

**AN ESP TEACHER AS THE IMPLEMENTER OF STRATEGIC THINKING AT THE  
TERTIARY LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

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**Abstract:** Being dependable upon development in numerous scientific fields as well as trends of everyday life, education has never before been faced with such an urging demand for dramatic changes, implying a pressing need for continual self-evaluation and flexibility on the first place. The implementation of the Bologna Process into higher education institutions poses certain criteria ahead of higher level institutions that have not yet been uniformly adopted by all higher education institutions in Serbia. The most radical change is certainly the one of the modified role of students who are now not only beneficiaries, but equal partners in the process of education. Another call imposed by the Bologna Process is market oriented education, which places students' needs, i.e. the needs of their future workplace, into the focus of education. Such requests are particularly demanding for societies where lectures are widely delivered ex cathedra and students are traditionally treated as instruction receivers. Both the viability and sustainability of this concept of education primarily depends on the carriers of those changes, i.e. teachers and students alike. The traditional role of a tertiary-level teacher changes in the sense that he/she is now not only the source of knowledge, but gets more involved in students' progress by mentoring, i.e. monitoring and evaluating the progress of each and every student. In so doing, the focus of his/her attention is to teach students how to learn. This means that the focus of the lecture is not only subject matter, but the processes that need to be developed in order to help students achieve better learning results, which would eventually lead to better exam pass rate. All this would be hardly possible unless the students are self-aware and confident individuals prone to proactive reasoning, highly motivated to succeed and make progress by mastering their learning process. However, being overdependent upon teachers, students increase their expectations concerning teacher contribution to and responsibility for their learning process and exam outcome. Consequently, developing independent learners who are able to connect different aspects of knowledge concerning different subject matter and self-manage their own learning process would become the primary aim of any tertiary-level classroom. Learner-centered education has a-few-decade-long roots in contemporary language teaching methodology, yet this is something that still has to be adopted by Serbian higher education institutions. The aforementioned points to the necessity for changes in both teacher and student role(s) within a classroom. The proper driver of these changes is development of strategic thinking, i.e. implementation of strategy-oriented teaching instruction. In the group of learning strategies, metacognitive ones stand out as those which act as a basic students' tool for managing the process of learning. Another critical characteristic of metacognitive strategies is their transferability to teaching and learning different subject matter. This means that the burden of strategy building can be shared among teaching staff members, which implies close collaboration among teaching personnel of an institution. The aim of the paper is to discuss the idea of introducing the concept of learning strategies primarily into the tertiary level of education and look into the newly imposed role(s) of the ESP teacher as the implementer of the process. By looking into the role of an ESP teacher, we are generally looking into the roles of all tertiary-level teaching staff members.

**Keywords:** tertiary education, learner independence, metacognitive strategies, teacher role.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Being dependable upon developments in numerous scientific fields as well as trends of everyday life, including social, economical, and political changes, and cultural values and beliefs, education has never before been faced with such an urging demand for dramatic changes, implying a pressing need for continual self-evaluation and flexibility on the first place. The introduction would provide an insight into those phenomena that have been acting as the main instigators of changes in teaching instruction and, consequently, teacher roles. These would be the concepts of globalization, ICT development and the Bologna Process implementation.

The concept of globalization has imposed the issue of competitiveness in the knowledge-based society. Finding sister universities all over Europe has become a common practice in Serbia. Such connections with institution(s) of common interests have opened the opportunity for both student and teacher mobility aimed at exchanging ideas, good practice and research results with the further scope of preparing students to enter the global market and survive there. Furthermore, competitiveness imposes constant improvement and perfection, bringing thus the concept of life-

Thirteenth International Scientific Conference  
THE TEACHER OF THE FUTURE  
25-28.5.2017, Budva, Montenegro

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long learning to the focus of educational attention. As such type of learning continues after the formal education being over, it supposes the existence of independence and self-directedness, i.e. certain techniques and procedures that would enable learners manage their own process of learning.

The most critical driver of changes in the field of education in recent years has been the development of ICT. Those changes are noticed in terms of educational environment (the classroom equipment), curriculum decisions (subject matter content and teaching methodology) and communication between a teacher and students (the change in teacher's and students' roles). Employing ICT in a classroom is not anymore the question of computer literacy, but of efficient use of ICT in developing an active, knowledge-oriented classroom whose main aim is to equip students with resourceful and applicable long-lasting knowledge and skills, which bring us once again to the concept of learner independence.

