UNIT 18  TEACHING STUDY SKILLS

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18.1 INTRODUCTION

Today language is viewed as a 'skill' rather than as 'knowledge'. What does this mean? If you want to acquire knowledge about any subject, you read books or listen to lectures. For example, if you want to know about the Moghul rule in India, you read history books, or you listen to talks/lectures on this topic. Thus you acquire more knowledge. On the other hand, if you want to learn singing, you don't read books on singing, you practise singing until you attain competence. The same is true of dancing, painting, cycling or swimming. These are known as 'skills'. Skills are acquired through practice. Language is also regarded as a skill by experts. The more you speak, the more fluent you become. The more you read, the faster you can read. There are, as you know, four linguistic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These four skills have to be mastered by any user of the language. If you want to study anything through a language, you have to master what are known as study skills. In the next section we shall make an attempt to define study skills and also look at the various types of study skills.

18.2 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:
- define study skills;
- list the various types of study skills;
- explain why study skills are important to learners; and
- design tasks to develop study skills.

18.3 WHAT ARE STUDY SKILLS?

In very simple terms, 'study skills' may be defined as skills which help learners to study more efficiently. When we teach study skills to our learners, we achieve two purposes: (a) Directly — We help the student to increase his/her knowledge of the subject matter, and (b) Indirectly — We improve his/her ability to learn other subjects independently and at will. In other words, we enable him/her to 'learn to learn'.

We must be careful to distinguish linguistic skills from study skills. Linguistic skills help learners to 'communicate'; study skills, on the other hand, enable the learners to 'study'; and
the process of study involves four operations: perception, comprehension, retention and retrieval. In other words the student should first perceive what is relevant to his/her needs, and then only select those areas which are important. (s)he cannot study everything available in every book (s)he can lay hands on. Once (s)he has decided on areas significant to him/her, (s)he has to read and understand - or comprehend - the material that (s)he has selected, for no learning can take place without comprehension. What is not understood is not learnt. Comprehension thus constitutes an important stage in the process of learning. However, mere comprehension does not guarantee mastery of the subject: for human memory is so transient, that, what is understood, may easily be forgotten, hence the learner has to make special efforts to retain what (s)he has learnt. Different students adopt different means towards retention. Very weak students blindly memorize the whole lesson; brighter learners, however, try to remember the basic principles in the form of short notes, which could be paraphrased later. The last stage in the learning process involves the retrieval of what has been learnt. When required, for example, in the examination hall, the learner should be able to retrieve all that (s)he has learnt throughout the year. We shall look at each of these sub-skills of study in greater detail.

In the literature on study skills, we refer to three major types of study skills corresponding to the four operations in the process of study. They are:

a) Gathering skills (Perception, Comprehension)

b) Storing skills (Retention)

c) Retrieval skills (Retrieval)

18.3.1 Gathering Skills

These are also known as reference skills and enable a learner to gather information as quickly as possible. This requires two sub-skills: locating and comprehending information.

How do we go about locating the information we need? We should first of all, know the sources available, e.g. books, journals, etc.; once the learner has identified the sources, (s)he should make effective use of them.

A major source of information, which all educated people keep consulting often, is the dictionary. We mainly look for meanings of words in the dictionary. Most students don’t even know how to use a dictionary. Nor are they aware of the fund of information available in a dictionary, e.g. pronunciation, grammar, etymology, derivations, etc. In a later section of this unit we shall present several tasks which enable a learner to exploit the potential of the dictionary for language learning.

What are the other sources of information available to a student? Imagine that there is a student of chemistry who has been asked to write an assignment on a specific topic.

His/her textbook alone will not be sufficient nor can (s)he afford to copy verbatim from the same. (S)he has to go to the library. Here (s)he should know how to make use of library catalogues. In the era of computerisation today, (s)he should know how to get the information from the computer. Once (s)he has located the relevant books from the library catalogue, (s)he can start referring to them. As it is impossible to read every word of every book on the area, (s)he, needs to be selective. Here (s)he could get some guidance from the contents page or the index at the back of the book. After locating the relevant pages, (s)he should quickly skim through them and perhaps scan only those sections which are useful for his/her assignment. Most students today do not want to go through these laborious processes, with the result, the xeroxed materials pile up but nothing gets assimilated. The gathering skills may be summed up as follows:

a) Locating information - through reference to dictionaries, library catalogues, Tables of Content, Index, etc.

b) Comprehending information - through mastering the sub-skills of reading, like skimming, scanning, etc.

