**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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PROMOTION OF STUDENT METACOGNITION IN ELL: A DISTANT DREAM OR A NEAR REALITY

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ABSTRACT

Second language is effectively learnt only when learners own learning process. No learning can take place without the active cooperation and participation of learners. All teacher efforts, preparation, motivation, and execution can not automatically and causally lead to learning unless learners take efforts to learn At the most, learners can be taught how to learn, but learning how to learn cannot be abandoned with a fond hope that learner will eventually learn it. Even teachers undergo training in teaching before or after appointment through in-service programs. Hence, the two main arguments developed in the present paper are 1) because a vast majority of ELLs are not aware of their own learning processes, they have not made any significant progress in English from the school days to college days; and 2) teachers do not promote student metacognition by not stressing its importance in the learning process.
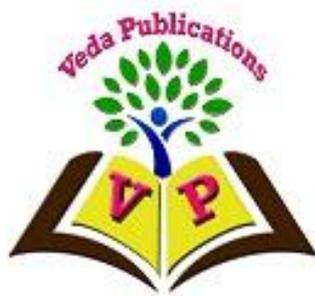
Keywords: *Metacognition, Metacognitive knowledge, Metacognitive awareness, English language learners (ELL).*

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Every well-meaning English language teacher feels the missionary burden of not being able to empower students with communication skills in English despite students' piecemeal exposure to English over a period ranging from 12 to 15 years. They try all second language theories on materials production, methods of teaching, and testing, but all these efforts appear to be in waste. Even some action research has been conducted on the classroom problems, and some reflective, research papers on the various issues connected with teaching and learning have been shared with the research community during national seminars and conferences. Some of them have been published in international journals with impact factor. Still, all

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these scholastic activities have not made any impact on learning and learner and teaching and teacher. Youth addiction to technology also adds its contribution to their woes. Students of all streams feel bad and sad when they come to final year of study and when they find themselves incapable of transacting business in either oral or written English. The bottom line is that learners have not taken up the responsibility to planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning processes. In other words, metacognition was never promoted in them.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were addressed in the course of the present study:

1. What is metacognition and how might it be relevant to ELL?
2. Do English teachers promote metacognition?

HYPOTHESES

Promotion of student metacognition is the best strategy to ensure English language learning since learners become responsible for their learning.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Though originated in psychology, metacognition is now associated with language teaching (**Flavell, 1979**). According to him, metacognition comprises metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive experience or regulation. **Wenden (1998: 528)** considers metacognitive knowledge as "a prerequisite for the self-regulation of language learning: it informs planning decisions taken at the outset of learning and the monitoring processes that regulate the completion of a learning task..." It has influence on language learning. **Flavell (1979)** divides metacognitive knowledge into three categories: person knowledge, task knowledge, and strategic knowledge. Flavell includes two dimensions of person knowledge: intra-individual and inter-individual knowledge. They mean personal learning styles and abilities. **Victori & Lockhart (1995)** include motivation and intelligence as factors central to learning language. According to **Wenden (1991: 42-44)**, task knowledge requires four aspects: the purpose of a task, task demands, nature of task, and awareness of the need for deliberate learning. Strategic knowledge refers to awareness and application of metacognitive strategies while

attending to a task. As **Livingston (1997: 1-2)** states, it also includes "knowledge about both cognitive and metacognitive strategies, as well as conditional knowledge about when and where it is appropriate to use such strategies." **Flavell (1979: 908)** describes metacognitive experiences as "any conscious cognitive or affective experiences that accompany and pertain to any intellectual enterprise. **Anderson (2002)** explains that the metacognitive learning process can be divided into five primary components: preparing and planning for learning; selecting and using learning strategies; monitoring strategy use; orchestrating various strategies; and evaluating strategy use and learning.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESULTS

A questionnaire with 24 questions on a two-point Likert scale was administered among the two representative students from each class in all the twenty five undergraduate departments. The subjects were selected at random and the total number was 150 (2x3x25). A percentage calculation was taken to compute the results. The twenty four questions cover four types of activities, such as classroom, tasks/assignments, quiz/exam and overall course with two questions each on planning, monitoring, and evaluating within all the four contexts.

