

“The Role of Metacognitive Knowledge in Enhancing Learners Autonomy”

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1- Introduction

Many scholars have identified different methodological approaches to metacognition development and learners' autonomy in teaching and learning English as a foreign or second language. Garcia (2010) states that “learning cannot be autonomous if there is no metacognition to supervise, organize and plan the process. Learning is part of everyone's life; whether they attend formal schooling, university, or not, people will learn”. As established by Flavell (1975), metacognition is simply defined as “thinking about thinking” which consists of components that are made up of knowledge and regulation. Metacognitive knowledge includes knowledge about oneself as a learner (personal knowledge) and the factors that might impact performance (task knowledge), knowledge about strategies, and knowledge about when and why to use strategies (strategy knowledge). Since the present paper sets out to discuss the role of metacognitive knowledge in enhancing learner autonomy, the paper reviews related metacognition literature on both learners' autonomy and language learning strategies.

2- Literature Review

2.1- Metacognitive Knowledge

Metacognitive knowledge has its own regulation which includes the monitoring of one's cognition and planning activities, awareness of comprehension and task performance, and evaluation of the efficacy of monitoring processes and strategies. Recent research for instance, suggests that young children are capable of rudimentary forms of metacognitive thought, particularly after the age of 3. However, the development of metacognition of individual varies as most postulate massive improvements in metacognition during the first 6 years of life (Lai 2011). This indicates that metacognition improves with appropriate instructions in stages that students can be taught to reflect on their own thinking.

Metacognitive knowledge is therefore classified according to whether it focuses on the learner's belief, the learning task or the process of learning. Flavell (1979) refers to these three categories as person, task and strategic knowledge highlighted in the introduction. Wenden (1998, p: 520) comes with another explanation of the importance of metacognitive knowledge in learning. In summary form, Wenden states that metacognitive knowledge characterizes the approach of expert learners to learning to enhance learning outcomes. It also facilitates written recall, the comprehension of written texts, and the completion of new types of learning tasks. The metacognitive knowledge therefore improves the rate of progress in learning as well as the quality and speed of learners' cognitive engagement.

Thus, Learners of second language can become confident in their abilities to learn. Though they are autonomous learners, they do not hesitate to obtain help from peers, teachers, or family when needed. Influenced by Flavell, Wenden (1998, p: 516) classified metacognition knowledge into three components:

- 1- Person Knowledge.
- 2- Task Knowledge.
- 3- Strategic Knowledge

2.1.1- Person Knowledge

Person knowledge or knowledge of person variables, applies to individual's overall understanding of how people learn and process information. It also refers to one's awareness of particular thinking and learning processes.

For example, an individual may not only know that humans process information in various ways. (i.e. auditory, visual tactile) but that he/she also learns more quickly through a particular medium. Wenden (1998) attributes language's improvement in learning to some ability especially personal ability. In her opinion, lack of personal ability for instance may cause the second language development to take a long time. The personal knowledge is part of the good ways to speed up learning activities. This is make Flavell (1979) to propose two dimensions of person knowledge: intra-individual differences and inter-individual differences (knowledge of personal styles, abilities, and so forth), and universal of cognition knowledge of human attributes influencing learning.

2.1.2-Task Knowledge

According to Wenden (1978) task knowledge not only includes learner's knowledge of the purpose of a task and how it will affect their learning, but also the nature of the task, and the task's demands. An example of a learner's metacognitive knowledge of task demands a learner to recall that speaking about everyday topics was easier than speaking about more abstract topics.

Wenden (1991, p: 42) adds that the task knowledge requires four aspects:

- 1- Knowledge about the purpose of a task (What is the objective in performing a given task?).
- 2- Knowledge about task demands (What resources and steps are necessary and what is the degree of difficulty involved?).
- 3- Knowledge about the nature of the task (What kind of learning is it?).
- 4- Awareness of the need for deliberate learning.