18.3.2 Storage Skills

As the name suggests, storage skills involve the ability to store information for ready retrieval and use. You may ask: What is so difficult ‘storing’ information? Once we have read and understood some information, is it not automatically stored in the memory? I would say, ‘partly yes’ and ‘partly no’. What does this mean? We do remember what we read/listen
to; but not everything. So, most of us hasten to copy down important facts. If we are not properly trained, we would waste a lot of time in copying; further, just before the examination, when the students revise all the lessons, it would be just impossible for them to read through hundreds of pages. They should have the notes in a brief and precise form, ready for quick reference. In fact, each student adopts his/her own way of storing information. However, (s)he will benefit greatly from a training in storing skills.

Storing skills are of two major categories:

a) **Note-taking** - which involves listening to lectures and taking down notes - i.e. the main and subordinate points. This is a skill every student needs to master. In fact, since students have not mastered this skill adequately, we teachers are forced to resort to dictating notes after we have finished lecturing on a topic.

b) **Note-making** is very similar to note-taking, except for the fact that note-making involves reading books and making notes, whereas note-taking involves listening to a lecture and taking down notes. Note-making is a more leisurely activity.

Both the skills above, may be divided into the following sub-skills.

i) Comprehension of the text/lecture
ii) Identification of the main points
iii) Distinguishing main factors from subordinate ones
iv) Deciding on the order of priority among the various points
v) Identifying the organisation of points
vi) Organising the points into a visual display

Note-making and note-taking are meant only for the student’s private use, hence (s)he is free to use any abbreviation, symbol, etc., although it would be a good idea to tell the students about certain reduction devices.

### 18.3.3 Retrieval Skills

While writing an examination, or participating in a conference or seminar, students need to summarise their ideas in a coherent form, so that their readers can understand them. Or sometimes they have to prepare a research abstract based on their reading.

The student will of course base their summary or abstract on the notes they had prepared earlier. The length of a summary may vary depending on the purpose for which it is intended. Generally the precis in the examination papers is required to be one-third of the original; but all summaries need not be so.

Summarising is not an exercise to be learnt for use in the classroom alone; it has relevance for life. We can summarise articles, chapters and even books for future reference. If you are a secretary, your boss may ask you to present the gist of a document. A newspaper reporter’s job is to summarise speeches and reports. Scientists and researchers read abstracts of important books/papers to keep themselves up to date and save time as well. A good summary requires several skills on the part of the learner: reading, comprehension, analysis, judgement, clarity, brevity, etc.

### Check Your Progress

**Notes:**

a) Write your answers in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1. What are ‘skills’? How do they differ from ‘knowledge’?

2. What are the major study skills?
Students have two types of goals: the short-term goal is to pass the examination. The long-term goal, on the other hand, is to prepare for life; in other words, the second goal extends beyond examinations. In order to achieve both these goals they have to know how to study. Hence the importance of study skills.

It is a sad reflection on our education system that our learners do not know the study skills even in relation to their mother tongue. They do not know how to locate information or make notes even when they refer to books in the vernacular. Very often, the English teacher tells them what study skills are, as well as, how to develop them. By training them in study skills, the teacher indirectly helps them to study their other subjects also more efficiently.

Many teachers argue that there is no need to focus on study skills or give special training in this area. Conscious teaching of study skills is not necessary. They say: “Most of us learnt our study skills unconsciously. No one taught us how to make notes. We learnt it on our own; similarly our learners will also ‘pick up’ these skills. There is no need to ‘waste’ precious class time on such trivialities”.

There are two basic flaws in this argument. Firstly, we know from experience that most students do not learn study skills on their own. Even when they join the undergraduate course, they do not know how to make notes or how to write a summary. They lift words at random and string them together and call it a precis. The concept of note-taking is totally strange to them.

