

The Importance of Learning Styles and Learning Strategies in EFL Teaching in Japan

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I. Introduction

“From the fish bowl to the open seas”(Yoshida, 2001/2002), the analogy symbolizes the past and the future of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) in Japan. With globalization, EFL in Japan has been in transition for years. Among the changes are: the propulsion of team teaching with ALTs (Assistant English Teachers), who are native speakers of English; the introduction of a new subject, Oral Communication; and implementation of fostering four skills under the course of study revision in 1989. The latest course of study, which emphasizes the development of students’ practical communication abilities, will officially go into effect in 2003. Under the circumstances, teachers have been reconsidering the aim of EFL. Many workshops have been held in order to pursue a new purpose of EFL. Teachers have tried to include activities which are effective for facilitating the four skills. Many teachers have tried to shift their teaching styles from a traditional method to a communicative one. Thus, a study of teaching techniques is very popular among teachers. However, a study of students themselves has not had much focus yet. Nevertheless, from their experiences, keen teachers realize students have different learning preferences. As teachers consider students’ learning styles, their lessons will be more successful. Furthermore, as much research suggests, learning strategy training could be very powerful for guiding students. Teachers should ACT, A for analyzing students’ learning styles, C for considering to bridge the gap between students’ learning styles and the teacher’s teaching style, and T for teaching learning strategies. In this project, I will discuss the importance of being aware of students’ learning styles. Moreover, I would like to suggest the importance of teaching learning strategies.

II. The present situation of EFL teaching in Japan

A. Trends and problems in EFL

The necessity of acquiring English as a tool of communication is recognized by both the administration and the public. In 2002, MEXT (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) placed English as one of the very important subjects as well as Japanese and mathematics. An example can be seen in the introduction of English Conversation Education in Elementary schools, which has been a hot issue for a long time. Moreover, MEXT designated 16 high schools in Japan as Super English Language High Schools, which attach importance to English education. In terms of the social trends, some companies began to adapt English proficiency tests like TOEIC as a factor for promotion. Along with education administrators, the general public seems to be more aware of the need to study English. The importance of being able to communicate in English when traveling overseas for business or pleasure is becoming increasingly apparent to Japanese. Even understanding the lyrics of popular music today requires some knowledge of English vocabulary.

Contrary to the trends of the society, there are many students who do not study English effectively. For example, the majority of my students answered that they had difficulty in studying English just after they began studying English in junior high school. Having a positive experience with English when it is introduced has a large impact on students' academic futures. Furthermore, if students have fallen behind in English in junior high school, this situation is compounded as they face English in high school. Difficulty in catching up with their classmates may be in part because of differences in learning styles, and it may also be because of large class size. Recently, however, some English or mathematics classes have reduced class size. Another

factor to consider is the learning pace of different students. It is difficult, particularly in large classes, for teachers to accommodate various learning paces within the class and still cover the required curriculum.

B. Teaching Styles

Some factors which may effect how well English is learned were outlined in the previous section. I would now like to focus on how teaching styles impact on English education. According to the shift of EFL purpose, teaching styles are changing. In fact, the importance to change lessons from traditional styles such as a translation based-instruction or a grammar-based instruction to a communicative approach has been advocated for years. Consequently, many teachers are looking at how to shift their lessons to meet new education purposes. Some may have successfully changed their teaching styles. However, lessons are still more teacher-centered than student-centered in some classrooms. In addition, lessons are designed to include whole class activities such as lectures instead of pair work or group work. This approach, however, is not good for increasing students' interaction in order to acquire communicative skills or even for keeping students' attention. Besides, lessons are focused on accuracy rather than fluency. As a result, the atmosphere in this type of classroom is not relaxed nor does it encourage student participation. Teachers should design lessons to lower the students' filter so that they can maximize the learning experience. It is obvious that there are some factors, such as class size, beyond the control of the teacher. At the same time, a teacher can adjust his/her teaching style to match the diversity of his/her students.

III. Building awareness of different learning styles in the classroom

A. Analyzing students' learning styles

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the classroom environment is often not good for dealing with various learning styles. Teachers have not methodically considered students' learning styles. In a sense, it is natural that Japanese teachers have not been aware of student diversity because of their students' similar background: they have the same nationality; speak the same language; and belong to the same culture. Although every student is unique, the diversity among students is much less than that in the United States.

There are several ways to identify students' learning styles. I will focus on several models in this chapter. The first thing teachers can do is to label the learning styles of students with a questionnaire.

The learning style questionnaire developed by Kolb categorizes learners as *Diverger*, *Assimilator*, *Converger*, or *Accommodator*. This learning style model shows *Divergers* learn from concrete experience, *Assimilators* learn from reflective observation, *Convergers* learn from abstract conceptualization, and *Accommodators* learn from active experimentation. Violand-Sanchez identified *Divergers* as learning from feeling, *Assimilators* as learning from watching and listening, *Convergers* as learning from thinking, and *Accommodators* as learners from doing. The need for being aware of learning preferences seems important especially in a teacher-centered classroom; otherwise, the activity might not keep the attention of many of the students.

