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ESP STUDENTS' METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS DEPLOYED IN MAKING A LANGUAGE LEARNING PLAN

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Abstract. *Metacognition is a higher order thinking process that presupposes active control over cognitive learning processes. While the teachers should address learning issues in the classroom, the learners ought to be geared toward making conscious decisions about what they can do to improve their learning, especially in terms of planning the learning process. According to research, drawing upon established theories of language acquisition and pedagogical practice, metacognition enables students to employ, retrieve and deploy a particular strategy that has been taught in a particular context and subsequently employ it automatically in other contexts. Thus, students become both aware of their preferred learning strategies, which are efficient for the given task, and more responsible for meeting their learning outcomes. The aim of this study is to explore ESP students' metacognitive awareness employed in making their language learning plan. A questionnaire was administered to 85 students of Law Faculty in Kosovska Mitrovica studying English for Specific Purposes. Therefore, the role of metacognition in planning learning activities and fulfilling learning objectives is investigated. Possible pedagogical implications include affecting ESP instruction, as well as providing ESP students not only with insight, but also with practical knowledge about planning the language learning process.*

Key words: *ESP, language learning strategies, metacognition, language learning plan*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition requires strategic planning and diligent effort in a complex endeavor that involves a myriad of cognitive, socio-cultural, and affective factors. In order to navigate this intricate and multifaceted process successfully, learners must develop a structured plan that encompasses various linguistic skills and competencies. A language learning plan delineates the objectives, strategies, and resources necessary for achieving proficiency in a target language.

Metacognitive awareness in language learning is concerned with being aware of one's learning processes, including strengths and weaknesses, and being able to plan, monitor and evaluate one's learning. It is exploited within the scope of metacognitive strategies, which are encompassed by a broad concept of metacognition. Moreover, metacognitive strategies are a part of language learning strategies, which are, in turn, a sub-branch of learning strategies as a wider concept referring to both mental and communicative processes learners deploy in the course of learning a second or foreign language (Nunan, 1999: 310, Nunan 2003).

The aim of this study is to inspect metacognitive awareness deployed in making a language learning plan by means of a questionnaire. The instrument has been administered to 75 students studying English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at Law Faculty in Kosovska Mitrovica, in an endeavor to come up with results that would affect ESP course design as a possible practical implication of the study. Thus, this paper also aims to elucidate the essential components of an effective language learning plan in order to guide ESP students through the process of creating personalized language learning plans tailored to their individual needs and learning goals.

2. METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES

In the most general sense, language learning strategies can be defined as specific steps, operations, actions, techniques, or behaviors employed by second language learners to help them improve and enhance their language learning. They are problem-oriented tools that facilitate the transfer of information into long-term memory, as well as the development of communicative competence and the activation of four language skills. Accordingly, this concept is related to learner-centered approach, learner's autonomy, and self-directed language learning, whereas metacognitive awareness is linked to increased self-efficacy, motivation, and engagement in language learning (Cohen, 2011). As a result, language learners who consciously deploy and orchestrate effective strategies, adapting them to the learning task, are metacognitively aware of their strategy use. They are regarded as strategic learners that possess metacognitive knowledge about themselves as learners, i.e., their own learning approaches, and self-reflection, i.e. thinking about the learning process and one's attainments during the process.

The study of language learning strategies was initiated by the studies of good and bad learners, which originated in the 1970s (Rubin 1975, Rubin, Thompson, 1982). While Rubin describes them as techniques or tools students use to acquire knowledge (Rubin 1975: 43), Cohen (1998) defines learning strategies as processes consciously selected by learners, emphasizing that the element of choice plays an essential role in defining this concept. Furthermore, O'Malley and Chamot (1990: 1) emphasize the mental nature of strategic behavior and define strategies as "the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information". In that sense, Oxford asserts that learning strategies are both "operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information" and "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford 1990: 8).

