

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' USE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENGLISH

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between attitude towards English language and language learning strategy use. The sample group of the present quantitative study is 100 preparatory class students from Bingöl University. The scales used in the present study are Attitude towards English as a foreign Language Scale consisting of 30 items (Aydoslu, 2005), and Language Learning Strategy Scale (Oxford, 1990) with 52 items. The data collected were analyzed by SPSS program. The main finding is that students with more positive attitudes towards English language use language learning strategies more frequently compared to those who have less positive attitude. Another result of the present study is that participants with more positive attitudes used memory, cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies respectively while no significant difference was found between participants' attitude and use of compensation and affective strategies.

Key words: Attitude, Language learning strategies, English as a foreign language.

LİSANS ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN DİL ÖĞRENME STRATEJİLERİNİ KULLANIMLARI İLE İNGİLİZCEYE YÖNELİK TUTUMLARI ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİ

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı İngilizceye karşı tutum ile dil öğrenme stratejisini kullanımı arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektir. Mevcut niteliksel araştırmanın örneklem grubu Bingöl Üniversitesi'ndeki 100 hazırlık öğrencisinden oluşmaktadır. Bu öğrenciler rastgele seçilmiştir. Bu çalışmada kullanılan ölçekler 30 maddeden oluşan İngilizceye Yönelik Tutum Ölçeği (Aydoslu, 2005) ve 52 maddeden oluşan Dil Öğrenme Stratejisi Ölçeğidir (Oxford, 1990). Toplanan veriler SPSS programı ile analiz edilmiştir.

Bu çalışmanın temel bulgusu, İngilizceye karşı daha yüksek tutumları olan öğrencilerin, daha düşük tutum sahibi olanlara kıyasla dil öğrenme stratejilerini daha sık kullanmasıdır. Bu çalışmanın bir başka

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sonucu ise, daha olumlu tutumları olan katılımcıların sırasıyla hafıza, bilişsel, üst bilişsel ve sosyal stratejileri kullandıkları, tutum düzeyleri ile telafi ve duygusal stratejilerin kullanımı arasında da anlamlı bir fark bulunmadığı gerçeğidir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Tutum, Dil Öğrenme Stratejileri, Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce

INTRODUCTION

For years, English language teachers have struggled with the problems of foreign language teaching process. Some of these problems have stemmed from the chosen teaching methods or materials and some have been caused by the learners. Over the years, various approaches and methods have been found to develop foreign language teaching skills; however, the researchers did not pay attention to learning aspect of language teaching process. It is a known fact that second or foreign language learners differ in their level of achievement even if they got the same education, this difference implies that teaching methods, materials or teachers are not the mere determiners of language learning process, but also learners or learner individuality are the potential factors affecting foreign language learning achievement. In addition to learner factor, most of the researchers in this field accept that language learning is not a concept that is related to only cognitive factors and the teaching or teachers. Gardner (1985) uses the term affective domain broadening it with individual differences such as attitudes, motivation, language anxiety, self-confidence, field independence, personality variables, intelligence, language aptitude, and language learning strategies. Dörnyei (2005) also points the importance of IDs (individual differences) stating that IDs are the most determining predictors of L2 learning success. Therefore, during the learning process, some learners are quicker in learning and getting subjects while others have difficulty in learning. Many researchers have tried to find the reason for some learners' being more successful at learning the language items, while others are not. They have reached the conclusion that learner difference is the possible answer of this question. Researchers divide the individual difference into various categories. In spite of different categorizations; there is not much controversy among researchers about the effect of affective factors or in broader term individual differences on language learning process.

According to researchers, one of the affective domains which has a deep effect on learning is attitude. Spolsky (1971) indicates that one of the main

significant factors related to L2 / FL learning is attitude. That is, if someone has a positive attitude towards the culture of the target language, then it will become easy for him/her to learn it.

Since the class is a problem- solving environment, foreign language learners use language learning strategies inevitably. That is to say, it is a widely accepted issue that language learning strategies are effective in language learning process (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Griffiths, 2008; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Naiman et al., 1975).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RELATED RESEARCH

Language learning strategies are one of the subcategories of individual differences such as aptitude, style, attitude, age, personality and anxiety (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003). Language learning strategies have been also included in the socio-educational model of Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) as individual differences. Figure 1 shows the socio-educational model of Second Language Acquisition by Gardner and MacIntyre(1993) (as cited in Ushioda, 2003).