The next method of identifying learning style divides all learning styles into two groups, one favors left-brain mode function and the other right-brain mode function. These two groups are referred to by some researchers as *Analytical* vs. *Relational*; by other researchers as *Field*

independent vs. Field dependent (sensitive); and by still others as Left brain vs. Right brain.

These classifications have common factors. Because these classifications are broader than Kolb's categories, the learners' characteristics can be seen in both categories. The first group is logical and analytical, the second group is relational and intuitive. Some researchers describe Japanese learners as *Analytic* learners. In a traditional classroom such as a grammar-based or translation-based classroom, such analytic students are, or teachers encourage them to be, analytic learners unconsciously, however, the second type of learning style would be more effective for acquiring communicative skills.

The third style presented in this paper, *Perceptual Learning Style* by Reid, divides learning styles into six groups: *Visual, Auditory, Tactile, Kinesthetic, Group, and Individual*. Learners use these styles as major learning styles, minor learning styles, or negligible learning styles (Reid, 1984). The more learning styles learners use as their major learning styles, the more flexible and successful the learners are. If students use limited learning styles as their preference, it is more challenging for them to "adjust" to teachers' teaching styles. In Japanese education, teachers prefer the word "concentration." Japanese teachers tend to judge whether a student is a good learner or not by his/her ability to concentrate more than his/her motivation level. In teacher-centered classes, *Auditory* learners will be evaluated as good learners. *Visual* learners may also benefit from a traditional method which emphasizes in-class reading. On the other hand, *Tactical* or *Kinesthetic* learners may have a strong disadvantage in such a class. In addition, the *Perceptual Learning Style* model explains why specific students in a vocational high school work especially hard during practical subjects like P.E., industrial arts, or home economics, while showing less interest during academic subjects.

It is not easy for teachers to accommodate different learning styles unless their students do develop the ability to shift learning styles according to the activity. Recognizing the weaknesses of their own styles and the strengths of other learning styles is important for students in order to be effective learners.

B. Considering learning style questionnaire

In terms of analyzing students' learning styles, there are some factors to consider. Some researchers label Japanese learners as *Analytic* learners (Call, 1998 and Rao, 2002) while some other researchers report that Japanese students are *Visual* learners (Rao, 2002). Nevertheless, Stebbins (1995) reported, "Japanese students responding to the survey in both 1984 and 1992 showed no strong preferences for any mode, which perhaps indicates unwillingness to express personal opinions rather than a lack of preference" (p.111). Most researchers emphasize that the relationship between the preferred learning styles is affected by culture. Stebbins (1995) cited Rohlen's (1983) idea which refers to the influence of Confucianism on Japanese students' decision (p.111). Chung and Banya (1998) also mention its influence on their subject (p.81). It is true that Japanese have a tendency to choose a neutral response rather than an extreme one. For this cultural reason, a four-score system may assess their preferences better than a five-score system.

Eliason (1995) indicates the difficulty of assessing by a questionnaire. According to Eliason, both culture and the language itself affect the questionnaire. As a Japanese translation questionnaire is available, it might be better to use it to diminish the influence of language. Eliason (1995) points out, however, that a translated questionnaire may not necessarily have

accurate translation because of the influence of culture.

For the above reasons, a questionnaire is not a perfect tool for analyzing student learning styles. Eliason (1995) proposes using alternatives; having students write their learning experiences, or devising their own questions (p.28). Whatever preferences students have, findings will show us how learning preferences are different. The real aim of using questionnaires is to have students notice what strengths or what weaknesses they have for their learning styles explicitly. On the teachers' side, this questionnaire is useful not only to identify students' learning styles but also to be aware of the fact that learning styles are different. This concrete experience of using a questionnaire demonstrates these differences more clearly. In addition, teachers should be very careful in dealing with the questionnaire results. Teachers should tell students the aim of the questionnaire. "To prevent students from worrying about being labeled or having the "wrong" learning style, teachers must stress the fact that no style is better than another..." (Kinsella, 1995, p.188).

C. Population for surveying purposes

We should consider the subject population. Kinsella (1995) states that the integration of learning styles occurs along with a growth process (p.173). When an analysis is done on students at different achievement levels, we may find different results. Moreover, we should not have stereotypical ideas about students' learning styles; we have to survey our own students. In fact, I recognize some of my students as *Relational learners*. *Right brain* and *Field dependent* (*sensitive*) learners if I categorize their styles using the second model. According to Violand-Sanchez (1995), those students "need to feel they belong to the classroom and that they are

accepted in the school.” She continues, “They may get discouraged unless they maintain a positive relationship with teachers (p.52-p.53). I find the same phenomena among my students. Furthermore, with cultural changes and the EFL shift towards a communicative approach, students’ learning styles will also change.

D. Bridging the gap between students’ learning styles and teachers’ teaching styles

Bridging the gap between students’ learning styles and teachers’ teaching styles will be a powerful means to guide students toward successful learning.

