CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion and Recommendation

Introduction

This study attempts to investigate the ways the English major students of Taiz University use their strategic competence to learn and communicate in English; it mainly deals with learning and communication strategies. The study poses three questions to realize the main goals of this study: (i) “how do English majors of Taiz University deploy their strategic competence when they want to achieve their communicative goals, in terms of using communication strategies?” (ii) “how do English majors manage their strategic competence when they learn new items in English, in terms of using learning strategies?” (iii) “how can teaching the learning and communication strategies help the English majors at Taiz University to develop their strategic competence?”

For answering the first main question of this study, two statistical questions were formulated:

*Are there any significant differences between the students of the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Arts in terms of using learning strategies in general and the use of the various types of learning strategies?*

*Are there any significant differences among the four academic levels of study in terms of using the learning strategies in general and the use of the various types thereof?*
Also, to answer the second main question two statistical questions were formulated:

*Are there any significant differences between NS/NI group and the S/I group in terms of the use of the various types of communication strategies?*

*Are there any significant differences among the four academic levels of study in terms of the use of the various types of communication strategies?*

In order to deal with the teaching of communication strategies and learning strategies, i.e., the subject matter of the third question as mentioned above two corresponding questions were formulated:

*Is teaching strategic competence necessary and useful for English language learners?*

*What are the difficulties the Yemeni English language learners face in terms of learning and using English language and how can strategy training overcome such difficulties?*

This study targeted the students of all academic levels at Faculty of Education and Arts, Taiz University. The study adopted the SILL questionnaire of Oxford (1990). The subjects participated in this questionnaire were 300 students and 80 students participated in the oral task (10 students from each level of the two faculties) selected randomly from the total strength enrolled. The latter were divided into two groups. Both were asked to retell a story in English orally with the help of two pictures representing the main events. Also, the story was narrated to them in Arabic by the researcher. Both groups were asked to write the
story in Arabic before performing the oral task. However, one group was informed of the aims of the study and the required behavior expected from them. The other group was not informed of the required behavior expected from them after writing the story.

Quantitative methods of analysis were employed to answer the first two questions. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were calculated. Then t-tests and ANOVA were used to examine the existence of the significant differences in the mean use of the learning strategies, communication strategies and their various types. Scheffe and Tukey HSD post hoc tests were used for executing the multiple comparisons. The SPSS (Version: 10) statistical program was used here for the tabulation and the analysis. The third question was tackled qualitatively without availing of any numerical data since the researcher could not find any information available at the time of performing this fieldwork. So, he relied mainly on the results of this study and his experience of teaching in the department for a period of four years.

**Issues on the notion of strategic competence**

The review of the previous literature in this study has focused on two important issues: the definition and classification and the factors affecting the strategic behavior. Clearly, most of the early studies of communication strategies, which investigated the problem of classification, produced roughly similar taxonomies. The mere difference among the recent studies was the claim that the classification should be based on the cognitive processes of language production rather than on the utterances that were produced. Also, the learning strategy
classification had no radical variations because most of the researchers based their taxonomies on similar processes, namely: cognitive, meta-cognitive and socio-affective.

However, most of the studies that studied strategic competence isolated its components according to the area on which each component worked. This, in my opinion, has increased the gap between the theory and practice. Strategies stem from the same cognitive system and studying each component separately does not imply any new practical knowledge to understand the language learning process and its relation to the communicative behavior of the language learners.

**Unhelpful environment of learning and using English**

A knowledge of the environment surrounding the process of learning is very important to predict the effect of the teaching program on the learners’ behavior. This entails the factors that obstacle the learning process. Some of these obstacles are inevitable in the sense that they are related to the external reasons, that the teaching program cannot control or overcome. Here, the study investigates the extent to which the English majors in Yemen strive to learn a foreign language in unhelpful environment. This study has revealed that the students used a lot of strategies, regardless of their effectiveness in learning and using English. Therefore, resorting to use strategies of learning is considered an active learning behavior to overcome the embedding factors that associate English language learning process.
The English Departments in the Yemeni universities know that they receive learners with poor background and consequently try hard to improve their communicative ability by focusing on language skills in the first two years of the teaching program. In fact, this is not enough to overcome some other factors that affect badly the learners’ communicative competence. These factors are: educational (the illiteracy rate among the society is a serious cause of concern), cultural (communicating in English is not acceptable by most of the Yemeni people) and economical (a huge number of students join the English departments every year despite the shortage of necessary funds and teaching staff). These three factors rot the normal environment of learning and using English as a foreign language and negatively affect the development of the learners’ communicative competence. Therefore, this study suggests that the learners’ role should be taken into consideration to enhance the effectiveness of the English teaching program.