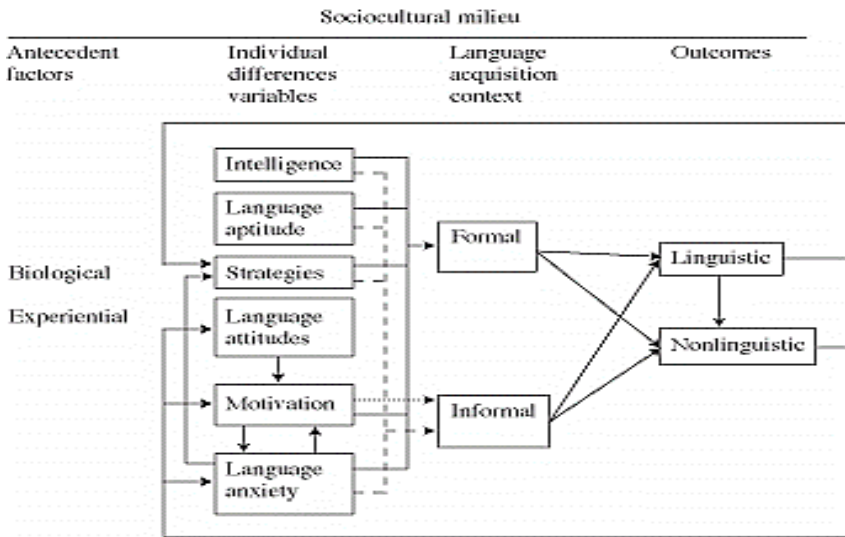


Figure 1. Representation of Socioeducational Model of SLA (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993)

As it is seen in Figure 1, Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) handle strategies as one of the subcategories of individual difference variables that have relationship with aptitude, intelligence, motivation and anxiety. Griffiths (2008) has a different view; he does not put language learning strategies as a sub-

category of individual differences but claims that language learning strategies are affected by individual variables.

Overall, it is certain that language learning strategies constitute an important aspect of the learning process as an individual difference. Nyikos and Oxford (1993, p.11) state that the “initiator of the learning process” is the learner. That is, the quality of education sometimes does not have an equal effect on learning, also students’ efforts are needed. For most of the years, extensive theoretical definitions and classifications have been made by the field researchers (Dörnyei & Skehan; 2003; O’Malley et al., 1985; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Wenden, 1987) Many investigators have intended to define and classify language learning strategies those are used by successful language learners in order to provide an equal teaching opportunity for the students. (O’Malley and Chamot, 1995; Oxford, 1990).

Rubin (1975) states that language learning strategies consist of behaviors, steps, or techniques that language learners use to learn language effectively. There have been various classifications on LLSs; however they reflect almost the same functions or definitions to some extent.

Most of the studies conducted through the scale of Oxford (1990). Some studies (Griffith, 2008; O’Malley et al., 1985; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989;) which applied the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) argue that using language learning strategies have valuable result for enhancing foreign language proficiency. Following there are six sub-categories of SILL by Oxford (1990).

1. “Memory strategies; grouping, imagery, rhyming, structured viewing (nine items),
2. Cognitive strategies; reasoning, analyzing, summarizing, practicing (fourteen items),
3. Compensation strategies; guessing meaning from the context, using synonyms and gesturing (six items),
4. Metacognitive strategies; paying attention, searching for practice opportunities, planning for language tasks, self-evaluating progress, monitoring errors (nine items),
5. Affective strategies; anxiety reduction, self-encouragement, self-reward (six items),

6. Social strategies; asking questions, cooperating with active speakers of the language, becoming culturally aware (six items)" (Oxford & Burry, 1995, p. 5).

There have been growing bodies of research on LLSs. Rubin (1975) states that the reason for extensive research in language learning strategies is their being key factors enhancing learning skills and creating good language learning. In this regard, many researchers dealing with the area of second / foreign language learning have explored language learning strategies (LLSs). As Wenden (1987) states, most of the studies focus on the statements of good language learners about what they do in the language learning process. It is clear that LLSs are highly potential determiners of foreign language achievement. Therefore, many studies have been conducted in the field of language learning strategies. Some studies focused on the differences between good language learners and less successful learners in terms of their strategy use, while other studies focused on factors such as attitude, aptitude, sex, age, years of study, learning styles, individual differences and language proficiency (Chamot & Kupper 1989; Griffiths, 2008; Oxford, 1989; Oxford & Nyikos 1989; Özseven, 1993; Rubin, 1975; Sedaghat, 2001; Yang, 1993). Chamot and Kupper (1989) point out that successful language learners select strategies which are consistent with one another and with the requirements of the language task. O'Malley et al. (1985) found that both the successful learners and unsuccessful learners use LLSs. That is, learners at all levels use of a wide range of learning strategies.