1. Teachers’ learning styles vs. their teaching styles

The gap between students’ learning styles and teachers’ teaching styles, and the lack of instruction on learning strategies might sometimes hinder students’ learning. According to Rao (2002), “Bridging the gap between teaching and learning styles can only be achieved when teachers are first of all, aware of their learners’ needs, capacities, potentials, and learning style preferences in meeting these needs”(p.7). As Kinsella stated (1995), “Without a fundamental awareness of our own preferences, it is easy to believe that the way we study and learn is the most efficient way to bias our teaching in favor of students who approach learning in much the way we do “ (p.170).

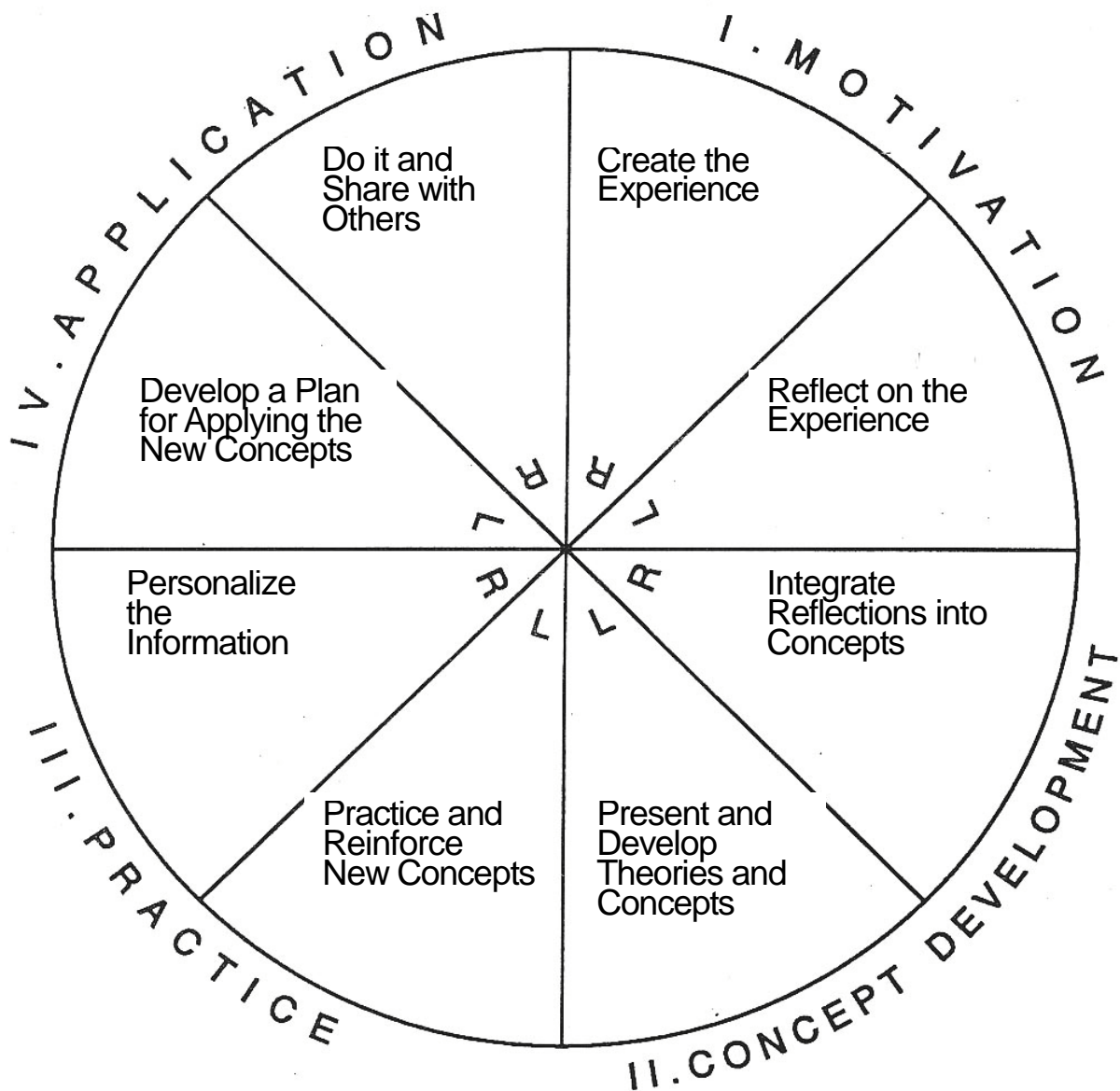
Using Chinese students and Taiwanese teachers, Cheng and Banya (1998) show a comparison between teachers’ and students’ perceptual learning style preferences in their article (p.81-p.82). According to the article, “The teachers were substantially more Auditory than the students (70 % to 43%)”(p. 82). They interpreted that “These teachers feel comfortable instructing by lecturing”(p. 82). On the contrary, the students were greater Visual learners than

teachers (41% to 7%) (p. 81),” and they learn more by reading textbooks than by listening to lectures. Those students might learn more effectively from approaches and activities better suited to Visual and Tactile styles”(p.83). A study of Japanese students and Japanese teachers may not yield the same result, but it would probably note a different preference for learning styles between teachers and students. In addition, Rao (2002) analyzed that traditional East Asian learning styles are Introverted, Closure-Oriented, Analytic and Field Independent, Visual, Think-Oriented and Reflective, and Concentrate-Sequential (p.5-p.7). As an Open Style, Global and Field Dependent and Auditory, Kinesthetic, Intuitive person, I should be very sensitive to students’ learning styles. Without noticing my own learning style and researching students’ learning styles, the bridge between the teacher and the students is very fragile.