Secondly, even learners who can learn these skills on their own, might take a long time doing so. In the absence of guidance, they have to adopt the ‘trial and error’ method to develop these skills. If, on the other hand, they are given some training, they will learn these quickly; this, in turn, will accelerate their pace of learning the other subjects as well. Instead of regarding the time spent on developing study skills as a waste of time, it is necessary to regard it as a wise investment.

Study skills are needed at all levels. Even children at the primary level need them. For example, identifying the moral of a story is a study skill. Locating answers to questions is another study skill. As students go to higher classes the nature of study skills becomes more complex.
Learning to learn, as we pointed out earlier, is more important, than learning per se.

Why should study skills form a part of the English curriculum?

Even those who strongly advocate the introduction of study skills as an integral part of school education, suggest that the teachers of various subjects should undertake the responsibility of developing study skills in their learners. Two major reasons are offered in support of this view:

a) Study skills help learners to study their subjects better.

b) The English teacher is not a master of all the subjects and hence may find it difficult to deal with subjects like Physics, Economics, etc.

While we admit the validity of both these reasons, we would still argue for the inclusion of study skills in the English curriculum for the following reasons. The attitude towards the nature of English to be taught in schools and colleges has undergone a sea change in recent years. Teaching of English literature, though it has its value, is now no more regarded as the primary aim of General English courses. English is now regarded as a service language or a tool, which enables learners to acquire mastery in other subjects. Hence there is an urgent need to relate the teaching of English to the teaching of other subjects.

Of course the English teacher cannot master all the subjects; and (s)he need not. It is enough if (s)he is able to steer the middle course between literature and other subjects as far as the content goes. The English teacher is not expected to teach the subjects; but only the strategies to study them. This becomes feasible at the secondary school level, where most English teachers also handle subjects like Science, History, etc.

ACTIVITY

1. How would you convince the Secondary School Board of Studies to include study skills in the English curriculum?

2. Select any six students two each from bright, average and weak categories, and conduct an experiment to identify their relative mastery over study skills in L1 and English.

3. Interview colleagues who teach subjects other than English and find out
   a) if they train their students in study skills;
   b) and if so, how they go about it.
18.5 HOW CAN STUDY SKILLS BE DEVELOPED IN LEARNERS?

In this section we propose to present simple tasks/experiences which may be used to develop the various study skills in our learners.

18.5.1 Gathering Skills

a) Using a Dictionary

Task 1

Arrange the words in each list below in the correct alphabetical order:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>question</td>
<td>separate</td>
<td>prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>person</td>
<td>sanction</td>
<td>primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ancient</td>
<td>sublime</td>
<td>proficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doubtful</td>
<td>stately</td>
<td>practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>handsome</td>
<td>space</td>
<td>prudent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>troublesome</td>
<td>smooth</td>
<td>presentation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Task 2

If you want to refer to the dictionary for the meaning of the following phrases, under which word will you look them up?

(e.g.) to pull on, pull

1. at the end of
2. put of place
3. break out
4. turn down
5. in spite of
6. on account of
7. to sail through
8. burn the midnight oil
9. look down upon
10. make both ends meet

Task 3

Look up the following words in your dictionary and find the four different kinds of information about each word.

(Note: All these words have more than one meaning).

i) Parts of speech (Noun, Verb, Adjective, etc.)

ii) Inflected forms (Tenses of verbs, plurals of nouns, degree of comparison, etc.)

iii) Pronunciation

iv) Meaning

e.g. book - Noun, Plural - books; Pronunciation - /buk/

a) bear
b) bank
c) lead
d) fire

Many different types of exercises are possible on the use of the dictionary. You could design many more such tasks on your own, relating to what you are teaching your learners at the moment.
b) Using the Library

Task 1

The following is a part of the index taken from a book. What information do you get from the book?

i) 1. Abbreviations - 76
    2. Colloquial expressions - 25-27, 48, 92
    3. Idiomatic usage - 43-46, 57, 85
    4. Pronunciation - 15-20, 37, 90
    5. Reported speech - 35-38, 52, 79

ii) Where would you find information related to the following? stress; short forms; slang.

iii) You want to find out what is wrong with the following sentences. Where could you possibly find the information?
    1. The Minister gave to each of his friends on his birthday an expensive gift.
    2. He asked me where are you wrong.
    3. I read in the newspapers that he has kicked the bucket.