One of the other components of individual differences is the attitude toward foreign language. Also, it is among the most effective variables according to researchers who have made extensive research in this field (e.g., Gardner and Lambert, 1972). As Griffiths (2008) states "almost all writing on motivation seems to be a commentary, in one way or another, on the agenda established by Gardner" (Griffiths, 2008, pp. 20).

As Ushioda (2008) states, "it almost goes without saying that good language learners have positive attitude or they are motivated" (pp.19). Among the affective factors affecting the success of students in learning a language, attitude is a highly influential one (Sadighi & Zarafsan, 2006). Chamber (1999) asserts that successful learning depends on positive attitude towards language and learning and attitude is an important component of achievement. Studies of Gardner and Lambert (1972) support the idea that

an individual needs positive attitude to enhance his/her achievement in language.

As attitude is regarded as a predictor of foreign language achievement, the numbers of studies have increased to examine it recently. There are many studies on the effects of positive and negative attitudes on foreign language achievement. Researchers have also studied on different variables and their relationships with language attitude and other variables such as attitude and language learning strategies (Gan, 2004), attitudes and level of language achievement (Graham 2004), attitude and anxiety (Levine 2003) attitude and gender (Karahana, 2007) .

In spite of the most of studies investigating the effect of language learning strategies and attitude towards foreign language, there is a scarcity of research into the relationship between attitude towards foreign language and language learning strategy use. One of these rare studies is that of Jabbari (2014). In his study, the researcher investigated the possible relationship between strategy use and attitude; he found that learners with positive attitude are highly language strategy users.

To sum up, it is evident from results of studies (Aydın, 2007; Karahana, 2007) that the issue of attitude as a factor impacting foreign language learning process has been studied much. That is, it is supported by many researchers that (as stated above) attitudes and language learning strategy use have an impact on foreign language achievement. However, there is a scarcity in the studies examining the relationship between attitude and students' language learning strategy use and preference.

METHODOLOGY

In this part of the study, research model, target population of the study and sample group, data collecting methods and data analysis will be presented.

Participants of the Study

The population of the present study was students majoring English department, at Bingöl University. 100 indiscriminately chosen students from day and evening preparatory classes of English Language and Literature department completed the questionnaires.

The numbers and gender rates of the students are given in *Table 1*.

Table 1.**Numbers and Genders of Participants**

GENDER		
Female	F	56
	%	56
Male	F	44
	%	44

Instruments

Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, and Aydoslu's (2005) Attitude towards English Course Scale are used. These surveys have 110 questions in total and each of them is Likert type, that is, they contain five choices. The total internal reliability coefficient of the scale was .92. Findings demonstrated that the subscales had internal consistency reliabilities. Table 2 shows the distribution of strategy items according to six strategy subscales.

Table 2.**Distribution of Strategy Items According to the Six Subscales**

Strategy Type	Items	Total
Memory	1-9	9
Cognitive	10-23	14
Compensation	24-29	6
Metacognitive	30-38	9
Affective	39-44	6
Social	45-50	6
Total		50

Attitude Scale towards English Course has three dimensions.

- 1. Cognitive Dimension:** It is about the beliefs of students towards English language.
- 2. Affective Dimension:** It covers students' emotions towards English course.
- 3. Behavioral Dimension:** It is about the time and activities, actions spent for English language out of class.

Table 3.**Distribution of Attitude Scale Items According to its Dimensions**

Attitude	Items	Total
Cognitive	10-16-21-24	4
Affective	1-4-6-7-8-9-11-12-13-14-17-18-20-22-23-25-26-27-28-29	21
Behavioral	2-3-15-19	4

As it is seen, the scale consists of 30 questions. The cognitive items' Cronbach Alpha reliability was found as 0.62, affective dimension items' Cronbach Alpha reliability was found 0.93 and behavioral dimension Cronbach Alpha reliability was found as 0.71. It is seen that these surveys are reliable. The items have a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1-5.