2. Lesson plan

When teachers take learning styles into consideration, they should include the learning stages in their lesson plans. *McCarthy’s 4 MAT* is useful for considering the four stages- Motivation, Concept Development, Practice, and Application- in order to deal with different learning styles. Presented below is an example:

Concept:	Giving and following directions for a destination
Topic:	Giving directions from train stations to various destinations
Skill Emphasizes:	Speaking
Audience:	30-40 Japanese high school students (high basic)
Time Frame:	2, 50-minute classes
Materials:	Lesson 9 “Telling the Way” in <u>Select Oral Communication A, New Edition</u> , Tokyo, Sanseido



Adapted from the 4MAT® System Model by Bernice McCarthy; Excel, Inc.; Barrington, IL. Copyright, 1979.

I. MOTIVATION

Create the Experience (Right Mode Strategies)

- I T tells Ss to conjure up images of the way to get to school from the nearest station. (There are several ways from the station to the school.)
- I T asks them to name landmarks from the station and writes them down on the board.

Suitable for Diverger / Auditory and Visual learners

Reflect on the Experience (Left Mode Strategies)

- I T posts a rough map on the board.
- I T asks volunteers how to go to the first landmark, then to the second landmark, and continues asking until getting to the school.
- I T uses these expressions: (e.g.) “Excuse me, will you tell me the way to ~?” “Excuse me, where is the ~?”
- I T traces the map as Ss give the directions.
- I T asks the way to go to school by different routes.
- I T asks the same question again.

Suitable for Diverger / Visual and Auditory learners

II. CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

Integrate Reflections into Concepts (Right Mode Strategies)

- I T writes useful expressions about directions on the board.
- I Ss copy the expressions.
- I Ss make pairs. Ss stand up. Ss ask the direction how to get to school in pairs.
- I T tells them to make gestures according to the instruction.

Suitable for Assimilator / Visual, Tactile, Auditory, Kinesthetic, and Group learners

Present and Develop Theories and Concepts (Left Mode Strategies)

- I Ss sit down. Ss open their textbook and repeat after the tape.

Suitable for Assimilator / Visual, Auditory and Individual learners

III. PRACTICE

Practice and Reinforce New Concepts (Left Mode Strategies)

- I Ss make pairs again. Each member of the pair has different information and asks his/her partner to get to the destination.

Suitable for Converger / Group and Auditory learners

Personalize the Information (Right Mode Strategies)

- I Ss make small groups of at most 4, based on the area they are from.
- I Ss brainstorm landmarks of the area including popular places among young people such as video shops or restaurants in their neighborhood.
- I Ss also brainstorm the description of the landmarks.

Suitable for Converger / Group and Auditory learners

IV. APPLICATION

Develop a Plan for Applying the New Concepts (Left Mode Strategies)

- I T tells Ss they are going to make direction cards to get to destinations.
- I Ss assign themselves for making direction cards in groups.
- I Each S makes direction cards to get to the destination from the nearest station or landmark of the area; they write the directions on one side, and place the destination on

the reverse side. Ss write the area name on both sides.

- I The groups make a rough map of the area with landmarks to get to destinations, but they do not mark the destination.

Suitable for Accommodator / Individual, Group, and Tactile learners

Do it and Share with Others (Right Mode Strategies)

- I T tells Ss to form two groups.
- I Ss ask and answer each other about how to get to the destinations.
- I One student asks the direction and another student traces the map.
- I Ss have to change roles each time. As an alternative activity, students can introduce their area to their classmates with the map and the direction cards. After they finish the activity, then they combine with the other group with the map and direction cards which were made by the other group.
- I Then Ss begin the same activity to tell the directions to destinations with which they were not familiar.

Suitable for Accommodator / Auditory, Tactile, and Group learners

When teachers can develop a plan which incorporates the activities to fit various learning styles, the lesson plan will be more powerful.

3. Reflecting on lessons

Without reflecting on the lesson from the perspective of learning styles, teachers may never vary their lesson styles. There are several ways to reflect on lessons. Checking the activities based on the *4 MAT* plan will be useful in order to know whether the activities are balanced for different learning styles. It should be noted, however, that planning activities for the four learning stages that address all the learning styles is not always possible, though ideal. More realistically, the teacher should keep in mind the learning styles attended to in one lesson and then make sure to focus on different learning styles for the next lesson. Keeping a journal, video taping, and observation by other teachers are possibilities. As a means of systematic reflection, action research is a wonderful way for teachers.

Furthermore, feedback from the students' side is to be considered. Teachers can improve

the evaluation system of the lessons by students, can increase the opportunity to listen to students' opinions about the lessons, and can teach students how to convey a mismatch between styles. As Kinsella (1995) asserted, teachers should teach their students how to communicate with teachers regarding problems resulting from a mismatch between styles (p.192).