O'Malley and Chamot claim that all language learning strategies can be categorized into cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective (O'Malley, Chamot 1990), while Rebecca Oxford divides them into direct strategies (memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies) and indirect ones (metacognitive, social, and affective strategies), which are depicted in the

most widely utilized questionnaire for investigating language learning strategies called Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) that she created (Oxford 1990, 1992).

Whereas learning strategies are related to both cognitive and metacognitive processes, the concept of metacognition is used an umbrella term for metacognitive strategies, metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive awareness, and several other terms commonly associated with metacognition (Veenman et al. 2006: 3-4). Cognitive strategies include cognitive (mental) operations of language processing, such as mechanical strategies of repeating, whereas metacognitive strategies presuppose active control over the cognitive processes engaged in learning. In addition, O'Malley and Chamot (1990: 99) underscore that metacognitive strategies may include consciously directing attention to the learning task, self-evaluation appraising the success, and shortcomings in the learning effort. Hence, metacognitive awareness is conscious awareness of one's knowledge and the ability to reflect on what one knows, allowing a learner to plan, regulate and monitor learning (Grabe, Stoller 2011: 289). Since metacognition is viewed as knowledge about cognition and the regulation of cognitive activities, which consists of metacognitive knowledge, inclusive of knowledge about task performance and strategy use, and metacognitive regulation, O'Malley and Chamot (1990: 99) elaborate that knowledge about cognition generally refers to implementation of thoughts about learners' cognitive operations involved in language performance, whereas regulation of cognition comprises "planning, monitoring, and evaluation of a learning or problem-solving activity". Accordingly, metacognitive strategies are problem-oriented operations that help students understand the way they learn. These are "learning strategies that encourage learners to focus on the mental process underlying their language learning." (Nunan 1999: 310).

Effective strategy training requires both cognitive and metacognitive strategies, as students with metacognitive approach to learning would be able to review their progress, accomplishment, and learning directions (O'Malley et al. 1985). In that respect, metacognitive strategies are used to monitor language learning processes as cognitive mechanics, and to enable students to effectively plan and regulate these processes within specific problem-solving tasks. Consequently, they have been oriented towards selective attention, including focusing on special aspects of learning tasks, planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's learning, such as checking comprehension in receptive or productive language activity (O'Malley, Chamot 1990: 46). Metacognitive strategies, therefore, enable learners to plan and prepare their own learning during receptive or productive language activity, control and monitor the strategies they have chosen, knowing when and how to use and combine them, assess their own repertoire of strategies or their orchestration.

Apart from being a part of individual approach to language learning, metacognitive strategy use can be integrated into instruction and taught within strategy training (Oxford 1990), or strategies-based approach (Cohen 1998). Such strategic intervention would provide a model of efficient strategy implementation. In that sense, studies, such as O'Malley et al. (1985), Anderson (2002), and Rasekh and Ranjbary (2003), assert that metacognition enables students to employ, retrieve and deploy a particular strategy that has been taught in a particular context. The main objective of such attempts is to allow students to become aware of efficient learning strategies, and more responsible for meeting their learning objectives, which produces numerous benefits in language learning. As a result of strategy training, the given strategy or combination of strategies, can subsequently be employed automatically, or subconsciously, becoming applicable to other contexts.

2.1. Language learning plan

A language learning plan is a systematic framework designed to facilitate language acquisition. It outlines goals and strategies learners employ to enhance their linguistic proficiency over a specified period of time. A well-crafted language learning plan encompasses various dimensions of language acquisition, including vocabulary acquisition, grammar comprehension, fluency, listening comprehension, reading proficiency, or writing skills. Additionally, it takes into account learners' individual learning styles, preferences, and motivations, thereby fostering a personalized and adaptive approach to language learning.

