ABSTRACT

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The Characteristics of A Good Language Learner in A Multi-Lingual Context: An Investigation into the Learning Styles of Gujarati Learners of English at Undergraduate Level

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This research project on the Good Second Language Learner was undertaken in line with similar studies on the Good Language Learner carried out in Canada and the USA. Second language learning is a complex process involving not only intellectual or cognitive abilities but also influenced by social and affective factors as well. And, for this reason, second language learning is different from other subjects in the curriculum.

India is a multi-lingual country. English is studied as a second language in India. The investigation aimed at examining the precise strategies and overall styles of learning adopted by the Good Learners of English in our situation. The investigation was delimited to the learners at the Undergraduate level in the state of Gujarat. Major learner attributes covered in this study are: sex, age group, faculty or institution, medium of instruction, and level of competence in English language. All the learners approached for the study had a proven competence in English and therefore, they were Good Learners of English. But, for the purpose of this
study they were further divided into two categories- the Good Language Learners and the Better Language Learners, on the basis of their scores in English language paper in the last exam.

The set of hypotheses was formulated in such a manner that the study could examine whether different learner attributes had significant bearing on the strategies and styles adopted by the learners of English in our situation. The selected sample for the study was administered a strategy questionnaire. The random sampling method was used for the selection of the subjects. A few subjects from the selected sample were approached for face-to-face interview, which intended to elicit data on the use of learning strategies in more detail and in an informal setting. The data yielded through the questionnaire were quantified for the application of appropriate statistical measures. Analysis of the available data enabled the investigator to confirm or reject the hypotheses.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter seeks to provide a framework for the entire study- by reviewing the ELT scene in India and Gujarat, by making a statement of the problem, and by determining the scope and constraints of the study. The second chapter reviews in detail the research on various learner attributes/factors that relate to differential success in Second Language Acquisition and, in particular, it focuses on the research on learning strategies and styles. The third chapter describes the tools used for data-collection and outlines procedures adopted for the analysis of the available data on the strategies adopted by the Good Learners of English at the Undergraduate level in the state of Gujarat. The data is analyzed using Z-test, keeping in mind the comparatively large
sample. The fourth chapter gives an overview of the administration of the tools for data-collection and describes how the selected sample was representative of the universe. The chapter concludes with the observations made by the investigator. The fifth chapter is devoted to the analysis and interpretation of the data. The analysis is presented in the form of tables of mean, Standard Deviation (SD) and Coefficient of Variation (CV) as well as in the form of charts. The sixth chapter deals with major findings of the research and implications for English Language Teaching in the state. The last chapter forms a conclusion of the study and offers some suggestions for further research.

It is hoped that this research on the Good Language Learner will go a long way in making second language teaching more effective and productive. The poorer language learners can also be encouraged to use the strategies that the Good Language Learners employ and in this way, they can improve their competence in the target language. The findings yielded through this study may help to sensitize language teachers and educators in the state to learning strategies and to the styles of our language learners. It is important that various learner factors are taken into consideration in materials production and curriculum design and implementation. Further research on learner attributes like attitudes and motivation, and personality factors may be helpful to make English Language Teaching in the state more learner-centred.