarizes the research on second language learning strategy training at home and abroad since the 1990s. These studies not only provide us with valuable empirical data and some enlightenment, but also let us see the main problems in this field: (1) the existing strategy training lacks a unified theoretical framework; (2) the number of empirical research is seriously insufficient, especially the relative lack of diachronic research. Future research should be based on the existing model to explore a new model of strategy training suitable for specific learners, verify the effectiveness of the new model through practice, and constantly improve and perfect it.

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