If teachers provide only one type of activity in their lessons, that activity may or may not match the learning style of their students. When teachers are aware of the diversity of learning styles, they will begin to consider various activities. A variety of activities will enhance learning, and students will expand their learning styles through different tasks.

4. Sharing information about students' learning styles with colleagues

It is indispensable for teachers to share information about students' learning styles. In the teacher's guide file titled "*Incorporating Essential Knowledge in the Secondary HILT/HILTEX Language Arts Program*" (Arlington Public Schools ESOL/HILT 1999), there is a chapter about learning styles. The lack of recognition about students' learning style causes the teacher to choose a style which the teacher has been taught or which is the teacher's preference. Sharing information about students' learning styles with other English teachers in EFL is important; sharing information with other subject teachers is equally important. Teachers can survey and utilize their students' learning styles not only for one teacher but also for every teacher in the school. There could be a mismatch of teaching styles and learning styles for every subject. How to deal with students' diversity will be the responsibility of teachers. It should not be a secret for successful lessons for specific teachers.

IV. Teaching learning strategies

Bridging the gap between students' learning styles and teachers' teaching styles will be a powerful means to guide students toward successful learning. At the same time, teaching students learning strategies should not be neglected. Oxford (1990) describes learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations"(p.8). Learning strategies will compensate for the weaknesses of a learning style and maximize the strengths of a learning style powerfully.

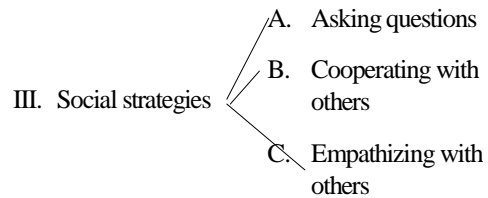
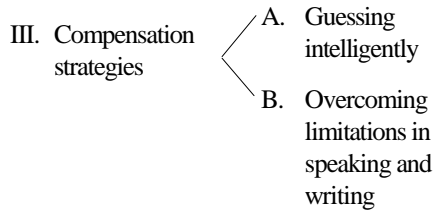
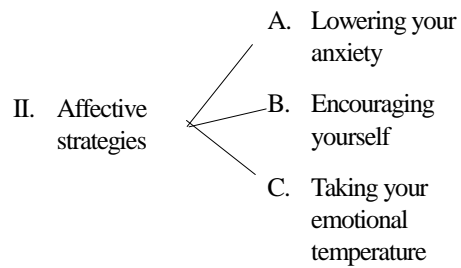
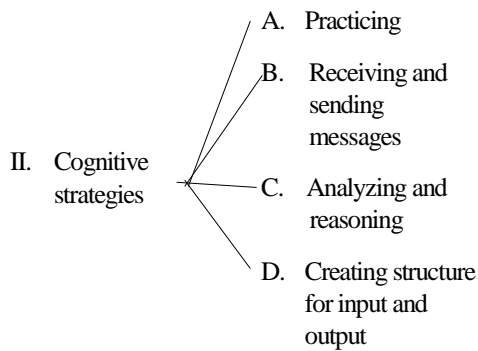
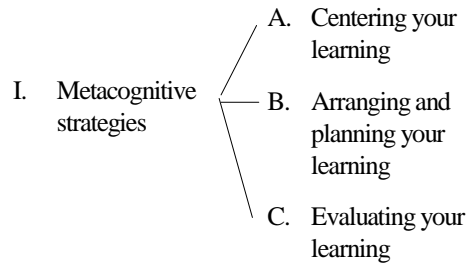
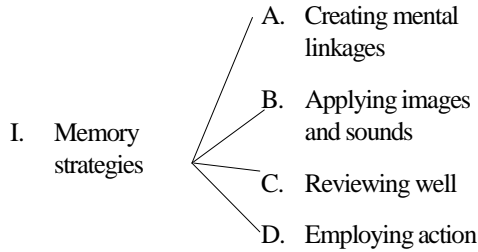
A. Teaching learning strategies

Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary and Robbins (1999) stated, "Differences between more effective learners and less effective learners were found in the number and range of strategies used, in how the strategies were applied to the task, and in whether they were appropriate for the task" (p.166). Therefore, teaching learning strategies is especially useful for the latter learners. Learning strategies should be selected to match the activity. Teachers may teach their students some strategies, yet these strategies might not fit them all the time. Whether teachers teach students optional strategies is definitely an important factor and will affect whether they can be proficient English learners. As their learning styles are different, their preferred learning strategies are different, too. If they can find the strategies which are effective for studying, they will be able to study successfully.

Although Oxford (1990) mentioned the difficulty of categorizing strategies (p.17), her definition is useful to be aware of types of strategies. Presented below is *Diagram of the Strategy*

System Showing Two Classes, Six Groups, and 19 Sets (p.17).

(From Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know by Oxford)



1. Direct strategies

What are direct strategies? According to Oxford (1990), "Language learning strategies that directly involve the target language are called direct strategies"(p.37). As seen in the diagram, Oxford defines *Memory strategies*, *Cognitive strategies*, and *Compensation strategies* as direct strategies.