As the task variables necessitate different ways to deal with tasks, these signify that tasks are different in nature. Learner must possess metacognitive knowledge to ask questions about their similarities and differences between tasks. For example, it is better to really understand a geometry proof rather than to study the proof by heart, whereas another task could require the learner to study in a different way. (Papaaleontiou –Locu ,2003 ,p:15 ; Larkin ,2010,p: 8 cited in DuToit .2013 ,p:63).

2.1.3 - Strategic Knowledge

Strategic knowledge, or knowledge about strategy variables, refers to the awareness and application of metacognitive strategies while attending to a task. It rests on the assumption that an individual knows strategies and their usefulness to him or her (Wenden, 1987; Wenden, 1998). The strategy variable of metacognitive knowledge deals with knowledge about the use of the most effective strategy in different tasks. A learner, for example, realizes that identifying the main point of a new concept and rephrasing it leads to effective learning

2.2 - Learner training and learning strategies. Many scholars discuss the concept of learner training under learning strategies (Benson & Voller, 1987; Willing, 1989; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1991; Stern, 1992 and Oxford, 1990). According to Oxford (1990), learning strategy is the specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, and more transferable to new situations. It is seen as specific mental steps or how learners implement learning as well as how learners' consciously engage in activities to achieve certain goals, and how they exercise a choice of procedure in form of long-term planning (Wenden, 1991; and Stern, 1992).

Scholars agree that it is a fundamental tenet of learner training that learning strategies of successful learners can be taught to poor language learners with resulting increase in their learning efficiency (Rubin, 1987; Wenden, 1987). To this end, the scholars' views differ on the concept learning strategies and its classification. Oxford 1990 classifies learning strategies into direct and indirect strategies, while in Wenden (1991), the learning strategies are categorized into cognitive and self-management strategies. Based on the two classifications of learning strategies by Oxford and Wenden, Learner training is directly linked to Oxford's indirect strategies or Wenden's self-management strategies where they placed it under metacognitive strategies, which was grouped along with social strategies and affective strategies or planning monitoring and evaluating strategies in the Wenden's classification. The justification of scholars to place learner training under self-management strategies was borne out of the principles that learners employ self-management strategies to monitor and manage the learning process. O'Malley & Chamot (1990:8) point out that metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process, planning for the learning, monitoring of comprehension or production while it is taking place, and self-evaluation after learning activity has been completed. It can also be termed as regulatory skills or skills of self-directed learning because of its three sub-principles: (1) planning; (2) monitoring; and (3) evaluating (Wenden, 1991; and Stern, 1992).

2.3-Learners' autonomy and learner training

Autonomy in learning is essentially a matter of attitude to learning. An autonomous learner is one who has undertaken the responsibility for his own learning. Dickson (1992) defines term learners' autonomy as 'taking responsibility for one's own learning as meaning that the learner is involved in making the necessary decisions about his learning'. In the same token, Little (1997) defines autonomy as "learning how to learn intentionally" (p. 105). From this perspective learners' self-awareness of their own techniques, strategies, motivation, strengths and weaknesses comes to prominence. The early research on learning autonomy postulates that the learners' autonomy is a goal of education rather than a procedure or a method. Work towards this goal is likely to be teacher directed initially, and it proceeds as a co-operative enterprise between teacher and learners involving the learners progressively in taking on more responsibility for their own learning (Rubin 1975, Stern 1974).