Majority of subjects expressed their surprise that no teacher in the department ever encouraged them to take an inventory of their learning. The negative option seems to be the overwhelming response to most of the questions. The average negative response is **82.4** %. During the informal interaction with some of the subjects, it was detected that they felt happy asking themselves these questions and they expressed that they never imagined that they could pose such questions to themselves. Some of them expressed that it dawned upon them the total responsibility for their learning. Still, some of them said they were becoming mature learners by way of taking stock of their learning processes.

DISCUSSION

Metacognition is an awareness of one's own thought processes. It explains and describes the learning process. It shapes attitudes and beliefs of learners toward English language learning. In turn, it

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affects learners' behaviour and therefore they affect directly learning and teaching. Though the idea of questioning as a method of learning was encouraged during the days of Socrates, **Dewey (1933)** asserts in the twentieth century that humans learn more from reflecting on their experiences than from the actual experiences per se. The term metacognition' is of recent origin and it is associated with the works by Developmental Psychologist John Flavell in 1970s. **Flavell (1976: 232)** refers it to:

> One's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes or anything related to them, e.g., the learning-relevant properties of information or data. For example, I am engaging in metacognition if I notice that I am having more trouble learning A than B; if it strikes me that I should double check C before accepting it as fact.

The term and correspondingly the concept acquired multiple perspectives during the last four decades. **Merriam-Webster (2012)** defines it as "awareness or analysis of one's own learning or thinking processes." **National Research Council (2000: 97)** expands the notion further by defining it as follows:

> Metacognition also includes self-regulation— the ability to orchestrate one's learning: to plan, monitor success, and correct errors when appropriate—all necessary for effective intentional learning…Metacognition also refers to the ability to reflect on one's own performance.

Giving more concrete examples in the form of questions, **Perkins and Salomon (1989)** assert that "students learn to monitor and direct their own progress, asking questions such as "What am I doing now?' "Is it getting me anywhere?" "What else could I be doing instead?" This general metacognitive level helps students avoid persevering in unproductive approaches." **Schraw & Dennison (1994: 474-5)** expand it a little further to classify knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition in the appendix:

> Knowledge of Cognition includes 1. Declarative knowledge: knowledge about one's skills, intellectual resources, and abilities as a learner; 2. Procedural knowledge: knowledge about how to implement learning procedures (e.g., strategies); 3. Conditional knowledge: knowledge about when and why to use learning procedures. Regulation of Cognition [means] 1. Planning: planning, goal setting, and allocating resources prior to learning. 2. Information management: skills and strategy sequences used on-line to process information more efficiently (e.g., organizing, elaborating, summarizing, selective focusing). [not sure here what is meant by "on-line" - not the standard use now I would think] 3. Monitoring: assessment of one's learning or strategy use. 4. Debugging: strategies used to correct comprehension and performance errors. 5. Evaluation: analysis of performance and strategy effectiveness after a learning episode.

These multiple perspectives on metacognition emphasize planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own learning processes.

Metacognition is desirable to successful learning of English as a second language since it enables students to effectively and efficiently manage their cognitive abilities and to correctly locate weaknesses that can be corrected by constructing new cognitive abilities. Students can perform language skills and therefore they are capable of thinking about they perform skills (metacognition). As **Joseph (2003: 151)** points out, "this introspective ability is important because it produces the powerful knowledge that enables students to control their learning by demonstrating a conscious application of cognitive strategies." Creating awareness that metacognition exists, that it differs from cognition (aptitude & domain knowledge), and that it enhances to success in English language acquisition, is a key to promotion of metacognition. In the same breadth, students should be taught strategies and when and where to use them. It will help them plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning.