**Learning strategy use**

The analysis of the leaning strategy use targeted the overall strategy use (that dealt with the difference between the four academic levels, the difference between the two teaching programs and the differences among the four academic levels) and the use of the various types of strategies (that dealt with the direct strategies and the indirect strategies of the four academic levels of each faculty).

**Differences in the overall learning strategies**

The results of the analysis have showed that the overall learning strategy use of the English major learners of Taiz University is at a moderate
level. The analysis also has sought the difference in the overall strategy use between the two faculties and has found no significant difference. Though the two faculties offer different programs for teaching English, this result clearly indicates that the difference in the two teaching programs has no significant effect on the overall learning strategy use.

However, the differences in the mean of the learning strategy use lie among the four academic levels of both faculties. Comparing the mean use of language learning strategy of the four levels has showed that level one differs significantly from level two and three but non-significantly from level four. At the time of doing this study the students of level one had already left secondary school and had acquired no serious experience of learning English. Level two, on the other hand, has had a real experience of language learning for one year in the English department. Therefore, this difference in the mean use indicates a drastic change in the means of learning English has occurred. Interestingly, level four, which has completed three years of study in the department of English, uses more strategies than level one but that difference is not significant.

Here, we can assume that the new experiences, which are offered by the learning materials to level four, are not challenging. Consequently, they do not feel any need for the use of learning strategies to cope with those experiences. Another assumption can be considered valid is that the learners at level four cease using all kinds of strategies and focusing only on some specific types of strategies. This second assumption can be valid since the new experiences might differ qualitatively from those of the lower levels and accordingly strategy use might also change.
This researcher has investigated the differences in the mean use of leaning strategies of the four academic levels within each faculty to probe the effect of the difference in the two teaching programs. Though the difference is not significant, the result has showed that level two still differ significantly from the other levels except level three of faculty of Arts. This confirms that the students of level two can be described as active learners, regardless of the type of the teaching program. However, this has also motivated the researcher to investigate the differences in the types of learning strategies since the type of the experiences are qualitatively different within each level of the academic study.

**Differences in types of learning strategies**

As it was claimed above, each academic level might have a qualitative difference of the experiences from those of the lower ones. This researcher has analyzed the differences among the four academic levels in the six types of learning strategies and the following results have emerged:

**Memory strategies**

Learners resort to various strategies to cope with the new linguistic items. Beginners are more liable to use memory strategies than those of the higher levels, because they face difficulty at the beginning of their study to memorize a vast number of new linguistic items. Reasonably higher levels might have acquired the necessary vocabulary and they do not face much difficulty in mastering additional new ones because they already have been exposed widely to the target language. In school, the English
syllabus offers the students a great deal of the basic vocabulary but because they do not get any kind of consolidation after the lessons, they just memorize to forget after the test or the final examination. Here, the results show that level two differs significantly from all the other levels. This result can be attributed to the great tendency of the students who join the department of English to master the newly presented vocabulary and other structural components of language in order to cope with the academic study of English that differs significantly from the study of English in school. However, the non-significant difference of memory strategies between level one and each of level three and four sheds some light on the students’ tendency to either rely on other strategies to learn English or a lack of enthusiasm. This lack of enthusiasm can be attributed to a weakness in the learning materials.

Cognitive strategies

The result indicates that level two uses cognitive strategies to learn English significantly more than the other levels. Here, level three and four differ significantly from level one. This confirms the fact that the students of level three and four actually use other strategies to learn English that differs significantly from that of the learners in school. Though level three gets higher mean than level four, the difference is not significant. The rise and the fall of the line of the graph gives the impression that there must be some flaw with either the students’ tendency to learn English or the learning materials.
Compensation strategies