2.1.1. Components of a language learning plan

Creating a language learning plan, as a structured approach to achieving language proficiency goals, includes several steps, such as setting clear long-term and short-terms goals, inclusive of breaking down language learning objectives into manageable tasks, regarding an anticipated language task or situation selecting linguistic resources, choosing learning tools or determining targeted language elements and functions, designing and establishing a study schedule (Oxford 1990: 139), as well as integrating assessment mechanisms that encompass restructuring, reorganizing, or reassessment of the original plan.

Therefore, metacognitive awareness, broadly involving metacognitive knowledge (understanding of one's cognitive processes) and metacognitive regulation (control and adaptation of these processes) in its broadest sense, profoundly influences each step of this process. Thus, regulation of learning, as distinguished from knowledge about learning, entails planning (predicting outcomes, scheduling, and trial and error), along with monitoring and checking outcomes (O'Malley, Chamot, 1990: 106).

According to Oxford (1990: 138-139, 156-160) metacognitive strategies are divided into creating one's learning, arranging and planning it, and evaluating it, while arranging and planning one's learning touches the following areas: finding out about language learning, organizing the schedule and environment, setting goals and objectives, considering task purposes, planning for tasks, and seeking chances to practice the language.

The first step in crafting a language learning plan is to establish clear and achievable goals. These goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) (Doran, 1891). Whether the aim is to achieve conversational fluency, pass an exam or enhance career prospects, clearly defined goals provide learners with a sense of direction and motivation.

Conducting a thorough needs analysis is essential for identifying the linguistic requirements and priorities of the learner. This involves assessing proficiency levels in different language skills, as well as determining specific areas of strengths and weaknesses. By understanding their linguistic needs, learners can tailor their language learning plan to effectively address areas requiring improvement. In addition, language skills are also taken into account when deciding the purpose of a language task, which involves purposeful listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Oxford, 1990: 139).

Effective language learning plans incorporate a diverse range of learning strategies to accommodate individual preferences and learning styles. These strategies may include vocabulary acquisition techniques (e.g., mechanical repetition, mnemonics), grammar practice exercises, conversational practice with native speakers, which Oxford (1990: 139) depicts as seeking out or creating opportunities to practice the language in naturalistic situations, or the use of technology-mediated resources, such as language learning apps, online tests and online courses.

Selecting appropriate learning resources is crucial for the success of a language learning plan. The resources may include textbooks, audiovisual materials, online interactive platforms, language exchange programs, or authentic cultural materials (e.g., films, newspaper articles). Learners should evaluate the quality, relevance, and accessibility of resources to ensure they align with their learning objectives and preferences.

Regular assessment and monitoring of progress are also integral components of a language learning plan. This involves setting milestones or checkpoints to evaluate proficiency levels and adjust learning strategies accordingly. Progress monitoring may entail self-assessment through quizzes, exams, or language proficiency tests, as well as seeking feedback from teachers, peers or language tutors.

3. METHODOLOGY

The role of metacognition in planning learning activities is exploited by virtue of a questionnaire that has been created by the author of this paper, relying heavily on Vocabulary Learning Questionnaire, developed by Zhao (2009).

The instrument is divided in three parts: a) demographic data on respondents' age, gender and number of years they have been studying English as a Second Language; b) 6 statements marked on the five-point Likert scale intended to measure ESP students' metacognitive awareness; c) 11 statements designed to measure the frequency of certain actions involved in planning the learning process. According to five-point Likert scale, students' responses range from 1= I never use to 5= I always use. The intended purpose is to find out how students reflect on developing and implementing the language learning plan as a metacognitive strategy.

The aim of this study is to explore ESP students' metacognitive awareness employed in making their language learning plan by means of a questionnaire that has been administered to 85 students of Law Faculty in Kosovska Mitrovica in electronic form (via Google Forms). ESP students have reported on their strategic behavior for the purpose of mapping their self-perception on strategy use, as well as considering the creation and application of their language learning plan as one of metacognitive strategies.