"*Memory strategies*, such as grouping or using imagery, have a highly specific function: helping students store and retrieve new information. *Cognitive strategies*, such as summarizing or reasoning deductively, enable learners to understand and produce new language by many different means. *Compensation strategies*, like guessing or using synonyms, allow learners to use the language despite their often large gaps in knowledge"(p.37).

Based on her category, I would now like to consider how these strategies are important in EFL in Japan and how I can teach these strategies.

a. Memory strategies

In Japanese education, there needs to be an expansion of *Memory Strategies* as applied to EFL. *Memory strategies* as well as *Cognitive Strategies* are very important for vocabulary building. However, the instruction for vocabulary building has heavily relied on rote memorization for a long time. As a way of *creating mental linkages*, *grouping* or *associating* will increase students' vocabulary; *semantic mapping* or *using imaginary* will tighten their memory; and using *physical responses* will allow them to memorize words like parts of a body. Through effective strategy teaching, students will acquire not only vocabulary but also the way for studying. I would teach utilizing the five senses through teaching these strategies when students memorize words. I would recommend that students take notes for vocabulary by grouping, associating or semantic

mapping. Students will keep notes as a language log.

b. Cognitive strategies

Cognitive strategies are very important strategies to improve students' ability. Specifically, these strategies are crucial for academic skills. As examples of practicing, Oxford (1990) lists *repeating, formally practicing with sounds and writing system, recognizing and using formulas and patterns, recombining and practicing naturalistically* (p.45). Above all, she emphasizes *practicing naturalistically* as the most significant strategy. For the strategy, *receiving messages*, I would use *skimming* and *scanning* for strategy training. For *analyzing* and *reasoning*, I would teach breaking the words into parts when they encounter long words. *Creating structure for input and output* and strategies for *note taking* should be seriously taught. The technique of *highlighting* should also be encouraged by teachers. *Summarizing* is a relatively difficult strategy for beginning students, however, it should be taught when students reach a certain level. I would utilize group work or pair work in which the students "discover" the rules of grammar or analyze the compounds of words. These are also useful for practicing and increasing interaction.

c. Compensation strategies

Scarcella and Oxford (1992) mentioned a low self-esteem-intolerance of ambiguity spiral (p.58). *Compensation strategies* should be taught to students to have students develop more linguistic flexibility. Because students will encounter the contents or information which they cannot understand completely for reading or listening, teachers should teach them to try not to understand every single word, but to guess the meaning. Students will feel relieved from the

instruction; they will expand their English proficiency by *guessing*. *Overcoming limitations* is definitely a valuable strategy in learning. *Clarifying the question* and *showing hesitation* in order to get help will ease communication difficulties and are relatively easy strategies to acquire. *Using gestures* or *explaining with other words* in order to compensate the unknown word will be very helpful. To practice the strategies, I would create situations in which students use English as much as possible. Hopefully, the communicative task will engage the students so much that they will be able to overcome their shyness or discomfort and more importantly, learn to make repeated attempts to communicate effectively when their initial attempts are unsuccessful.

2. Indirect strategies

Oxford (1990) defines *Metacognitive strategies*, *Affective strategies* and *Social strategies* as indirect strategies which “support and manage learning without directly involving the target language” (p.135)

“*Metacognitive strategies* allow learners to control their own cognition- that is, to coordinate the learning process by using functions such as centering, arranging, planning, and evaluating. *Affective strategies* help to regulate emotions, motivations, and attitude. *Social strategies* help students learn through interaction with others”(p.135).

In a Japanese EFL context, indirect strategies are not emphasized too much compared with direct strategies. As Oxford (1990) stated, “Direct and indirect strategies are equally important and serve to support each other in many ways”(p.12). Indirect strategies should also be taken into consideration.

a. Metacognitive strategies

Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary and Robbins (1999) indicated the insufficient comprehension of *metacognitive strategy* use of less effective students (p. 166) and they showed the four processes of the Metacognitive Model as planning, monitoring, problem solving, and evaluating (p.11). These processes allow learners to achieve their goals and expand their learning to a further stage. They are included in Oxford's category. Besides the strategies related to goal achievement, I would especially emphasize the importance of organizing their study. In fact, it is very difficult for some students to use time effectively, even though they know what they should do. The more efficient students become at budgeting their time, the better their results will be. An organizer would be helpful for them in order to budget their time, and to be used as a study log. Moreover, I would include the strategy of brainstorming or using the KWLH chart demonstrated by Chamot et al.

b. Affective strategies

Affective strategies should be emphasized in Japanese education, too. The way to *lower one's anxiety or take one's emotional temperature* is quite new for the Japanese education system. The teaching method, *Suggestopedia*, shows students can learn best when their anxiety filter is low. Using music in the classroom works to lower students' anxiety either by providing background music or by providing lyrics along with which students can sing. In such a relaxed classroom, students would be more likely to take risks. *Encouraging oneself* is also an essential strategy. Japanese students have a tendency to lack confidence in their ability to use English. To have students take risks for making mistakes and to lower students' anxiety for learning, I would

create a collaborative atmosphere in the classroom. I would be especially careful and tolerant of students' errors and encourage their participation with positive feedback. In addition, if students get positive feedback from their peers, it will facilitate their learning.