The result shows that the means of use of the compensation strategies by all levels are similar. Level four gets the highest mean that differs significantly from only level one but non-significantly from level two and three. Level two got the second highest mean in using compensation strategy that also significantly differs from level one but non-significantly from level three. This result indicates that when the students of level four face difficulty in learning they resort to compensation strategies. It reveals some of the reasons behind the low means in the use of the memory and the cognitive strategies; for example, instead of looking up the new words in the dictionary they make guesses. These alternative ways of learning English cause a decrease in the tendency of using the other strategies. The higher the level of the learners the more the tendency to use compensation strategy. Resort to compensation strategies with ignorance of memory strategies and cognitive strategies may reveal a fault in the students’ strategic learning behavior rather than a flaw in the learning material of the teaching program. There should be a balance in the preferences of using strategies. The result of this study shows that there is a kind of balance between these strategies; the use of memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies tend to be similar not less than 3.00. This will lead to attribute the significant difference between level two and four to the learners’ preferences rather than to factors related the learning materials. However, this result does not completely abandon the responsibility of the teaching program on affecting the students’ preferences of using some specific types of strategies more than others. In particular, we can claim that the teaching program lacks a serious treatment for encouraging the learners to use cognitive and memory strategy more than adopting the alternative ways
of learning, i.e. compensation strategies. This claim does not imply that compensation strategies should not be used at all but to the degree not affecting the quality and the progress of learning.

**Metacognitive strategies**

The use of these strategies of learning depends mainly on the awareness of the learner of his learning behavior, but they are always triggered by further learning activities imposed on the learners inside and outside the classrooms. The results show that level two uses this strategy significantly more than all the other levels. And Level three differs non-significantly from level four. However, level one uses this strategy significantly less than all the other levels. This result raises the effect of the academic courses on the use of learning strategies. The learners of level two use this strategy since they find that learning in the English department completely differs from that in the schools. So they try to cope with that new situation by exerting a lot of meta-cognitive strategies with which they can speed up their learning achievement and pace up with requirements of English learning at the college level. Here, we can notice that, at the time the student passes a stage of study he starts to give up some of these strategies. This researcher claims that meta-cognitive strategies are the learners’ responsibility but the program can avail from that tendency of level two to keep the same level of meta-cognitive strategy use by provoking more learning activities and opportunities. However, this should be based on the level and the need of the learners as well as on the requirements of the program. This will ensure the active participation of the learner in the proposed learning activities. What is
needed is that the program should assign a time and the necessary material should be accessible.

**Affective strategies**

The learners who cannot control their affective strategies must suffer from many irregularities in their course of study. As it is the case of controlling the cognitive activities by enhancing the meta-cognitive strategies, the whole learning process is affected by the emotional elements imposed by the learner in the learning process. Unfortunately, the use of affective strategies is very low which indicates that the learners are exerting lot of efforts to learn but they do not know how to control the emotional side of learning. This might happen due to cultural and social factors. As the results show, it seems that the Yemeni learners pay attention to the cognitive elements of learning, by using a lot of meta-cognitive strategies, more than to the affective ones. Another assumption can be acceptable is that the courses of study do not involve any procedures that may create confusion among the learners. This is not always right since a little of confusion might stimulate a great effort on the part of the learners which in turn affects the quantity and quality of the linguistic input and output.

**Social strategies**

The use of social strategy by the students of Taiz University does not appear to be as expected where the students of level four use this kind of social strategies lesser than even level one. This result is an indication of the complexity of the environment of learning English in Yemen. The
students who should use the language as soon as they graduate in vocational situations, they stop using proper strategies to practise what they have already learnt outside the classrooms. The students of level two use these strategies significantly more than all the other levels. Level one and level four use this strategy at an almost similar rate. The results can be attributed to psychological reasons. The students of level four stop talking and interacting with each other even for a learning purpose, due to the feeling that they will not be able to speak fluently and accurately. This behavior can be explained in that the self-confidence for talking to others has not been ensured well by the learners themselves. Ensuring self-confidence can only be attained after a long and real use of the target language. This again assures the absence of practice to use the Target language inside as well as outside the English department.

**Communication strategy use**

The communicative behavior of the English Major students is characterized by using many types of strategies. The results show the use of the following types of strategies: functional reduction strategies (message abandonment, replacement and topic avoidance strategies), interlanguage strategies (generalization, paraphrase, restructuring) and interlingual strategies (literal translation). The generalization of these results should take into consideration the absence of a rigid practice of the target language by the students inside and outside the classroom.
Functional reduction strategies

The results show that the students of Taiz University resort to three types of functional reduction strategies: message abandonment, meaning replacement and topic avoidance.

Message abandonment

In this study the subjects use message abandonment as a way of overcoming the problem of using the exact or the equivalent word/phrase for encoding the intended message. The results show no significant differences in the use of message abandonment strategies between NS/NI and the S/I groups. This means that the planning time does not affect the type of strategies. Furthermore, the result shows that the (NI/NS) group advances the use of the message abandonment to the essential elements of the story. On the other hand, the extra details that have been added by the students are easier to be managed without any kind of reduction. This can highlight two things. First, the students can communicate easily if they manage their own genuine intentions. Second, the students do not get benefit of planning to decrease the use of message abandonment.