There are four points to be considered in the relationship between learners' autonomy and learner training. First, the process of training towards autonomy is 'learner training'; the training process must be fully integrated into language teaching; learner training involves practice of autonomy; and the need to further analyze the concept of autonomy in language learning in order to identify appropriate goals for learner training (adopted from Benson and Voller, 1997). The ordinary spoon-fed methodology is abandoned to reorient students to utilize their maximum potentials as important agents both inside and outside the classroom. The role of the learner is therefore crucial as to how to define his or her own path to success. Becoming self-conscious about what to do, where to go, or how to undertake the proper action to improve one's learning is the premise of language success. Autonomy, though how far-fetched it may seem, empowers learners to become independent, self-reliant, accountable for their own learning one's learning is the premise of language success. (Little, 2003, p. 90)

This paper has discussed metacognition in relation to learner training and language learning strategies as well as autonomy and learner training. I am going to focus on the organization of the research indicating the source of data, researcher questions and data analysis and discuss which is central to the issue that the research is trying to investigate in the paper.

3. Data Analysis

The data of this paper is based on the reflection of sixteen undergraduate EFL learners' experiences at Suleyman D. University, Turkey. They submitted written reports to their supervisor which reflect their achievements, problems and observations on English as foreign language learning. Each participant was asked to write in a paper in English their thoughts, feelings and actions, goals about their experiences in speaking skill to measure their awareness in comprehension of metacognitive knowledge to enable them to be independent learners. The study examines and classifies the data based on personal, task and strategy knowledge discussed in the introduction in order to highlight their learning difficulties and put forward solutions to the identified problems.

4. Research Questions

The present study intends to examine eight second language learners' account of their experiences during pre and post-course second language learning to answer the following research questions:

- 1- What is the metacognitive knowledge of students to developing their EFL language learning skills?
- 2- Do the second language learners become aware of the different types of metacognitive knowledge to improve the learning activities?
- 3- To what extent do the students employ metacognitive knowledge in their experiences about how to speak well?

5. Classification of data

As metacognition simply refers to "thinking about thinking" (Flavell, 1979). It consists of three components of knowledge to regulate learner's activities. These components of knowledge include knowledge about oneself as a learner (personal knowledge) and the factors that might impact performance (task knowledge), knowledge about strategies, and knowledge about when and why to use strategies (Strategy knowledge). In view of this, the classification of the data will be based on the aforementioned component in order to identify the existence or no existence of the available type of knowledge of each of the participants at pre and post-course period of their second language study. This can be seen in table (1) and (2) below:

Table (1)

No	Person Knowledge	Task Knowledge	Strategic Knowledge
S1	After I passed prepare class exam, my English more improved. I learned my things .I am bad at listening and speaking, thanks to prepare class, I am better now in this lessons.		I will solve test for grammar will read newspaper, will search for internet I will do every things for me.
S2	Firstly, I have to say, I'm not very good at speaking English. I like English. I enjoy reading a lot of English books, watching English films. But, I can't easily express myself fluently. Because, I am very excited. I feel as if i forgot all what I know while I'm speaking. I really see myself inefficient in this part.	To make better my listening skills, i have to listening conservation on the radio or at the computer	My biggest plan is to go abroad in this summer and to improve my English These will help me to improve my listening. Finally, I will make every effort to improve my English every issue. That's all...
S3	I can speak English but I don't say I am very well on English	How can I develop my speaking? Firstly, I think singing foreign songs can be effective on our speaking. Because repeating the words of song is better for us. We can know how words are used The second one is watching film. Especially watching film is effective on our pronunciation and the films with subtitle can be more effective on our speaking and pronunciation	
S4	Firstly, I want to talk about my speaking. My speaking isn't enough for me. For example, I study ELIT but I can't understand very well when a foreign person asks me something. Also, I try to translate Turkish to English a sentence in my brain and then I can speak.	Secondly, I want to develop my speaking. How? Actually, I don't know, too. But can start with self-confidence. While I am speaking, I afraid of mistaking. And it limit my speaking. In addition to, I can speak English among my friends. It may help to develop my speaking. If I study more, I can achieve these aims.	
S5	Firstly, I want to say that there is no problem to speak English. I can easily express myself fluently. At the lessons ı can attend to conversations without having any problem.	In order to improve my speaking skills, I should take part at the lessons. I have to memorize too many words as well as possible and use them actively while I'm speaking.	
S6	My speaking is so inefficient Also ı don't have self-confident to speak. If ı have self-confident and ı remember which ı know words, ı can speak fluently. Actually ı know several words. When ı was studying for university exam, ı memorized them. But when ı speak ı can't remember words which ı know.		if we listen slow speaking early times, perhaps we understand well.
S7	Firstly, my English is improving. I introduce myself my hobbies, my experiment easily. But I am very excited. That's why I don't speak fluently		I believe to improve my English. Especially, I must practice very much and also communicate foreign student. These are extra information for me. In conclusion, my English is improving day by day.
S8	I want to tell my English skills. Actually, I'm not very good at speaking English. Whenever I speak English, I'll get very excited. I forget all words. I tried various way to calm myself when i speak. But it doesn't seem to work. Speaking English is a phobia for me. I worry about this issue		I will work at hotel for improving my speaking this summer. I hope that I can beat my fear. I must increase self-confidence. Finally, I will make every effort to improve my English. That's all...