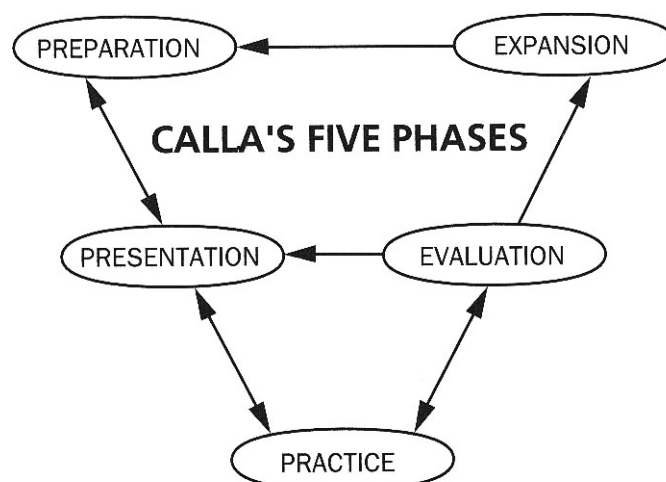
c. Social strategies

Social strategies will help students become positive learners. These strategies are not used effectively in Japanese EFL settings. It is in part because of the educational influence which I have presented in Chapter 1, and in part because of the cultural influence. When Japanese teachers teach their students these strategies and introduce them as their teaching strategies, the lesson will be more effective. To raise students' awareness about the importance of learning from others, again, group work such as discussion or pair work, should be incorporated into the lessons. These activities allow students to interact with peers, which is a necessity for acquiring language.

B. Framework for learning strategies

How can teachers teach these strategies? As Oxford (1990), Chamot (1998) and others suggest, strategies can be taught by strategy training. In her book, *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know* (1990), Oxford showed great examples. Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary and Robbins also suggested splendid models in *The Learning Strategies Handbook* (1999). In the book, they mention the *CALLA Instructional Framework* as Preparation, Presentation, Practice, Evaluation and Expansion. The idea is similar to that of the *4 MAT style*. Both of them suggest the importance of a reasonable sequence of the learning process. These

examples show us how important it is to demonstrate the natural process of learning. As strategy training is especially important for learners who cannot manage their learning by themselves, strategy selection based on the framework provides good guidance for teaching learning strategies. It would be very effective if teachers introduce this idea as strategy training in their lessons, too. Chamot Barnhardt, El-Dinary and Robbins (1990) presented many instructional lesson plans to include learning strategies which follow the five phases of the learning framework. The instructional framework is as follows:



(From *The Learning Strategies Handbook* by Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinary and Robbins)

Preparation

Students prepare for strategies instruction by identifying their prior knowledge about and the use of specific strategies.

Example:

Setting goals and objectives, identifying the purpose of a language task, over - viewing and linking with already known materials

Presentation

The teacher demonstrates the new learning strategy and explains how and when to use it.

Example:

Explaining the importance of the strategy, asking students when they use the strategy

Practice

Students practice using the strategy with regular class activities.

Example:

Asking questions, cooperating with others, seeking practice opportunities

Evaluation

Students self-evaluate their use of the learning strategy and how well the strategy is working for them.

Example:

Self-monitoring, self-evaluating, evaluating their learning

Expansion

Students extend the usefulness of the learning strategy by applying it to new situations or learning for them.

Example:

Arranging and planning their learning

(Taken from p.43-p.44)

C. Having students monitor their strategies

It is important to have students monitor their learning strategies. The ability to judge whether they use the best strategies is an inevitable factor for them to study effectively. Students should use appropriate strategies depending on the task. Learning strategies which students use should change as their learning stage changes. They need to know which strategies they use and monitor whether they are using the proper strategies for their goal. From this perspective, using Metacognitive strategies is especially crucial for students.

V. Assessing students' progress

In this chapter, I would like to think about the importance of assessing students' progress.

A. Setting reachable goals

It is very important to have students set realistic goals. In Japanese EFL, students who want to enter a university may set their goal to reach the admission standard of a particular university.

At the same time, it is very important to have them set a short-term goal or reachable goal. Some researchers have found that the least successful learners set too high goals. In such cases, students often do not reach their goals and may feel a sense of failure. Therefore, students should be guided to have realistic and reachable goals in order to experience success. That will build their confidence and motivate them to study further. In Japanese EFL, an example of an unrealistic goal would be to speak like a native speaker, or understand English songs completely from the beginning of learning. It would be a good goal for them to reach at a higher level, but more realistic goals should not be neglected. Otherwise, they will be disappointed with the gap between their dream and their level.