Replacement strategies

The result shows that the S/I group uses more replacement strategies than the NS/NI group. Besides the NS/NI extends the message abandonment to the necessary details, which means that the amount of time has an effect on the quality as well as reducing the quantity of the meaning replacement strategy use. This is because the comparison finds a
significant difference between the two groups, in favor of the S/I group. So, we can attribute the effect of the spontaneous task on the use of replacement strategies to the interactive situation in which the subjects have to convey the intended meaning without resorting to any kind of enquiry from his partner. However, the comparisons among the four academic levels show no significant differences in the use of replacement strategies, which means that the effect of academic level does not affect the use of this strategy.

**Topic avoidance**

Two cases found in this study one from the NS/NI group and the other from S/I group, reveal that resorting to this strategy is attributed to the factor of self-confidence rather than to academic level or the type of the task. This was observed by the researcher but the learners did not give any reason for their behavior.

**Interlanguage strategies**

The results show that the students of Taiz University resort to three types of interlanguage strategies: generalization, paraphrase and restructuring.

**Generalization**

Most of the instances of generalization strategies are used due to the failure of memory to recall a particular word or term. This gives an impression that the learners are not in a position to apply what they have
already learnt in the previous courses in real communicative situation. Furthermore, the comparisons among the learners in the use of generalization reveal that no significant differences are found among the four academic levels and between the NS/NI and S/I groups. This result means that all students of different academic levels and of different types of tasks use this strategy quantitatively and qualitatively in a similar way. This can be attributed to the unskillful use of synonyms due to the fact that the learners are accustomed to stick to the exact equivalent of their intentions to the words of the target language when they communicate.

**Paraphrase strategies**

The students try hard to avoid paraphrase strategy as they find it quite difficult. Even in the interactive task, the learners also seem not to seek the help from the interlocutor to avoid the difficulty in using paraphrase strategies. This is apparent from the comparison between the two groups NS/NI and S/I that reveals no significant differences. However, the effect of the academic level on the use of paraphrase seems to exist. There are significant differences between level two and each of level one and three but all in favor of level two. Also, level two uses more strategies than level four but the difference is not significant. So, this result does not completely eliminate the effect of the proficiency in the use of paraphrasing strategy. However, it is possible, particularly in this study, to refer this result to the active learning behavior, as in the case of level two which uses more learning strategies.
Restructuring

In this study, most of the learners resort to restructuring strategies due to its easiness or as a failure to use generalization. This heavy reliance on restructuring strategies by the learners can be attributed to the teaching method that the teachers follow as a technique to explain the difficult terms, in particular, in the literature classes, by exploiting the simplification strategy. However, the comparison between the two groups NS/NI and S/I shows a significant difference in favor of the S/I group. This result clarifies how the learners exploit the planning time to reduce reliance on restructuring strategies. Regarding the effect of the academic level, there is not any significant difference. Therefore, all learners of different proficiency levels tend to use the easiest strategies to communicate in the target language.

Interlingual strategies

The results show that only one strategy of the interlingual strategies is found to be largely used. Literal translation is a prominently used strategy by the English Major students of Taiz University.

Literal translation

Similar to restructuring strategy, this strategy gets the second prominent rank among the other communication strategies because it is easy to manage and safe to convey the message to a partner who shares the same language. Generally, the interactive situation might have an effect to encourage the learner to use the literal translation strategy. However, the
results show that the S/I group uses this strategy significantly more than the NS/NI. This result explains that planning time is very important in avoiding the literal translation in target language communication but this is not the only factor since the interlocutor who shares the same language may also have some effect on the use of literal translation. On the other hand, the academic level has no effect on the use of literal translation strategies because no significant difference is found among the four academic levels of study. This result can be attributed to the type of the oral performance that occurs among the students who have the same language.

**Defect in the teaching program**

In this study, two problems have emerged in relation to the defects in the teaching program. The first is the poor oral practice the students are getting in their courses of study. The second is in relation to the blurry syllabus. The first problem is due to economical reasons but still the program has to do a lot by exploiting the strategic competence of the learners to enhance the tendency of the learners to learn English effectively and enthusiastically. It seems that learners need to be activated by stimulating them to use the language in different situations. If the learners do not feel that they get benefit of their learning efforts, they will cease learning and they will be stimulated only by grades they get in the exams that do not take into consideration the use of language in the evaluation process.

