WAYS TO IMPROVE STUDENT'S COGNITIVE ACTIVITY IN LEARNING ENGLISH

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Abstract: *The article deals with the importance of learner's cognitive activity in acquiring the English language and offers numerous strategies to develop the cognition. We know that cognitive learning is a way of learning that helps students use their brains more effectively. This method of learning is active, constructive, and long-lasting. It encourages students to fully engage in the learning process so learning, thinking, and remembering get easier. Cognitive learning isn't about memorization or repetition. It's about developing true understanding; it's about learning how to learn. Thus, this style of learning is a powerful alternative to the traditional classroom approach. Instead of focusing on memorization, cognitive learning builds on past knowledge. Students learn to make connections and reflect on the material—skills that help them become better learners.*

Key words: *cognition, approach, strategy, cognitive activity, memory, comprehension, educational settings, English language.*

The connection between cognition and language is of significant importance to language learning and teaching. Exploring this link may lead to an understanding of the part played by cognition in the English as a foreign language classroom. This is feasible by shedding light on the way multiple cognitive devices operate in language learning activities. Research into the relationship between cognition and language is useful in understanding the functioning of the cognitive mechanisms underlying any language learning activities, particularly in educational settings. In the late 1950s, there seemed to be two different views concerning this relationship (Harris 2003). The former relates to Chomsky's ideas emerging out of his mentalist theory of generative linguistics. One of the main tenets of his theory is the existence of a mental innate capacity within all children that permits them to acquire the grammar of a language. This innate capacity which he called Language Acquisition Device (LAD), or Universal Grammar (UG), is believed to be located in the brain (Chomsky 2000).

Teaching English as a foreign language was not left aside untouched by the results of this research. The focus on the learner brought also an interest in possibilities of equipping learners with the power to make autonomous and informed decisions about their own learning process and about the selection of such strategies which suit each learner the most. Learning strategies started to be in the centre of attention of foreign language teachers, e.g. in CALLA – The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach by Chamot and O´Malley (Lojová, Vlčková, 2011). Oxford also claimed that learning strategies can be taught i.e. people can improve their learning through strategy training (Williams, Burden,

1997). Learning strategies when incorporated into regular work in the classroom can build the confidence of the learner in accessibility of all possible sources for achieving their aims. Individual learning strategies can be in-built in the development of any language skill. This study looks at how the focused use of cognitive strategies can improve the way young learners approach the text in a foreign language. It demonstrates how conscious application of selected strategies improves the comprehensibility of the text as well as speed in which the tasks are solved.

Here are some ways to improve the cognitive activity of English language learners.

Semantic mapping

Semantic mapping is a strategy which helps learners to understand the concepts through graphical representation of relations between individual parts of the concept. With young learners, it can be used in a limited scale; however, we can start getting them used to the strategy itself. Learners can collect the words within certain topic (e.g. this is a very suitable way of recording vocabulary for young learners). It can also serve for connecting words, actions, characteristics, etc. expressing their mutual relations; or it can serve for text/story summary and revision of certain topics. The most important keywords are included in the map and related to each other.

Using new words in a context

Recycling new words is a very important strategy to build strong links in the memory. It is essential that new words do not appear only in the original context they were used, but they should cross thematic borders. This strengthens the ability of the learner to retrieve the word with ease. A sample activity through which the teacher can support contextual variety: the teacher places flash cards with the words recently taught on board face down in a grid marked vertically by letters and horizontally by numbers. The class works in groups. They select a letter and a number and the teacher turns the flash card. The group of students is supposed to create a sentence using this word. Once learners get acquainted to this kind of activity, the teacher can take it to the next level and use two words in one sentence. The teacher can also use posters with more context, e.g. in the supermarket, at school, etc. and children are supposed to create sentences within the given context.

Sequencing

Sequencing is an important strategy which helps learners not only to understand the text better but also to realize that things and events in every-day life happen in a certain order. The ability to search and discover this order can be practised best in story-based activities where the content always follows certain order. This can be done through picture sequencing or word/ sentence/ paragraph sequencing. Besides the stories, it is useful to teach children that even daily actions happen in a sequenced way and through pictures or sentences ask them to put them in order. For instance, we can use sentences: I wake up. I have a shower. I go to bed. I read a book. I go to school.... Learners will organize those actions in the order as they happen during the day.

Creating associations

This strategy guides learners to make connections which might be personally relevant for them, e.g. based on their prior knowledge or experience, or it might be an original solution to a problem. This is a very important strategy to be trained since it helps learners in being flexible and inventive. Associations can be trained through simple activities in which learners build words chains: they say or write words and add the first word they associated with the previous word. They can also collect a set of words connected to a certain topic or word (e.g. school, morning, sports, lion, hot, etc.), or to contrasting words (e.g. big/small, cold/hot, happy/sad, etc.). What is very typical for creating associations is that the connections, presented by learners, can be surprising and the teacher might ask for an explanation. In this way, learners learn from each other and see things from a completely different angle as before the association was presented.

Summarizing

This strategy teaches learners how to reduce the text to the key ideas. Learners need to decide what the most important information in the text is and which ideas can be omitted. This is not an easy task for young learners, since, for them, everything seems to be important. It is more suitable for them to start with summarizing paragraphs or shorter passages than to ask young learners to summarize longer text or the story. Visualisation helps a great deal since it is less abstract for young learners to recall what happened in the story when they link it with a visual representation of the situation. The teacher can prepare a set of pictures or flashcards representing the main ideas, and the learners will be able to summarize the story according to this visual support. It is also suitable to teach learners basic discourse markers such as first, next, after that, finally because these can help them to sequence and structure the summary.

This research paper presented partial outcomes of the initiative to discover whether training of cognitive learning strategies can help learners to approach reading in a foreign language. Since the target group consisted of young learners whose cognitive capacity is still developing and abstract

thinking cannot be taken for granted, the choice of strategies was selected in such a way that it would enhance rather than hinder the learning process. Even this limited scale of strategies provided a clear indication that reading as a skill can be developed through step-by-step training of strategies developing cognitive processes of the learner. Development of cognitive processes and the development of reading are interconnected and should be treated that way by teachers in practice, whether we speak about reading in mother tongue or in a foreign language.

As a conclusion, unlike the behavioral approach, cognitive approach aims to discover what mightbe the better way for the acquisition of language in our mind. It highlights howmental process greatly influences behavior and the disparity of learning effects. This has positive significance for those who want to use the cognition to change their learning behavior for the better. Cognitive approach is, furthermore, a flexible theory which can be

easily combined with other theories to make more positive results. For example, cognitive behaviour therapy is a compound therapy, striving to create more favorable behavior by changing cognition. It is proved to be greatly useful in language learning.

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