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Learning Strategies in Operation

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Learning strategies have been quite extensively researched and studied by educational psychologists, students and scholars of learning psychology. However, the studies are largely limited to the readily measurable and observable phenomena and these variables differ from an actual classroom, syllabus-bound context and such factors as age, sex, aptitude, etc. What need to be examined are the dynamic interrelationships among the study activities, course features and student characteristics. From this focal point, studies into the relationships between the efficacy of learning strategies and academic achievement, as occurring admidst numerous intervening variables, will be more realistic.

At this point the components of the three major variables will be described and discussed.

Study Activities

Study activities are numerous and diversified in accordance with study contexts, contents, purposes and other criteria. In a period of study both covert and overt behaviours occur within the domains of the learning processes. In communicative domains of language instruction, interaction and internalization, study activities include "task-focused" activities as well as "learner-focused" activities. Comprehension and production are integrated through teacher-managed and self-managed activities. Successful integration is to a large degree due to students' willingness to expend effort and to persevere.

Course Characteristics

Course characteristic variables include the content and context of the language syllabus. Content refers to texts; media, aids, concepts, integration of course material, integrative instructor aids, study guidance from the instructor, clarity of the expected goal of learning and out-of-class or independent word. Evaluative

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measures, such as checks on student progress, objective/subjective formative evaluation by peers/instructor, and summative evaluation by instructor, are also within the domain of course characteristics. Knowledge about the criterion or expected goal is inductive to the student's employment of appropriate and relevant learning strategies. The congruence of the learned and tested content can be a powerful course/characteristic/independent variable influencing study activities. It has been discovered that a mismatch between what was studied and what was tested is common. The test content may represent only part of what was learned, transformation of what was studied, or something that was not studied at all.

Student Characteristics

Student learning strategies are influenced both by course characteristics and by the characteristics of students. The characteristics encompass the following variables:

Readiness and maturity level: these two are related to student age and developmental level. From childhood to adolescent years, increasingly sophisticated learning strategies, applications of skills and awareness of their usefulness are acquired.

Academic competence: students with high academic competence as compared to those with low competence have more effective study methods, more sensitivity to the demands of learning tasks, a larger repertoire of strategies, and more flexible skills in using them across tasks. (Belmont, Butterfield and Feretti, 1982).

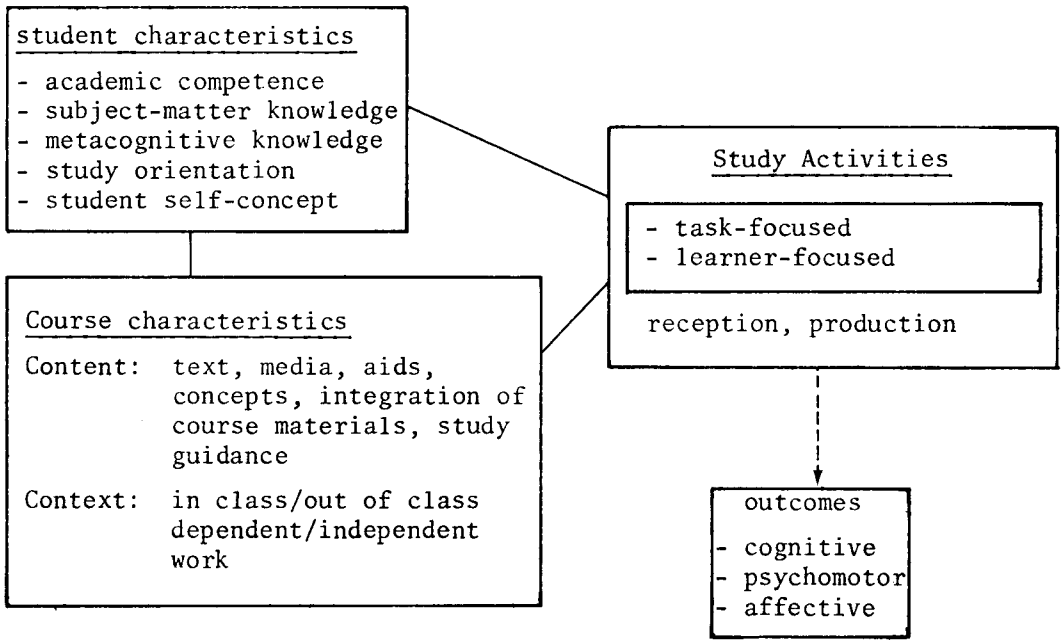
Subject-matter knowledge: accommodation of new-incoming information by the knowledge structures already existing is as crucial as assimilation of the new information with the previous one. Effective studying requires that the information to be acquired be integrated with a previously learned conceptual framework and incorportated in terms of structural relations (Holley and Dansereau, 1984). Students who have more subject-matter knowledge will be more skillful in learning than those who are not as knowledgeable.

Metacognitive knowledge: metacognitive knowledge refers to what students know about tests and the demands of different study strategies. Testwiseness and knowledge of the functions and operations of various learning strategies are metacognitive.

Study orientation: in addition to differences in student knowledge and experience, students also have different approaches, styles and degrees of intensity towards learning activities. Differences in goals, values and beliefs lead to differences in study orientation.

Student self-concept: the perceived self-concept of academic ability inevitably affects their selections of study methods, degree of effort-both/cognitive and psychomotor-to be put into a particular method, their perseverance at learning tasks, and types of self-monitoring during study activities.

In conclusion a model of learning strategies in operation is proposed here:



The end box or outcome box of the model in connected with a dotted line indicating the variable strengths of the relationship depending on the success of the integration of the three components in the above boxes.

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