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METACOGNITIVE STRATEGY INSTRUCTION FOR LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREGN LANGUAGE

Metacognition is a term that was coined by Flavell in 1970 and the argument about its definition hasn't been settled yet. In a language learning context this means knowing about oneself as a learner, in other words, self-awareness of a learner. Metacognition can be defined as having strategies for figuring out what to do and controlling cognitive processes. Metacognitive strategies, that allow students to plan, control, and evaluate their learning can help students learn to think about what happens during the language learning process, which will lead them to develop stronger learning skills. This is one of the most essential skills that classroom teachers can help second language learners develop.

However, many teaching situations and teaching materials do not encourage this kind of reflection and therefore do not contribute to the development of metacognitive awareness and learners are not able to uncover the implicit without some kind of prompt or help. It is, therefore, the lot of the teacher to add this missing dimension.

Metacognition combines various attended thinking and reflective processes. It can be divided into five primary components:

1) preparing and planning for learning;

2) selecting and using learning strategies;

3) monitoring strategy use;

4) orchestrating various strategies;

5) evaluating strategy use and learning.

Preparation means that students are thinking about what they need to accomplish and how they intend to accomplish it. Teachers can promote this reflection by being explicit about the particular learning goals. The more clearly articulated the goal, the easier it will be for the learners to measure their progress. A student might set a goal of mastering vocabulary for himself in order to be answer the comprehension questions at the end of the chapter.

At the stage of selection of learning strategies metacognitive instruction should explicitly

teach students a variety of learning strategies and also when to use them. For example, when students encounter new vocabulary they can be taught the strategy of word analysis or the use of context clues. Instructions teaching students how to skim for comprehension, read for detail, or pick out the main idea may be included.

Once they have selected and begun to implement specific strategies, they need to ask themselves periodically whether or not they are still using those strategies as intended. For example, students may be taught that an effective writing strategy involves thinking about their audience and their purpose in writing but they should pause occasionally while writing to ask themselves questions about what they are doing, whether or not they are providing the right amount of background information for their intended audience.

Knowing how to orchestrate the use of more than one strategy is an important metacognitive skill. The ability to make associations among the various strategies available is a major distinction between strong and weak second language learners. The teacher needs to show students how to recognize when one strategy isn't working and how to move on to another.

Evaluating strategy use means reflecting through the whole cycle of learning and answering to the questions: Was the goal I set to accomplish good enough? What strategies am I using? How well am I using them? What else could I do? Evaluation can be conducted in a form of learning logs in which students recorded the results of their learning strategies applications, checklists of strategies used, and open-ended questionnaires in which students expressed their opinions about the usefulness of particular strategies.

There's a climate of opinion that metacognition is not reduced to cognitive self-awareness in terms of language acquisition. It can also imply social and cultural awareness. Involving students in collaborative activities provides a new understanding of how to behave in class, towards the teacher and towards each other; to make concessions; and to learn to interact and cooperate together in activities. Such activities enable them to discover similarities and differences between themselves and other people and to see these in a positive light.

Metacognition is not a linear process that moves from preparing and planning to evaluating. More than one metacognitive process may be occurring at a time during a second language learning task. This highlights once again how the orchestration of various strategies is a vital component of second language learning. Working in this way means that a teacher should be prepared to take a few minutes away from the content of a foreign language lesson to focus on the process. Strategy training should be somewhat individualized, as different students prefer or need certain strategies for particular tasks.

Once internalized, metacognition strategies can be generalized and applied to new academic tasks; and students learn academic language easier via learning strategies. At a final stage students can be encouraged to devise their own individual combinations and interpretations of metacognitive learning strategies. They were asked to consider not only vocabulary learning but also other domains of language learning.

The empirical evidence indicates that explicit metacognitive strategies instruction has positive impact on the lexical knowledge development of EFL students. It helps teachers in accomplishing their challenging task of teaching English to learners who have little exposure to language. Students become more aware of their preferred learning strategies and more responsible for meeting their own objectives.