Learners who are aware of metacognition are strategic and perform better than those who are not aware of it. It is because of planning, monitoring, executing, and evaluating their strategies and these in turn improve the quality of their performance. Cognitive skills are needed to perform a task. On the other hand, metacognitive skills are required to

comprehend how a task is performed. In fact, everyone engages in metacognitive activities everyday. It is therefore imperative that teachers ought to attend to the development of these skills in students. Knowledge (the ability to perform an action) and regulation (how an action is performed) act in unison to the extent that it helps students become self-regulated learners.

Students should therefore be taught the purpose and usefulness of a metacognitive strategy so that they can apply it to new situation through a process of generalization. For instance, Metacognitive Awareness Inventory can be employed and it can be followed by a discussion in class through raising questions as done in the experiment. The inventory can include sections like metacognitive processes (what kind of strategies do you use monitor and access your learning?) declarative/procedural/conditional knowledge (which are you more proficient or more inefficient?) planning/monitoring/evaluation (which are you more proficient or more inefficient?)

Moreover, metaacognitive skills are essential for lifelong learning. They help learners understand how they learn, their strengths, their needs, and how they can learn better. Of course, the ability to analyze and understand one's own learning is always influenced by experience and educational background. All these skills can be summed up in one phrase—thinking about thinking in the sense of developing self-awareness and self-assessment. Besides, metacognitive skills are not necessarily aligned with language skills as much as technology skills are rarely aligned with language skills levels. Metacognitive skills ought to be taught since some of them may be foreign to Indian learners of English. For instance, the concept of goal setting and evaluating one's class that includes assessment of teachers by students are not only unfamiliar but also uncomfortable to them. Sometimes, learners may think it inappropriate to share personal thoughts and reflections. Therefore, teaching metacognitive skills is an ongoing process. Teachers can activate metacognitive skills by asking questions like 'what did we learn today?' 'how will you use what we are learning outside the class?' 'when you try something

new, how do you feel?' and 'when you are doing something and when you get stuck, what do you do?'

Metacognitive skills can belong to three different domains from learners' experience: setting learning goals, understanding their learning styles, and evaluating their learning.

SETTING LEARNING GOALS

1. setting personal goals for participation in English classes
2. differentiating short term and long term goals
3. outlining activities that will help them achieve their goals
4. identifying obstacles to meeting their goals
5. developing and practicing necessary skills to achieve learning goals
6. reviewing and updating learning goals throughout the course
7. revising course of action for meeting goals
8. identifying and developing new strategies to achieve learning goals
9. exploring additional learning opportunities, and
10. planning a career path

UNDERSTANDING THEIR OWN LEARNING STYLE

1. identifying their own previous learning experiences in schools
2. expressing likes and dislikes about learning activities
3. understanding strengths and weaknesses
4. recognizing learning modalities or preferences (in terms of multiple intelligences)
5. self-assessing learning styles and preferences, strengths and weaknesses
6. sharing learning experiences and strategies to others
7. describing how one's learning preferences affect how one learns

EVALUATING THEIR OWN LEARNING

1. expressing feelings about class
2. describing progress toward goals
3. monitoring and assessing their progress
4. providing feedback to teachers about needs and preferences
5. identifying achieved goals
6. changing plans and activities

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7. shaping new goals as they arise
8. demonstrating and understanding evaluation
9. seeking additional learning opportunities, and
10. learning independently of groups and teachers

CONCLUSIONS

Metacognition is directly related to learning and teaching. It shapes learner and teacher attitudes toward learning and teaching. In **Niemi' s (2002: 765)** words, "How we learn and comprehend knowledge depends on our beliefs, attitudes, and values and our self-concept as a learner." It also plays a central role in in explaining and describing learning processes. Teachers should therefore employ all available sources of information about metacognition and develop the skills in students, develop curriculum, and create classroom environment.

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