Data Analysis and Results

In order to find whether there is a meaningful difference between the levels of attitude and strategy use, One Way ANOVA was applied and the results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4.**Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviation Values of Attitude Scores.**

Strategy	Attitude	N	X	S.D.
	Low	40	1.975	.8002
	Medium	51	2.137	.8004
	High	9	2.222	.6666
Memory	Low	40	26.02	6.573
	Medium	51	29.78	4.772
	High	9	29.22	4.549
Cognitive	Low	40	47.00	6.994
	Medium	51	53.45	7.406
	High	9	54.88	4.400
Compensation	Low	40	21.37	3.807
	Medium	51	22.96	3.638
	High	9	23.55	4.362

Metacognitive	Low	40	32.42	6.193
	Medium	51	36.39	5.642
	High	9	3.88	2.934
Affective	Low	40	17.45	3.169
	Medium	51	18.07	4.063
	High	9	18.33	3.427
Social	Low	40	18.92	5.460
	Medium	51	21.56	4.055
	High	9	22.22	3.898

In Table 4, students' strategy choices are shown according to their attitude scores. In order to find whether there is a meaningful difference between the means, a Variance Analysis was applied and the findings are given in Table 5.

Table 5.

The Students' Strategy Use according to Their Attitude Levels

		Sum of Squares	SD	Mean	F	p
	Between-groups	.790	2	.395	.633	.533
	Within-groups	60.57	97	.624		
	Total	61.36	99			
Memory	Between-groups	326.5	2	163.1	5.298	.007
	Within-groups	2989.	97	30.8		
	Total	3315.	99			
Cognitive	Between-groups	1082.	2	541.2	10.92	.000
	Within-groups	4805.	97	49.5		
	Total	5888.	99			

Compensation	Between-groups	70.04	2	35.	2.46	.091
	Within-groups	1379.	97	14.2		
	Total	1449.	99			
Metacognitive	Between-groups	393.929	2	196.9	6.05	.003
	Within-groups	3156.821	97	32.5		
	Total	3550.750	99			
Affective	Between-Groups	11.164	2	5.58	.413	.663
	Within-groups	1311.586	97	13.5		
	Total	1322.750	99			
Social	Between-groups	183.670	2	91.8	4.22	.017
	Within-groups	2106.840	97	21.7		

It is seen in Table 5 that the students' strategy use according to their attitude level shows a meaningful difference in memory, cognitive, metacognitive and social subcategories of language learning strategies; (memory=5,298=p<.05), (cognitive =10,925, p<.05), (metacognitive=6,052, p<.5), (social=4.223, p<.05). In order to find the source of difference in means, a Scheffe test was applied.

As a result of Scheffe test, it was revealed that the if the students have high or medium scores of attitude towards English, they use memory, cognitive, metacognitive, social strategies more frequently compared to students with low attitude level. No meaningful difference was found between compensation and affective strategies use of students in terms of their attitude level.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to investigate the strategy preferences and frequency of undergraduate students and the relationship between their strategy use and attitude. According to the analysis, it was revealed that students with high scores of attitude used cognitive, metacognitive and memory strategies more frequently when compared to students with less positive atti-

tude. As it is clear, students with more positive attitude use cognitive and metacognitive strategies more. The research findings could be used for the benefit of foreign language teaching as it can enhance the awareness on the importance of enhancing positive attitude towards English language and thus contribute to students' strategy use.

As this study shows, in language learning strategy use, more motivated students, that is students with more positive attitudes, tend to use language learning strategies more compared to those who are less motivated. While most of the early research went towards identifying just the kinds of learning strategies, this study implies that simply recognizing learners' contributions to the process was not enough. Thus, learning activities can be more effective if teachers have time for strategy training (Wenden, 1987). For this reason, in preparatory classes of universities strategy training should be involved and motivation towards the use of language learning strategies might be enhanced by enabling students to have more positive attitudes.

The present study has led to some implications for teaching and learning English in terms of attitude as it is revealed that one of the important psychological variables affecting foreign language learning strategy use is attitude. In the present study, it is revealed that learners with positive attitude in terms of cognitive and behavioral subcategories are higher users of language learning strategies. The practitioners of foreign language should take into account the role of attitude on the use of language learning strategies and its possible effect on foreign language achievement.

CONCLUSION

Overall, according to the quantitative results of the present study, it was showed that there is a significant relationship between strategy use and attitude towards English. That is, in essence, there seems to be a positive relationship between memory, metacognitive and social strategies and attitude of students while there is no meaningful relationship between compensation and affective strategies. Students who have more positive attitudes towards English tend to use the language learning strategies, particularly cognitive strategies, more frequently than students who have less positive attitude towards English.

That is, having a positive attitude towards English may trigger the use of language learning strategies which are regarded by many studies in the field as one of the essential factors for foreign language achievement.

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