The third phenomenon to be considered is the implementation of the Bologna Process. The basic idea underlying the Bologna Process was to create European Higher Education Area (EHEA), as a response to the massification of higher education institutions in the last decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this regard, European higher education is supposed to be compatible and comparable, more transparent, competitive and attractive for students of different origin, who are offered a number of quality courses on either national or international level. However, such a concept of tertiary education imposes the need for reforming higher education institutions, which implies certain changes that traditional educational institutions are more or less ready or keen to face. Concerning traditional university education in Serbia, which is still theory oriented, the most dramatic ones are (1) adapting curricula to market needs and national demands; (2) multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary directed towards meeting the needs of newly emerged professions motivated by technological development; (3) the change of focus from theory-oriented studies to the studies with the practical application of the learned; and (4) involving students as partners into the process of education<sup>17</sup>.

Having considered the phenomena with the largest influence on the present-day education, we become aware of the fact that, despite the changes in teaching methodology directions, modern education should emphasise both the learning product and the learning process. It is, nevertheless, impossible to talk about either of these without considering learning strategies.

Apart from influencing the focus of teaching instruction, the aforementioned phenomena influence the approach to content of university courses, which further leads to changes in the relationship between teachers and students and teacher roles. The prevailing feeling is that the central issue of present-day education is the one of learner independence and autonomy, i.e. the ways of creating independent learners and equipping them with skills and strategies that would prepare them for life-long learning. The answer that contemporary teaching methodology has to offer is the implementation of learning strategies, as a means of upgrading one's learning style, which would eventually lead to learner autonomy and independence.

The aim of the paper is to discuss the idea of introducing the concept of learning strategies primarily into the tertiary level of education and look into the newly imposed role(s) of the ESP teacher as the implementer of the process. It would be done by discussing the role(s) of university teachers, then by introducing the concept of (language) learning strategies as a means of developing independent learners, and, finally, by emphasising the role of teachers in learning strategy implementation. By looking into the role of an ESP teacher, we are generally looking into the roles of all tertiary-level teaching staff members.

## **2. THE ROLE OF ESP TEACHER AT TERTIARY EDUCATION**

Following the chronological sequence of course organisation, i.e. curriculum writing – delivering teaching instruction – assessment/examination, the first and foremost role of a teacher in a traditional university classroom would be the one of a course designer. As all decisions concerning the content and teaching instruction of a university course are made by a teacher, irrespective any extrinsic influence, this can be said to be the most important and responsible role. It is to be followed by a teacher as a source of knowledge and material writer. The role of an assessor used to be rather specific. Namely, students' knowledge used to be assessed regardless the estimation of their overtime progress. The exam outcome used to be based on the presentation of the learned at the moment of examination. That is why, at this point, this role is not considered to be the role of an evaluator.

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<sup>17</sup> Crosier, David and Parveva, Teodora. *Fundamentals of Educational Planning – 97: The Bologna Process: Its impact on higher education development in Europe and beyond*, Paris: UNESCO: International Institute for Educational Planning, (2013).

Thirteenth International Scientific Conference  
THE TEACHER OF THE FUTURE  
25-28.5.2017, Budva, Montenegro

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However, from the point of view of a university teacher, the most important role would certainly be the one of an academic. Ur<sup>18</sup> points out the importance of distinguishing the roles of the academic and the professional, which is very important point as far as university teachers are concerned. Namely, she supports the idea that academics are 'primarily occupied in thinking and researching; they research in order to refine thinking; they are interested in finding out the truth or more information; they are not immediate agents of real-world change; they are evaluated in the short term by his/her publications and they are evaluated in the long-term by his/her influence on the thought and action of both academics and professionals'. On the other hand, professionals are 'primarily occupied in real-time action; they think in order to improve action; they are interested in finding out what works; they are immediate agents of real-world change; are evaluated in short term by the extent to which he/she brings about valuable change and they are evaluated in the long term by his/her influence on the thought and action of both academics and professionals'. Though different in five aspects, one trait is common to both roles and that is being evaluated on the basis of their 'contribution to their field in a way that can benefit future generations'. Regardless many differences, it cannot be said that these two roles are exclusive. For example, the English language teacher (Dudley-Evans<sup>19</sup> goes a step further and suggests referring him/her as ESP practitioner) is primarily a professional who contributes to bringing about real-world change, but he/she can still undertake an academic research. In this sense, it would be recommendable to include both roles in the description of a university teacher.