Table (2) classification of post-course data

	knowledge personal	knowledge askt	knowledge strategy
S1	Firstly, I want to talk about my speaking. At the start of term I haven't got a good speaking, because I did not learn about speaking at my high school times. I learned much thing about speaking at this class thanks to you.	If I practice about the listening I believe I will be better on listening. For this, I need a silent place and some hardworking friends.	
S2	I must say that speaking English is wonderful for me. I like speaking English so much . But i have some problems about speaking. One of them, i can't find anything to say when i speak someone. Also, i always nervous when i am speaking especially in exams.		i can overcome this problem. I can read books for learning vocabulary. Besides, to rehearse vocabulary may benefit for improving vocabulary knowledge. Watching English films is helpful for improving speaking and listening i can overcome this problem. I can read books for learning vocabulary. Besides, to rehearse vocabulary may benefit for improving vocabulary knowledge.
S3	I can easily express myself on daily conversations. Without thinking too much I able to talk on familiar topics by using correct grammar structures. But nevertheless I make mistakes on most subjects include academic issues. Vocabulary lackness makes me fail to speak variety of topics.	To improve my listening skills I must learn too many words and idioms. I must learn some terms being used in daily speeches as well.	On the other hand I want to reach at least C1 level until I graduate. By using range of vocabulary I want to talk to a native speaker clearly and fluently on different topics such as politics, economy, sports etc.
S4	I have difficulties to understand person whose speaking is fast and his/her pronunciation is bad.	.	But as I said I couldn't suddenly think about topic. And for this, this summer will very useful. I've planned to register only speaking course. Besides I bought a lot of books, such as Virginia Woolf, Charles Dickens and so on. Even if I do not understand very well, I will analyze them.
S5	My speaking is getting well if I compare it with last year. For instance, last year if somebody asked me about anything about daily life situation I couldn't talk. And now I can enter without prepared into conservation which related to daily life. When somebody ask about my idea I can explain and give some examples. But if there is a speaking exam or a person who come from abroad something interesting happen to me because of my fear		I am planning to go to abroad for one year with Erasmus. But after my school is going to finish I would like to work in a Turkish courses to teach Turkish foreign students in abroad. It is one of my plan, I hope I can realize my dreams.
S6	At firstly, I mention that my speaking At the start of the year I send you a A writing about my speaking .I said my Speaking is bad for me .because those Days I got excited. but now I control My excitement .It is a important thing For me.	Then my listening still is not very good. But to improve it i watch Voscreen site and i listen English songs. Sometimes i watch TV series	To do better my speaking in future, i want to go abroad. I know that it is expensive for a student. But if i pass Erasmus exam i can go abroad. And i believe that it is the best thing learning a foreign language...
S7	Firstly I know I must improve my speaking and my listening skill., because I cant speak frequently I don't know why , But I don't understand when he/she speaks quickly and quietly in front of me	I couldn't read properly . so this doest only right to speech. I know, in order to overcome this I need to speak more in class, it also will improve to my speaking and reading skills and indirectly my listening skill.	
S8	My E level isn't very good. I can understand you easily when you speak but I can't speak very well when I speak in class or anywhere I am getting excited that`s why I `can't express myself .		