Since student achievement and needs are different, it is necessary to have students set their own goals for each skill. To have students set their own goals, it is necessary for students to assess each skill: reading, writing, speaking and listening. However, it seems to be quite difficult for teachers to assess such skills accurately. For reading skills and listening skills, Eiken, a well-known English proficiency test, could be used as a means of assessment. For writing skills, journals kept in a portfolio could be used. For speaking skills, to record a short talk or speech is a possibility. If teachers constantly use these assessments, they serve as alternative ways to assess students' progress, too.

B. Lack of confidence

Japanese learners also tend to lack confidence in ability to communicate effectively in English. This lack of confidence seems to be affected by their culture. Some foreign learners appear to use English more successfully, even if they do not have formal English education,

while Japanese learners tend not to be comfortable speaking in English despite formal education in school. An explanation could be that EFL education in Japan results in passive knowledge, not active knowledge of English. The EFL classroom climate might affect their attitudes. Learning should be fun, and one goal of activities should be to build confidence. The process of learning a foreign language is everlasting, and it is difficult at times for learners to see their progress. Grammatical accuracy should not be the primary objective of some communicative activities, but rather the ability to convey the intended message. If that message has been conveyed and understood, the student should be rewarded, thus building his/her confidence. The creative teacher should be able to develop many types of activities with different objectives which could be met by different students: activities that focus on pronunciation accuracy for those who are more skilled in pronunciation, activities that require correct grammar for those who are strong in grammar, etc. Feedback should not come only from the teacher, but should include peer review and self-monitoring. The purpose, of course, is to allow all students to feel some level of success, and therefore, develop confidence.

C. Assessment

Many researchers emphasized that not one learning style is better than another (Kinsella,1995, Stebbins,1995,Violand,1995, Call,1998). Nevertheless, specific learners such as *Relational or Field dependent* learners have disadvantages in the American education system, which requires analytic thinking or facilitates individual activities (Kinsella, 1995, and Violand-Sanchez, 1995). It could be true in the Japanese education system, too. It is difficult to assess students' English proficiency accurately using only one method. Teachers should consider the

disadvantages for some learners when they assess students in a routine way, such as a written test. In Japanese high schools, teachers have a tendency to rely on close-ended questions requiring multiple choice. Communicative skills, however, are usually not adequately assessed through multiple choice. A language exists for communication. Teachers need a variety of assessment tools in an EFL class. Assessing oral skills could include taped recordings, oral presentations, or interviews with ALTs. Using portfolios could be a good alternative for assessing writing skills. Teachers should explain the criteria of an assessment clearly. This is also important in order to help students recognize what kind of goal they should set for the next stage: explaining the criteria will also allow students to know when they have been successful and how much progress they have made.

D. Individualization of studying

Being able to consider the strengths and weaknesses of students as well as their different learning styles is an ideal way to help students meet their goals. The students' skills in the four areas are different and their needs are different. If teachers take the time to plan in-class activities and homework assignments that try to match the needs as well as the interests of individual students, greater learning will be fostered. Keeping a study journal about what they have learned outside the classroom for a specific skill will be a record of individual learning and could be a tool of assessment as mentioned earlier. The specific task could be to reinforce strengths or overcome weaknesses. For example, by watching a foreign video for two hours, students with strong listening skills might be required to listen for details while students with weaker listening skills might listen only for main ideas.

VI. Conclusion

When students study in a structured situation, as the Japanese EFL situation used to be, students have model answers and teachers as the final authority. In Japan, it did work quite well, as long as students studied English as one of the subjects for entrance examinations or graduation requirements, and yet there was a premise that Japanese did not need to use English in their daily lives. However, this situation did not usually create any real motivation or pleasure in studying English, and, therefore, has not necessarily resulted in effective learning as stated in the previous chapter. Yoshida (2001/2002) characterized Japanese EFL as a fish bowl, which symbolizes a reliance on others (p.5). In the “reliance on others” situation, teachers’ roles are powerful for students who play passive roles. A mismatch between learning styles and teaching styles is a crucial factor in hindering students’ learning unless students have strong external motivation for studying.

English learning in this global society will apparently be a lifetime process for students, certainly continuing after their graduation. Thus, EFL at the high school level will play the much more important role of having students build the foundations of education for life, rather than of only providing a means of passing examinations or fulfilling a requirement. In open seas, students have to adjust to the situations from reliance on others to reliance on self (Yoshida, 2001/2002). In this context, the students have to be autonomous learners. Learning strategies are the tools for them to be self-reliant. In open seas, learning can sometimes be lonely, severe, and difficult. *Tolerance of ambiguity, controlling their emotions, planning or evaluating their learning* - these strategies will be much more important in the 21st Century. Hopefully, the tools will work to broaden their ability to have a good command of English, which is the dream of most Japanese.

Last but not least, through the study of learning styles and learning strategies, I have some suggestions: teachers should know their own students. Teachers should be sensitive to their students' feelings. Teachers should listen to their students' real intention.

In conclusion, teachers should consider students' learning styles and enhance students' learning strategies for their successful learning. Learning a foreign language without good guidance is similar to sailing without a good map. When teachers are aware of the importance of learning styles and learning strategies, they can provide a good map to their students. It is time for teachers to seek a way to teach English so that students can swim in open seas.

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