However, the implementation of the Bologna Process and developments in teaching methodology have influenced some changes in the aforementioned roles as well as the emergence of some new concepts. The first change definitely concerns the role of an assessor and its transformation into the one of an evaluator. Namely, due to the Bologna Process, the exam outcome is the sum of all pre-examination activity and the examination performance. In this respect, a teacher becomes constantly involved into the process of evaluation. While evaluating, he/she monitors the performance of all students and should act as a motivator in supporting them in their efforts to overcome any difficulties concerning a certain course.

The importance of the concept of learner independence calls for the role of a strategy builder, where a teacher is not concerned only with the subject matter, but with the ways of learning as well, i.e. he/she does not teach only what, but how in learning. This role would be looked into in some more detail in Part 4.

The role relating to foreign language teachers only is the one of a language consultant. It emerged due to certain trends in teaching methodology (content-based learning and learner-centred approach) and market oriented education (the Bologna Process). Namely, a foreign language teacher at non-philology universities does not deliver language content only. The use of language becomes now dependable upon the context of use, which turns a language teacher into language consultant.

It goes without saying that university teachers are researchers. However, apart from being indulged into their subject matter, they should also do a classroom research aimed at delivering the subject matter in a way that would be acceptable for the group of students they work with, and that would lead to achieving most positive results in the sense of the gained knowledge and consequently exam outcome.

The last, but not the least role to be mentioned is the one of a fine-tuner. Namely, in the process of teaching, teachers are constantly re-evaluating a pre-defined curriculum and reshaping it in a way to best suit the students needs. This fact bring us to the point that being a teacher, especially a university teacher, does not mean only being an expert in one's own field of interest. A constant development should be given not only to the knowledge concerning the subject matter, but to the issues of pedagogy, as well. This is particularly important for university teachers, given the fact that the primary interest of the most of them is not of a pedagogical nature. A further thought might be given to the idea of implementing pedagogic courses, at least as an optional course, at the postgraduate studies at non-educational universities.

### **3. THE IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC THINKING – LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES**

Globalisation as a world-wide phenomenon has imposed a strong competition, urging thus a need for constant learning and perfection, with the final aim of equipping learners with tools necessary to cope in the constantly changing world. This brings us to the concept of life-long learning, which has a rather long tradition in the Western

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<sup>18</sup> Ur, P. The English Teacher as Professional. In Richards, Jack C. & Renandya, Willy A. *Methodology in Language Teaching, An Anthology of Current Practice*. (10<sup>th</sup> ed.). Cambridge: CUP, (2008).

<sup>19</sup> Dudley-Evans, Tony and St John, Maggie Jo. *Developments in English for Specific Purposes. A Multi-Disciplinary Approach*. Cambridge: CUP, (1998).

Thirteenth International Scientific Conference  
THE TEACHER OF THE FUTURE  
25-28.5.2017, Budva, Montenegro

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world and is still to be adopted in Serbia and the Balkan countries. The issue of education as a lifelong process imposes the question of acquiring the skills of self-directed learning<sup>20</sup>. As suggested by many authors, the main tool to be employed in creating a self-directed, i.e. autonomous (language) learner is learning strategies<sup>21</sup>.

The question of learning strategies is the question of how students deal with the process of learning. If you start the conversation with your students about the way they acquire a foreign language, the answers may range from reading and re-reading in order to understand some confusing word/parts of a text, to reading and repeating the lists of words in order to remember them, or trying to remember other courses content to grasp the meaning of unfamiliar words, etc. During a learning task, they may use highlighting pens to underline the important language items, ask for clarification if something is not understandable, or try to predict what comes next in reading and listening activities, etc. All these are the examples of different learning strategies.

