

Facilitating Second Language Learning Through Metacognitive Practices

Abstract

Meta cognition has emerged as a significant construct in Secondary language or foreign language learning since last two and a half decade. It is said to play an important role in language learning. The manuscript in hand, is an attempt to throw light on various aspect of meta cognition ,such as its components ; meta cognitive knowledge and meta cognitive experiences on the one hand ,notions about language learning ,especially secondary language on the other. The paper deals with the how and the extent of the role metacognition plays in secondary language learning. The study ends with a note of suggestion to the teachers to understand the importance of metacognition in language learning .Teachers can get students involved in activities and processes which could lead them to develop their metacognitive knowledge.

Keywords: Second Language, Metacognitive Knowledge, Metacognitive Experience, Metacognitive Strategies.

Introduction

Metacognition is “Cognition about cognition“, thinking about thinking”, or “knowing about knowing.” It comes from the root word “meta”, meaning beyond. It can take many forms; it includes knowledge about when and how to use particular strategies for learning or problem solving. Learners who are meta cognitively aware know what to do when they don't know what to do; that is, they have strategies for finding out or figuring out what they need to do. The use of meta cognitive strategies ignites one's thinking and can lead to more profound learning and improved performance, especially among learners who are struggling. Understanding and controlling cognitive processes may be one of the most essential skills that classroom teachers can help second language learners develop. It is important that they teach their students meta cognitive skills in addition to cognitive skills.

Language learning, specially second language learning is facilitated purposefully and meaningfully through different approaches and strategies .Meta cognitive strategies, that allow students to plan, control, and evaluate their learning, have the most central role to play in language learning. Rather than focus students' attention solely on learning the language, second language teachers can help students learn to think about what happens during the language learning process, which will lead them to develop stronger learning skills. So cautious teachers should understand and employ the available information on meta cognition and then design curriculum and learning environments accordingly. In this regard knowledge of metacognition, its components and strategies becomes indispensable for language teachers, specially second language learning teachers.

Second Language Learning and Metacognition

The term second language is applied for the language, mostly spoken by an individual, after his/ her mother tongue .Besides Hindi, other languages spoken by more than 25 million Indians are Bengali, Telgu, Tamil, Marathi, Urdu, Gujrati, Kannada, Malyalam, Odia Punjabi and Assamese. Even more Indians speak English than any other language .But by most of the speakers English is spoken as a secondary language ie. their first language is not English. The way secondary language learners are instructed depends upon the proficiency and programmes provided in their schools. Metacognition appears to be a significant contributor to success in second language (SL) and foreign language (FL) learning. This study deals with the role of metacognitive practices in facilitating language learning .It is assumed that Learners who are equipped with metacognitive strategies, are aware of their learning and they know how and when to employ the most relevant strategies to accomplish a given task; they know how to accomplish a particular task in the most effective



Neeta Kaushik
Associate Professor,
Deptt.of Education,
J.V. Jain College,
Saharanpur

way. They plan their learning in advance, monitor their learning during the task performance, and evaluate their learning after task accomplishment Zhang & Goh (2006).

Assumptions About Second Language Learning

Learning secondary language is not an easy task, it requires some special efforts on the part of teacher as well as student. It is not astonishing that some preconceived notions exist about second or foreign language learning. Some say that language can be learnt better if given opportunity of listening and speaking (aural oral approach), while others say that language can be learnt better in simulated situations (linguistic communicative approach). Horwitz (1987) indicated that "many Americans believe strongly that children are better language learners than adults or that second language learning is mainly a matter of learning many new vocabulary words". Some students may hold that free conversation should constitute a large portion of classroom activities, whereas others believe language structure should be the focal point of teaching. Furthermore Cotterall's study (1999) revealed that some students believe that a grasp of language rules is a prerequisite to communicative abilities.

Benson and Lor (1999) stress that if language teachers wish to influence learners' attitudes and behaviours, they will need to address the underlying beliefs on which they are based. At this point it makes sense to investigate what beliefs learners hold or have towards learning a foreign language, whether those beliefs are positive or negative, and further whether learners with positive beliefs are more successful and more frequently and appropriately employ learning strategies than their pessimistic counterparts.

Components of Metacognition

Generally the components of Metacognition are categorized into three main categories: Metacognitive awareness, knowledge and control. Awareness means being aware about the learning strategy one should choose to learn, knowledge means knowledge of the learning process or how one learns under different circumstances and control means evaluating one's own progress of learning. According to Flavell (1979), metacognition comprises both metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive experiences or regulation Hüseysin ÖZ' (2005).