18.5.2 Storing Skills

a) Note-Making

Task 1

Read the following passage, then fill in the notes below:

Upto the end of the eighteenth century, small-pox was a particularly dreaded disease, not only because it was often fatal but also because those who recovered were permanently disfigured. A very large proportion of the population bore the marks of small-pox on their faces.

In the seventeenth century, people in Turkey began to inject themselves deliberately with mild forms of small-pox with the hope of making themselves immune to severe attacks. Sometimes they developed a light infection as a reaction; sometimes they suffered the very disfigurement or death they had sought to avoid. It was a risky business, but people were willing to risk the horror in order to escape from it.

Certain countryfolk in England believed that a case of cow-pox, a disease that attacked cows and sometimes people, would make a person immune to both cow-pox and small-pox. An English doctor, Edward Jenner, decided that there might be some truth in this 'folk' superstition. Milkmaids, he noticed, were particularly prone not to be pockmarked by small-pox.

Very cautiously Dr. Jenner began to test this notion. In 1796, he decided to make the supreme test.

Now fill in the blanks in the notes below:

1. Small-pox—a dreaded disease till the end of the 18th century.
   Reasons:
   a) ......................................................
   b) ......................................................

2. Attempts to conquer small-pox—Turkey—17th century—Risky method—Injecting mild forms of small-pox.
   Results:
   a) ......................................................
   b) ......................................................
3. Stem ??
   a) ...................................................................................................................
   b) ...................................................................................................................

Task 2
Read the following passage on ‘Insects’, then fill in the notes in the outline given below.

Insects are small creatures having six legs, no backbone and a body divided into three parts. They are the most plentiful of all living creatures. From man’s point of view, insects can be divided into two main kinds: those insects which are useful to man and those which are merely interesting or beautiful.

Bees and silkworms are examples of useful insects. Bees collect honey and produce wax from flowers which we can use. Silkworms supply us with fine, strong silk. These insects provide man food and clothing.

Locusts and mosquitoes, on the other hand, are harmful to man. Locusts will eat all growing plants and every year trees and crops are destroyed by these hungry creatures. Mosquitoes, on the other hand, are harmful to man. Mosquitoes pass the dangerous disease of malaria from person to person, and every year millions of people become ill and even die because of the activities of mosquitoes, which are a great danger to health.

There are some insects which are not directly useful or harmful to man, but are interesting and beautiful. Examples of such insects are colourful butterflies, pretty little ladybirds and fluttering moths.

1. ..............................
   a) 6 legs
   b)
   c)

2. ..............................
   a) useful - example - (i) bee (honey)
   b) ................................................................. (i)
      (ii)
   c) ................................................................. (i)
      (ii)
      (iii)

Task 3
Notes may also be made diagrammatically. Read the passage below:

A student can acquire information in several ways. His teachers give lectures, conduct tutorials and issue handouts. He can read library books, listen to the radio or watch the TV and thus learn from other experts. He can get information from fellow students through seminars or informal conversation. He can also learn from himself by thinking about his subject when he is alone.

Now fill in the diagram below:

(Adapted from Michael J. Wallace (1980) : Study Skills in English, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.)
b) Diagramming/Information Transfer

The diagrammatic presentation of notes as seen in the task above, is also known as diagramming. Diagrams are of various types: trees, pie charts, histograms, graphs, tables, etc. Such visual display can be grasped quickly and also facilitates retention. In most disciplines, writers resort to such diagrammatic or visual presentation, e.g., labelling of the digestive system or genealogy of a king, etc.

‘Information Transfer’ means the restatement of verbal information in non-verbal form or vice-versa.