In order to avoid any possible confusion concerning learning strategies, it would be useful to make a distinction between *learner strategies*, *learning styles* and *learning strategies*, as all three concepts characterize each and every student. When talking about *learner strategies*, O'Malley and Chamot<sup>22</sup> say that they are strategies developed by very learners aimed at solving certain learning problem. Depending on how consciously learners use them, they could be divided into implicit and explicit. On the other hand, *learning strategies* are explicit and they can be implemented into curriculum, i.e. teaching instruction. They are influencing the process of learning as they are used in information processing, storage, retrieval and use and, furthermore, they help in developing learning styles. According to Oxford<sup>23</sup>, learning styles are general personal approaches to learning, whereas learning strategies are used in a particular context as problem-solving techniques, thus being purposeful and goal-oriented<sup>24</sup>. They are the result of personal, cognitive, affective and psychological characteristics and represent a learner's attitude to the learning environment<sup>25</sup>.

In researching strategies and strategic behaviour, much effort has been put into categorisation of strategies. However, contemporary language teaching methodology recognises four types of strategies – social, affective, cognitive and metacognitive.

Social strategies deal with interacting with another person in order to assist learning. It can be either asking for clarification or working with someone else in order to solve a problem or finish a learning task.

Affective strategies refer to managing emotions. They are seen as lowering anxiety, self-encouragement or control over negative feelings, i.e. not allowing them influence attitudes or behavior<sup>26</sup>.

Cognitive strategies are often seen as theoretical procedures involved in the learning process<sup>27</sup>. In other words, they are considered to be controlled mental processes used in the process of learning and understanding, i.e. in obtaining, storage, retrieval and use of information. In such a way, in the context of language learning, they help students process and manipulate the language content.

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<sup>20</sup> Knowles, Malcom. *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*. New York: Association Press, (1976).

<sup>21</sup> Wenden, Anita and Rubin, Joan. (eds.) *Learner strategies in language learning*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. (1987).

Oxford, Rebecca. *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. New York: Newbury House, (1990).

O'Malley, Michel and Chamot, Anna. *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: CUP, (1990).

<sup>22</sup> O'Malley, Michael and Chamot, Anna. *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: CUP, (1990).

<sup>23</sup> Oxford, Rebecca. Language Learning Styles and Strategies: An Overview. *Learning Styles & Strategies/Oxford, GALA*, (2003). <http://web.ntpu.edu.tw/~language/workshop/read2.pdf> (April 2017)

<sup>24</sup> Williams, Marion and Burden, Robert L. *Psychology for Language Teachers: a Social Constructivist Approach*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Cambridge: CUP, (2002).

<sup>25</sup> Oxford, Rebecca. Research on second language learning strategies. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 13, pp. 175-187, (1992).

<sup>26</sup> Vandergrift, Larry and Goh, Christine. *Teaching and Learning Second Language Listening: Metacognition in Action*. New York: Routledge, (2012).

<sup>27</sup> O'Malley, Michael and Chamot, Anna. *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: CUP, (1990).

The strategies that control the process of learning are metacognitive ones. Being the most important strategies for developing independent learners, they would be the focal point of our interest. Namely, by developing this type of strategies, students learn how to observe their own process of learning, being aware of the subprocesses taking place, of the strategies used and possible corrective measures that should be implemented. It means that metacognitive strategies are employed in all three phases of task completion – the phase of approaching a task (planning), performance (monitoring and focusing attention) and the one following the task completion (evaluation).

As the starting point of developing metacognition and building independence in learning, planning encompasses advance organisation and self-management. This strategy asks for proactive thinking, as a student is expected to think ahead and foresee the possible problems and think about suitable solutions. Namely, it can be said that a student is able to plan if he/she is aware of all aspects of the task at hand and its potential outcomes. At the same time, he/she is expected to develop a strategic approach that would lead towards achieving these outcomes.

Monitoring implies 'checking, verifying or correcting one's performance in the course of the task'<sup>28</sup>. As the successful completion of a task depends on the ability to promptly spot the failure in performance and redirect one's attention towards the task completion, the work on developing this strategy is very important.

The process of evaluation takes place after task completion. The two most important questions addressed by evaluation are the consideration of success in task completion and possible alternative behaviour in future performance.

It becomes obvious that developing (meta)strategic thinking is a most beneficial concept in developing the overall critical thinking ability. In such a way, one builds his/her self-confidence in learning and performing and takes control over the very process, which leads to independence in learning.

#### **4. THE ROLE OF A TEACHER IN IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC THINKING**

In the process of implementing strategies into teaching instruction and making them a component part of a curriculum, the main objective of a teacher is to get students acquainted with different types of strategies, to explicitly teach students how to use each of them, to make students aware that they should use the strategies which they find useful, i.e. make them self-directed and to foster strategy use in other learning environments. In so doing, students become aware of the fact that the process of learning is at their hands and that they are in charge of it.