Metacognitive Knowledge

Metacognitive knowledge refers to acquired knowledge about cognitive processes, knowledge that can be used to control cognitive processes. In Flavell's (1979) words "metacognitive knowledge consists primarily of knowledge or beliefs about what factors or variables act and interact in what ways to affect the course and outcome of cognitive enterprises" In other words, the individual's beliefs about oneself and about others as learners and of the requirements involved in the learning process related to metacognitive knowledge acquired through both conscious and unconscious means, and in formal and informal settings. Examples of metacognitive knowledge may be the belief that one is good at reading comprehension but poor at listening

comprehension, that one has to be intelligent to learn a language, that learning English is easier than learning other languages such as French, or that memory strategies are more appropriate for learning vocabulary. Flavell (1979) divides metacognitive knowledge into three categories:

1. Person knowledge (knowledge of person variables),
2. Task knowledge (task variables) and
3. Strategic knowledge (strategy variables) Hüseysin ÖZ' (2005).

Person Knowledge

Person knowledge, or knowledge of person variables, applies to an individual's overall understanding of how people learn and process information. It also refers to one's awareness of his or her 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 or she also learns more quickly through a particular medium. Pointing to the beliefs one has about oneself and others as cognitive processors (learners), Flavell (1979) includes two dimensions of person knowledge: intra individual differences and inter individual differences (knowledge of personal styles, abilities, and so forth, of oneself and of others), and universal of cognition (knowledge of human attributes influencing learning). When applied to second/foreign language learning, examples of these subcategories would be the beliefs that one can learn better by memorizing, that one's classmates are better language learners than him or her, and that factors such as motivation and intelligence play an important role in language learning Victori and Lockhart (1995), Hüseysin ÖZ' (2005).

Task Knowledge

Task knowledge or knowledge of task variables means that one is cognizant of the character of a specific task, how to best manage it, and the likelihood of one's success. Furthermore, one recognizes the degree of complexity involved in executing the task. In other words, this variable can be described as the knowledge that learners have about the information or resources needed for undertaking certain tasks and about the degree of effort required and difficulty involved in performing them for example, the individual knows that reading the passage slowly and closely will increase his/her chances of understanding and retaining the information. Hüseysin ÖZ' (2005)

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). A person selects from his or her repertoire of strategies the most appropriate ones that will promote successful completion of the activity. Hüseysin ÖZ' (2005).

Metacognitive Experiences

"Metacognitive experiences are any conscious cognitive or affective experiences that

accompany and pertain to any intellectual enterprise. An example would be the sudden feeling that you do not understand something another person just said" (Flavell 1979). Metacognitive experiences involve the use of metacognitive strategies and are likely to come up "in situations that stimulate a lot of careful, highly conscious thinking" Flavell (1979), in novel experiences, or "when learning has not been correct or complete" Wenden (1998). These experiences may change one's cognitive goals or add to one's metacognitive knowledge base. Hüseyin ÖZ' (2005)

Metacognitive Strategies for Effective Learning

Metacognitive strategies refer to methods used to help students understand the way they learn ie. the processes designed for students to think about their thinking. They facilitate learning how to learn. One can incorporate these strategies into formal or informal learning experiences. Some of the strategies as suggested by Connie Malamed (2012) are given below.

1. Generally questioning is used as a tool to evaluate the performance of students, but as a metacognitive strategy questioning allows learners to reflect on their own learning processes and strategies. Students are taught to ask four types of metacognitive questions to themselves that are; comprehension questions (whether students are able to comprehend the theme), connection questions (how learners connect their language learning with other previous experiences), strategy questions (what strategies they will like to adopt for their language learning), and reflection questions (why they are able or remain unable in learning).
2. Encourage learners to critically analyze their own assumptions regarding learning strategy and how this may have influenced their learning.
3. Encourage the participation of students in challenging learning experiences. By encouraging students participate in intellectual learning tasks students ability to develop their own strategies is developed.
4. Give opportunities to observe and interact with their mentors .Many people learn best by interacting with peers who are slightly more advanced. Promote experiences where new learners can observe the effective use of a skill and then gain access to the metacognitive strategies of their mentors.
5. Provide opportunities for cooperative learning. Cooperative learning can enhance metacognitive strategies by discussing possible approaches with team members and learning from each other.
6. Teach learners how to think aloud and report their thoughts while performing a difficult task. The think-aloud strategy asks students to say out loud what they are thinking about when reading, solving math problems, or simply responding to questions posed by teachers or other students. An experienced mentor or partner can then point out errors in thinking. Thinking aloud may be beneficial for the second language learners specially in reading comprehension.