Task 1

Read the following paragraph and complete the table given below:

The Rajans and the Davids are very good friends. They have a monthly income of Rs. 7,000 and Rs. 5,000 respectively. The Rajans buy milk for Rs. 700/- whereas the Davids spend only Rs. 500 on milk. The Rajans, being vegetarians spend Rs. 200 more on vegetables than the Davids, who spend Rs. 200 on vegetables and Rs. 150 on meat. The provision bill for the Davids comes to Rs. 700 per month whereas the Rajans spend Rs. 200 more on the same. Since Mr. and Mrs. David are both working, they have little time to prepare snacks at home. Hence they buy bakery for Rs. 200 every month. The Rajans spend only Rs. 100 for the bakery. They both buy fruits for Rs. 200 every month.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>The Rajans (Rs. 7000)</th>
<th>The Davids (Rs. 5000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Milk</td>
<td>Rs. 700</td>
<td>Rs. 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Task 2

The following pie chart represents the budget of the family of Mr. Iqbal. Study it carefully and rewrite it in the form of a paragraph.

Pie Chart

1. Food  40%  5. Transport  8%
2. Education  14%  6. Recreation  8%
3. Clothes  14%  7. Savings  5%
4. Electricity  8%  8. Rent  3%
Task 3

Given below is the floor plan of a deluxe room in Hotel Bombay International. Write a paragraph describing the room.

18.5.3 Retrieval Skills

Summarising is the major retrieval skill. Once a student has mastered the skill of note-making, summarising becomes easy. In addition to identifying the main and subordinate points in a text, and their manner of organisation, summarising requires a learner to write a coherent, logical piece of discourse in the form of a continuous paragraph. The length of the summary may vary according to the purpose for which it is written. Generally a summary needs to be comprehensive but precise. It should include the major relevant points but should not add any extra points not included in the text.

There is a more detailed discussion of summarising in the units on Writing.

Task 1

Refer to Task 1 on note-making in 16.4.2. Based on the notes you have prepared, write a summary of the passage not exceeding 100 words.

Task 2

Based on Task 3 on note-making in 16.4.2, write a brief abstract in about 50 words to be included in the guidebook for students.

Task 3

Read the Editorial of today’s newspaper and summarise it in about 100 words, to be put upon the school News Bulletin board today.

ACTIVITY

4. Prepare a task on each of the study skills discussed in this section, viz. Reference skills, Note-making, Diagramming and Summarising. Try to relate each of them to a subject that your students study e.g. Science, History, etc.

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................................................................................................................................................
5. Look through the tasks in the above section again carefully. Could you identify some basic principles of designing tasks to develop study skills in your learners?

18.6 LET US SUM UP

- Language is skill, not knowledge.
- Skills are acquired through practice.
- Study skills are different from the four linguistic skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Study skills enable learners to study more efficiently.
- The process of study involves four operations: perception, comprehension, retention and retrieval.
- There are three study skills corresponding to the four operations, namely, Gathering skills, Storage skills and Retrieval skills.
- Gathering skills help learners to locate and comprehend sources of information, e.g. use of a dictionary, skimming, scanning, etc.
- Storage skills enable learners to store information for ready retrieval and use, e.g. Note-making, Note-taking, Diagramming.
- Retrieval skills help learners to retrieve information when they need it, e.g. summarising.
- Students need training in study skills.
- The English teacher is the best person to develop study skills in learners.
- Study skills may be developed through tasks which require a problem-solving approach.

18.7 KEY WORDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gathering skills</td>
<td>skills useful for gathering information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information transfer</td>
<td>transfer information from verbal to non-verbal medium or vice-versa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic skills</td>
<td>the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner training</td>
<td>enabling learners to learn on their own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note-taking</td>
<td>listening to a lecture and taking down important points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note-making</td>
<td>referring to a written text and taking down important points.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrieval skills</td>
<td>skills used for retrieving the information that has been stored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study skills</td>
<td>skills which enable a learner to study more efficiently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storing skills</td>
<td>skills useful for storing the information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarising</td>
<td>identifying the gist of a text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. 'Skill' is a special ability to do something, gained through practice. Knowledge refers to the information one has gained through learning.

2. The major study skills are of three categories: gathering skills, storing skills and retrieval skills.

3. Note-taking is related to oral communication and note-making to writing.

4. A summary saves time for the reader.

5. Skills required for writing summary:
   - Comprehension: ability to identify major and minor points; ability to recognize the hierarchy of ideas in a text; ability to write a coherent piece of discourse.