The above classifications of participants' reports of pre and post-course are aimed to make the reader to understand that the metacognitive act can be understood from the learner's realization of his/her personal limitations to everybody's knowledge to complete a task, and how he or she possesses strategies for correcting that situation.

6. Data discussion

The classifications of the data in the two table (1) and (2) above, reveal that metacognitive knowledge is not only about regulation of learning activities but it includes the monitoring of one's cognition, planning activities, awareness of comprehension and task performance, and evaluation of the efficacy of monitoring processes and strategies. During the pre-course according to the data as indicated in table (1) the students have problems due to lack of metacognitive knowledge and experience in speaking and listening of English language which they are learning. This makes the participants to share their feelings in areas of leaning difficulties which falls within personal knowledge of metacognition.

However, the post-course data show significant improvement of the participants whilst at pre-course they lacked enough task and strategy knowledge. Even those who tried to express the both task and strategy knowledge, did it unconsciously without knowing its relevance because metacognition often occurs in situations when learners become aware of the fact that their cognition, their ability to comprehend something especially information about his/her learning as you in the following excerpt in table 3 below:

Student	knowledgeTask	Strategy knowledge
S2		i can overcome this problem. I can read books for learning vocabulary. Besides, to rehearse vocabulary may benefit for improving vocabulary knowledge. Watching English films is helpful for improving speaking and listening i can overcome this problem. I can read books for learning vocabulary. Besides, to rehearse vocabulary may benefit for improving vocabulary knowledge.
S5	In order to improve my speaking skills, I should take part at the lessons. I have to memorize too many word as well as possible and use them actively while I'm speaking	

The level of metacognitive development of the eight participants slightly increases at post-course period as they were able to provide account of both the task and strategy metacognition knowledge. This suggests that second language teaching especially with a curriculum and course books that will expose them to meatacognition development will help them to gain some improvement in second language oral proficiency. The curriculum and course books must contain available learner training that will guide the learners to strategies to improve their speaking and listening ability. This will also go a long way to encourage them to have a desire for effective strategies on their second language learning that will in turn enable the learner to bear the responsibility of their learning process through what Stern (1974) states as learner training and learning strategy.

7. Recommendations and conclusion

Like any metacognition research, the present study offers another window of opportunity for assessment of metacognition knowledge among ESL learner. Having discussed the data in relation to "person" knowledge, "task" knowledge, and "strategy" knowledge, the study recommends the following:

1. Teachers should teach metacognitive knowledge in separate courses or separate units since it is more important that met cognitive knowledge is embedded with usual content –driven lessons in different subjects areas especially at pre-course period.
2. Making the discussion of metcognitive knowledge part of everyday discourse of classroom helps faster a language for students to talk about their own cognition and learning through learner training exercises in course books.
3. Suggesting a handout for students incorporating concrete actions to enable them to take to develop their autonomy when learning a foreign language at post-course period.

These three recommendations will help learners at both pre and post-course level to observe and appreciate the principles of learners' autonomy which are synonymous to learner's empowerment and learner's reflection in appropriate use of learning techniques of the target language.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to present the role of metacognitive knowledge in enhancing learner's autonomy by comparing pre and post-course reports of eight participants as primary data of the study. The findings of the study reveal that metacognitive knowledge is the foundation for independent language learning. The research also helps us to appreciate that learning is a spiral process where new levels of autonomy are acquired as the learners move through new phases of independence; curriculum designers must create enough space for learner training in course books to help learners build their autonomy in order to make good use of their learning experience to overcome weaknesses and enhance their strength in second language learning activities.

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