7. Self-explanation in writing or speaking can help learners improve their comprehension of a difficult subject, specially of secondary language. Self-Explanation is also known as thinking out loud. It is a technique of asking questions in an effort to further one's understanding about what one's brain is doing. The learner ask questions, work on specific answers, try different solution paths, comment on mistakes, identify changes in approach, and so forth.
8. Do not consider errors as hindrance to learning, on the contrary when learners are given the opportunity to make errors while in training, such as during simulations, it helps them to reflect on the causes of their errors. A majority of language learning students will agree that it takes considerable effort and time to develop fluency in a secondary language and that in the process, mistakes are bound to happen.

Role of Metacognitive Knowledge in Language Learning

According to Flavell (1979) metacognitive knowledge has a significant role in many cognitive activities concerning language use, e.g. oral communication of information, oral persuasion, oral comprehension, reading comprehension, writing ; to language acquisition; and to various types of self-instruction. if language teachers wish to influence learners' attitudes and behaviours, they will need to address the underlying beliefs on which they are based (Wenden, 1987; Wenden, 1999; Benson and Lor, 1999). An understanding of such beliefs allows teachers to develop lessons that more correctly correspond to students' needs. In other words, teachers can use students' metacognitive knowledge as a springboard for more meaningful learning experiences rather than start teaching at an arbitrarily determined point. Wenden (1998) 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 is obvious that metacognitive knowledge as perceived today has influence on language learning. A review of literature generally reveals that it facilitates recall the comprehension of written texts, the completion of new types of learning tasks, the rate of progress in learning and the quality and speed of learners' cognitive engagement, and thus improves learning outcomes (Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1987; Wenden, 1998; Wenden, 1999; Victori, 2004).

Aim of the Study

This study aims at developing second language learning teacher's understanding of the concept and importance of meta cognitive practices so as to enhance the second language learning of the students

Conclusion

The above mentioned studies and researches on metacognition indicate that metacognitive strategy or knowledge is closely related to success in Second/ foreign language learning. Learners who are equipped with metacognitive

strategies, are aware of their learning and they know how and when to employ the most relevant strategies to accomplish a given task; they know how to accomplish a particular task in the most effective way.

It is possible to influence learners' language performance through metacognitive practices. Metacognitive training help learners to achieve improvements in their language performance. Metacognitive instructions can enhance language learners' metacognitive knowledge or strategy usage. Learners' metacognition can be developed through pedagogical interventions. Teachers can get students involved in activities and process-based lessons which could lead them to develop their metacognitive knowledge in language learning. It is very worthwhile for the teachers to understand the importance of metacognition in language learning because it helps learners to become autonomous and self-regulated language learners. Furthermore, in order to enhance students' metacognitive knowledge, teachers should focus on both teaching language content and teaching the ways and processes of learning. An understanding of the components and strategies of metacognition will worthy the second language learning teachers in facilitating the language learning of their students a lot. Thus investigating the metacognitive ways and strategies of pupils will prove to be salubrious to the second language learning teachers.

References

1. Benson, P., and Lor, W. (1999) *Concepts of language and language learning*, *System*, 27 (4), 459-472.
2. Connie Malamed (2012) *Metacognition And Learning: Strategies For Instructional Design* <http://thelearningcoach.com/learning/metacognition-and-learning/>
3. Cotterall, S. (1999) *Key variables in language learning: What do Jearners believe about them?* *System*, 27 (4).493-513
4. Flavell. J. H. (1979) *Metacognition and cognitive monitoring: A new area of cognitive-developmental inquiry*. *American Psychologist*, 34 (10), 906-911.
5. Horwitz, E, K, (1987) *Surveying student beliefs about language Jearning*. In A. Wenden & J, Rubin (Eds.), *Leamer strategies in language leaming* (pp. 119-129). London: Prentice HalL.
6. Hüseyin ÖZ' (2005) *Metacognition in foreign/ second language learning and teaching*. (H. U. *Journal of Education*) 29: 147-156 [2005]
7. Oxford, R. (1990) *Language leaming strategies: What every teaeher should know*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
8. Victori, M. & Lockhart, W. (1995) *Enhancing metacognition in seJf-directed language learning*. *System*. 23 (2), 223-234.
9. Wenden, A. L (1987) *Metacognition: An expanded view on the cognitive abilities of L2 learners*. *Language Leaming*, 37 (4), 573-598.
10. Wenden, A. L (1999). *An introduction to metacognitive knowledge and beliefs in language learning: Beyond the basics*. *System*, 27(4), 435-441

11. Wenden. A. L (1998) *Metacognitive knowledge and language learning*. *Applied Linguistics*, 9 (4), 5] 5-537
12. Zhang, D and Goh, C. C. (2006). *Strategy knowledge and perceived strategy use: Singaporean students' awareness of listening and speaking strategies*. *Language Awareness*, 15(3), 119-199. [Http://dx.doi.org/10.2167/ la342 .0](http://dx.doi.org/10.2167/ la342 .0)