However, the second problem touches the most important part of learning process; it is the department’s curriculum. In fact, relying on the
description of the broad lines of the syllabus will not be practical to meet the requirements of the final aims of teaching English. Many necessary elements of the curriculum have been ignored such as: the settings, the surrounding environment, the proficiency level, the teaching materials, the possible teaching methods, the characteristics of the evaluation procedures, the needs of the learners, the expectations from them. All these are still unclear and are not specified.

Strategy training

The importance of strategic competence in the developmental processes of language learning supports the call for strategy training. Furthermore, as a result of the rare opportunities of using English widely inside and outside the classroom, the training of strategies becomes a necessity for English major students. This at least will encourage the learners to take the initiative to use the Target language in their communication with teachers or their partners. From this study the learners try hard to stick to what should be more than to what is available. They hesitate a lot to compensate. By using a similar term, they think that they commit a mistake rather than using a compensation strategy. They think that there are only specific terms that can suffice the intended message in the target language. Being aware of the alternative ways to convey the meaning of their indented message will help a lot to enhance the autonomy of language learning.

This can be achieved by teaching the various ways of conveying messages in the target language. Assigning one method of teaching, it seems that the teacher can decide how to teach communication and learning strategies. However, there are two prevailing ways of teaching
strategies: implicitly or explicitly. Adopting one of these two methods depends on the learners’ characteristics and repertoire of the strategic behavior. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the training can be useful if it is synchronized with learning and speaking difficulties. Certainly, this will help the learners to get rid of the feeling of failure that seems responsible for halting the process of active learning.

**Relation of learning strategies to communication strategies**

The results reveal that the active learners are more liable to behave strategically. This researcher argues that not only the achievement strategies are always good strategies but also the reduction strategies can be good in situations that the learners need to resort to as a shelter from the feeling of failure. However, the over use of reduction strategies might imply a fault in the affective strategies.

In this study, the participants suffered from a feeling of failure. This factor is deduced from their learning strategies profile where all the students got the lowest means in the affective strategies. This clearly points out that English majors of Taiz University suffer from their inability to control their emotional behavior at the time of learning. Lack of self-confidence in applying what they have learnt in new situations is one of its symptoms. In conclusion, studying the learners’ strategies can be useful if they are investigated in combination rather than in isolation. Studying the effect of each strategy on the other and their relations to learning strategies might increase our understanding of the developmental process of language learning and consequently present a clear picture of the learning behavior.
The mutual effect of communication and learning strategies

On the basis of the results of this study it can be concluded that the students of level two are active learners, in the sense they use a lot of learning strategies, that in turn affects the use of achievement strategies more than reduction strategies. Notably, the rise in the mean use of learning strategies does not show an overall rise in the mean use of communication strategies but at least there is a significant difference in the use of paraphrase strategies that seem very difficult for all the students. This result is attributed to the poor oral practice that all the English major student suffer from in their course of study as a result of many reasons such as the unhelpful environment of language learning. However, level four and three, which are expected to use more achievement strategies, tend to use more reduction strategies. Advanced levels are more sensitive to their failure of producing correct language. This behavior is normal because they feel that they should not make mistakes and consequently, they tend to conceal their weaknesses. Their awareness of the fact that with communication strategies they can overcome some of their weaknesses might enhance the use of achievement strategies. However, this is not enough if they are not aware that learning strategies must be used as well.

Recommendations

On the basis of the results of this study, this researcher recommends the following:
The program should enhance the learning material of level three and four by providing them with new linguistic experiences that include new and refreshing items in which the learning process becomes challenging and interesting.

The program should focus upon the use of meta-cognitive strategies by creating more opportunities and learning activities that are almost absent in the plan of the teaching program.

The program should assign a time and identify the necessary material in order to exploit the tendency of the learners to use meta-cognitive strategies by making the necessary learning material accessible and assigning time for that.

The training should include a treatment of the use of reduction strategies with a stress on using learning strategies. Thus, we can summarize that training should focus on three points:

Inviting the attention of the learners and motivating them to adopt the various types of learning strategies that can help them to overcome the difficulties of learning the target language.

Encouraging the learners to use the language by paying their attention to the benefit of communication strategies to overcome problems of spontaneous and non-spontaneous communication, instead of concealing their weaknesses.

Urging upon the learners to pay their attention to the importance of using learning strategies directly after the use of communication strategies.