In their effort to develop independent learners and successful strategy users, teachers should be actively involved in 'assessing, planning and decision-making of what their learners already know, what they need to know and exactly how they can be helped to become independent learners'<sup>29</sup>. There are different models of strategy instruction developed so far, and we would make use of the Strategic Teaching Model, proposed by Jones et al.<sup>30</sup>. According to the Model, the first phase of strategy implementation is assessing. In this phase teachers should employ a questionnaire or think-aloud procedures or interviews to assess the type and frequency of strategy use. If possible, the combination of strategy assessing techniques is recommended, as this would bring about more precise information. When introducing of a new strategy, which is the following phase, the explanation should be given explicitly. A teacher names a strategy and explains its use, step by step. It is very useful to put the theory in practice by modelling strategy use, which makes the next step in strategy introduction. Here a teacher verbalises his/her own thought processes while doing a task. The support further given to students in practicing a new strategy should be adjusted to student needs. They should be motivated in using a strategy by providing successful experience or relating strategy to improved performance. Having in mind transferability as one of learning strategy traits, and following the CALLA (Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approaches) model introduced by O'Malley and Chamot<sup>31</sup>, we would add expansion as the final phase of strategy implementation. Namely, having mastered the strategy use in one teaching context, e.g. language learning, students could be further encouraged to use the same strategy(ies) at different learning situations (to different language tasks or to acquiring different subject matter).

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<sup>28</sup> Vandergrift, Larry and Goh, Christine. *Teaching and Learning Second Language Listening: Metacognition in Action*. New York: Routledge, (2012).

<sup>29</sup> Oxford, Rebecca. *Language Learning Strategies in a Nutshell: Update and ESL Suggestions*. In Richards, Jack C. and Renandya, Willy A. *Methodology in Language Teaching, An Anthology of Current Practice*. (10<sup>th</sup> ed.). Cambridge: CUP, (2008).

<sup>30</sup> O'Malley, Michael and Chamot, Anna. *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: CUP, (1990).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

Thirteenth International Scientific Conference  
 THE TEACHER OF THE FUTURE  
 25-28.5.2017, Budva, Montenegro

*Table 1. Teacher roles in learning strategy implementation based on the Strategic Teaching Model*

	Phases of strategy implementation					
	Assessment	Explanation	Modelling strategy use	Scaffolding	Motivating	Expanding strategy use
Teacher roles	Researcher Monitor	Knowledge resource Mediator	Presenter Consultant Mediator	Controller Facilitator Support-provider	Monitor Evaluator Motivator	Instigator Motivator Collaborator

Source: Author

It is obvious that one phase may entail more than one role. However, they are all characterised by providing a continual feed-back.

Table 1 gives us data that point to the conclusion that in implementing strategy use, teacher's roles should be reoriented. At the first place, teachers are expected to monitor the current degree and type of strategy use and make a more detailed research into it, acting as *researchers*. The role is further changed to that of a *mediator*, *consultant*, *controller* and *support-provider*, then *evaluator*, *motivator*, *instigator* and *collaborator*. At any time of this process, teachers are feedback providers. The final set of the given roles refers to post-implementation phase and is very important in transferring strategies to learning other subject matter. The last given strategy differs in relation to all the others as it implies developing relationships not only with students, but with fellow teachers as well. Without such collaboration, the process of strategy implementation would certainly take more effort and time.

## CONCLUSION

The consideration of three most influential factors of developments in the present-day education, i.e. globalization, the Bologna Process implementation and developments in ICT, has brought about the issue of learner independence and consequently given rise to the notion of learning strategies as a means of enabling the development of learner autonomy and independence. The same phenomena have influenced the change in the role(s) of modern-day university teachers, which has become even more complex and comprehensive by the introduction of learning strategies. This change is primarily reflected in the change of the role of assessor into the one of an evaluator, and the emergence of new teacher roles that should be adopted and implemented into higher education - mediator, support-provider, motivator, instigator and collaborator. It has become evident that without close collaboration with both students and fellow teachers, university teaching instruction lacks in quality and efficiency.

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Thirteenth International Scientific Conference  
THE TEACHER OF THE FUTURE  
25-28.5.2017, Budva, Montenegro

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