The following data are gathered about the respondents who participated in the research. There have been 38 male and 47 female students. Their average age is 20 (AM= 20.00, SD=0.66), and students have been learning English for approximately 12 years (AM= 11.97, SD=1.54).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the purpose of this paper, descriptive statistical analysis is carried out to determine the frequency of strategy use. Since descriptive statistics, as an established tool is implemented to analyze the compiled data, arithmetic mean (AM) and standard deviation (SD) were calculated, and the obtained results presented in Table 1 that shows reported strategy use by ESP students as participated in the research.

Table 1 Descriptive values of metacognitive strategies

PART I Metacognitive awareness	AM	SD
I regularly reflect on my language learning progress and adjust my strategies accordingly.	3.86	0.80
I monitor my own comprehension during language learning activities (e.g., reading, listening), and regulate when I don't understand.	3.84	0.75
I use a variety of strategies (e.g., flashcards, language apps, language exchange) to enhance my language skills.	3.80	0.78
I set specific language learning goals that are measurable and achievable.	3.74	0.97
I seek feedback from teachers, peers, or language partners to improve my language skills.	3.67	0.70
I keep a language learning journal or log to record my thoughts, progress, and areas for improvement.	3.65	0.61
PART II Formulating a language learning plan	**AM**	**SD**
I practice all language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) as a part of my language learning plan.	3.89	0.76
I turn to teachers and colleagues for help in implementing the learning plan.	3.85	0.79
I select materials (e.g., textbooks, online resources, videos) that are appropriate for my language learning goals.	3.84	0.83
I'm considering how to realize my learning plan.	3.80	0.84
I regularly review and revise my language learning plan to ensure it remains effective and aligned with my goals.	3.80	0.74
My plan is detailed, including a deadline for completing all tasks.	3.75	0.79
I create a structured study schedule with dedicated time for language learning activities.	3.73	0.90
I check if there is a mismatch between the current situation and the goals set in the plan	3.72	0.78
I know when to use certain learning strategies and how to use them.	3.71	0.87
I have a short-term plan and a long-term learning plan.	3.69	0.60
I check if the learning plan is implemented on time.	3.66	0.88

Based on the questionnaire administered, as shown in Table 1, the respondents exhibit a higher degree of metacognition. The most frequently used strategies are "I regularly reflect on my language learning progress and adjust my strategies accordingly" (AM=3.86, SD=0.80), and "I monitor my own comprehension during language learning activities (e.g., reading, listening), and regulate when I don't understand" (AM=3.84, SD=0.85). These results indicate that ESP students are metacognitively aware of effective strategy use, which also suggests a satisfactory degree of metacognition displayed by respondents. On the other hand, the least frequently used strategy is "I check if the learning plan is implemented on time" (AM=3.66, SD=0.88), which also suggest the overall moderate use of metacognitive strategies, based on students' reports.

It has also been determined that students often strategically opt for the use of a wide variety of strategies (AM=3.84), in the course of administrating a language learning plan and managing the learning process.

Since the strategy with lowest standard deviation is "I have a short-term plan and a long-term learning plan" (SD=0.60), it indicates the lowest level of discrepancies in students' answers.

The results of this research are in alignment with surveys that have found varying levels of metacognitive strategy awareness, where ESP students deploy a wide variety of strategies, such as goal-setting, self-monitoring, and self-reflection (Stanojević Gocić et al. 2023).

Since the results show that metacognitive strategies are moderately used by ESP students, they could be deemed as satisfactory. However, several steps could be undertaken in order to improve and develop students' metacognitive awareness and formulating a language learning plan, inclusive of modeling and applying effective strategies, developing short-term and long-term language learning plans in the classroom, promoting self-directed language learning, providing appropriate strategic input in a form of strategy-based instruction, developing strategic competence, as well as explicit teaching of strategies that proved to be more efficient than the implicit one (Chamot 2004). These steps would subsequently result in skill transfer, active learning, individualization, autonomous learning, self-regulation and self-reflection, as well as the application in real-world contexts. Thus, providing a set of guidelines, explanations and suggestion is an efficient strategic option (Rubin, Thompson, 1982).

5. CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Strategic area is a part of both individual and instructional language learning approaches. However, students with metacognitive knowledge use information to overcome various problems of learning. Since the use of language learning strategies by is directly linked to students' success, strategic input or strategy-based instruction, along with developing students' strategic competence is one of the means of mastering language skills efficiently and effectively (Stanojević Gocić, Janković 2019). Its key aspects include explicit teaching of specific strategies as problem-solving techniques, metacognition used to supervise and adjust strategies as needed, skill transfer utilized to transfer skills to other learning situations, active learning and engagement in implementing the strategies that have been taught, feedback from teachers, reflection as a form of self-assessment, and implementation in various contexts. In general, if students are provided with adequate strategic input, they should subsequently learn how to develop their language learning strategies, raise their metacognitive awareness to achieve better results, and enhance overall attainments in language acquisition.

Accordingly, this paper has provided a comprehensive framework for designing language learning plans, informed by current research and pedagogical practices. Crafting an effective language learning plan requires careful consideration of various factors, including goal setting, needs analysis, learning strategies, resource selection, progress monitoring and adjusting strategies. Thus, several opportunities and tools can be exploited in that sense. Passing an exam and improving speaking skills can be seen as short-term goals, whereas career advancement and fluent communication are usually viewed as long-term aims, both of which might be achieved through self-study, different courses, practicing with native speakers, or the use of resources, such as textbooks, language apps, online dictionaries, language courses, online test with answers that provide adequate feedback, etc. Additionally, critical thinking, problem-solving and adaptability in learning are encouraged.

Therefore, the finding of this research could be utilized by ESP teacher to promote and develop metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive regulation of language acquisition, which has been prioritized in contemporary methodology. Its possible pedagogical implications include affecting an ESP course design and providing ESP students with not only insight, but also practical knowledge with regard to planning their language learning. Practical implications also indicate the results may be used to upgrade the process of ESP teaching and learning, as students could benefit from explicit instruction and explicit knowledge about metacognitive strategies in a form of strategic input.

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METAKOGNITIVNA SVEST STUDENATA ENGLESKOG JEZIKA STRUKE PRIMENJENA U IZRADI PLANA UČENJA JEZIKA

Metakognicija je proces razmišljanja višeg reda koji pretpostavlja aktivnu kontrolu nad kognitivnim procesima učenja. Dok nastavnici treba da se bave pitanjima učenja u učionici, učenici treba da budu usmereni na procese razmišljanja o donošenju svesnih odluka o tome šta mogu da urade da poboljšaju svoje učenje, posebno u smislu planiranja procesa učenja. Prema postojećim istraživanjima, oslanjajući se na utvrđene teorije usvajanja jezika i pedagošku praksu, metakognicija omogućava studentima da koriste, pronađu i primene određenu strategiju čijoj su implementaciji podučavani u određenom kontekstu. Strategija se nakon toga koristi automatski i može biti primenljiva u drugim kontekstima. Glavni cilj je omogućiti studentima da postanu svesni preferiranih strategija učenja koje su efikasne za dati zadatak, i da im pomogne da postanu odgovorniji za ispunjavanje ishoda učenja. U ovom radu istražujemo metakognitivnu svest studenata engleskog jezika struke koja se koristi u izradi plana učenja jezika. Upitnik je popunilo 85 studenata Pravnog fakulteta u Kosovskoj Mitrovici koji izučavaju engleski jezik struke. Rezultati pokazuju da je značajna uloga metakognicije u planiranju aktivnosti i ispunjavanju zadatih ciljeva učenja. Pedagoške implikacije istraživanja uključuju uticaj na nastavu engleskog jezika struke, jer pružaju studentima ne samo uvid već i praktično znanje vezano za planiranje procesa učenja jezika.

 Ključne reči: *engleski jezik struke, strategije učenja jezika, metakognicija, plan učenja jezika*