

THE USE OF LEARNERS' DIARIES: DOES IT WORK TO ENGAGE STUDENTS' METACOGNITION IN LEARNING IF CLAUSES?

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Abstract: Metacognitive strategies are expected as 'higher order executive skills' which enable college students to approach learning systematically and effectively by using the elements of planning, monitoring and evaluating. This study is conducted to investigate whether or not metacognitive strategies can affect the development of structural knowledge of students. To reflect how the students use these strategies, learning diary can lead the learners to strategy use. Twenty-one participants of third semester students were involved. Nine of them were selected to be probed intensively for their metacognitive habits in learning If Clauses. Then, they were divided into three groups according to the level of students' progress and their mid test score. The first group was assumed as novice learners, the second group was categorized as medium level students and the last group was presumed as expert learners. This study revealed that expert learners were better diarist in documenting what they did when learning. The medium level students also indicated that their capability in realizing the use of their cognition was up and down. They were good at evaluating their shortcoming and monitoring some progress, but they were poor at planning and modifying strategies. Meanwhile, the novice learners less reflected how they learned on their documentation. It could be illustrated that they did not have any motivation to plan their learning, evaluate and monitor their learning.

Keywords: Learners' diaries, learning grammar, metacognitive

INTRODUCTION

Ideally, English as a foreign language should be taught by the teacher who has had excellent English proficiency. However, having teachers with low level of English proficiency has become a big issue in teaching English as a foreign language in some countries included Indonesia. A lot of English teachers in Indonesia have poor ability in English (Nuh, 2012). It could happen since the initial ability of the teachers when they are in the university is miserable (Setiadi, 2012). Those problems might be influenced by the internal factors from the students themselves, for instance their motivation, learning styles, and learning strategies (Shih, 1998).

University students are categorized as adult learners who enhance their ability to learn and understand information when they can monitor their own thinking. As children mature, they are assumed to become more aware of their own feelings, thoughts, and preferences. Hence, they are suggested to use their metacognition in their learning process. Therefore, it is called as

crucial ingredient to become good learners. Then, metacognitive strategies are presumed to engage their learning process more easily, more effectively, and more efficiently. Using these strategies, the students are demanded to set their goals, to monitor their progress and to appraise their process of learning. In the other words, the use of metacognitive strategies reflects the learners' realization about their responsibility in their learning.

Since metacognitive strategies are expected as 'higher order executive skills' which enable the first semester students to approach learning systematically and effectively by using the elements of planning, monitoring and evaluating, metacognitive strategies might affect the development of structural knowledge of students. To reflect how the students use these strategies, learning diary can lead the learners to strategy use. Using learning diary will provide language learners with opportunities to boost the learners' autonomously review the experience, reach what they have got and plan what to do better.

In the light of the need to overcome that the students have less metacognitive awareness, the following questions are proposed: 1) How do the learner diaries, as application of metacognitive strategies, foster the third semester students of English Education Department of the School of Teacher Training Program UHAMKA 2018-2019 academic year to plan their learning? 2) How do the learner diaries, as application of metacognitive strategies, foster the third semester students of English Education Department of the School of Teacher Training Program UHAMKA 2018-2019 academic year to monitor their learning?, and 3) How do the learner diaries, as application of metacognitive strategies, foster the third semester students of English Education Department of the School of Teacher Training Program UHAMKA 2018-2019 academic year to evaluate their learning?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grammar

All languages have grammar, and each language has its own grammar. Jackson (2005) states that grammar is the means by which we structure the language that we speak and write. He explains that grammar applies the rules that direct written and spoken language. It is also supported by Huegli (2008) that grammar is the system of rules by which we form words and sentences. Greenbaum (2002) adds that grammar refers to the set of rules that allow us to combine words in our language into larger units. It can be inferred that grammar is the rules about how words change their form and combine with other words to make sentences.

In portraying the grammar of a language, one is essentially trying to explain why speakers recognize certain forms as being "correct" but reject others as being "incorrect." Some people believe that people who speak the same language correctly are able to communicate because they know the grammar system of that language. Meanwhile, when one is speaking of the acceptability of the form itself, even if it is not grammatically correct, another can still understand it perfectly well. Hence, it demonstrates that there are two very different conceptions of grammar role, prescriptive and descriptive grammar. DeCapua (2008) asserts that prescriptive grammar is the grammar taught in school, discussed in newspaper and magazine columns on language, or mandated by language academies such as those found in Spain or France. It views

grammar as a collection of rules that must be learned in order to use language “correctly.” The correct rules must often be learned and practiced, and may at times be contrary to what even educated native speakers use in formal language contexts. In contrast to prescriptive rules, Kroeger (2005) defines that descriptive grammar rules, describe how adult native speakers actually use their language. Descriptive grammar, unlike prescriptive grammar, does not say, “This is correct” or “This is wrong.” In short, prescriptive grammar is the rules of language system when one thinks how another ought to say correctly while descriptive grammar is a set of rules that describe how the speaker actually use the language.

For teachers of English foreign language learners, a knowledge of how English works is notable. Teachers should be able to talk about aspects of grammar how sentences are constructed, the types of words and word groups that make up sentences, and the functions of these words and word groups within sentences and in larger contexts. As Radford indicates that in traditional grammar, words are assigned to grammatical categories (called parts of speech) on the basis of their semantic properties (i.e. meaning), morphological properties (i.e. the range of different forms they have) and syntactic properties (i.e. word-order properties relating to the positions they can occupy within sentences.) Grammar may also be used more broadly to cover all aspects of language structure. Sometimes the term between grammar and syntax are interchangeable. Moore defines on his site that the study of how words are organised into phrases, clauses and sentences is usually referred to as syntax. Words, phrases, clauses and sentences are all built the concept of construction and relevant to all areas of grammar. Since this research will probe on how the learners grasp using clauses, the writer administers more about clauses.

Metacognitive Strategy

Foreign language acquisition is a complex process that includes both obtaining information and how to employ it. Most learners believe by only attending the class they will learn the language. It can be inferred that they will not achieve their goals. If the learners are aware of the fact that it is important to perform actively in the class, to get involved and take part in every activity, they will have a better opportunity to be successful learners. William and Burden (1997) suggests that English foreign language learners should be aware of the process of their learning, that is, the comprehension of both what is learned and why it should be learned. Cohen, cited by Hurd, (2008) also points out that knowledge of how to learn a foreign language is enhanced if instruction of content is accompanied with strategy training. How students learn how to learn, how they know what they have learned and how to lead their future learning are all points of the concept of metacognition.

Metacognition often happens in situations when learners notice about their cognition, their ability to comprehend something that has failed them, for instance, they are not able to understand some information they need to know, or a formulation of something. Therefore, they have to work to do to make sense of it. In this case, the metacognitive strategies can be understood as the learners’ realization and the learners’ process strategies for correcting situation.

In addition, metacognition is expected to aid the learners to enrich their knowledge of the learning process and makes them become autonomous learners. It is supported by Hauck (2005) that learners who have developed their metacognitive awareness are likely to become more autonomous language learners. When a learner realizes his individual learning, he can take

measures which will enable him to process the information more efficiently. For example, if a student knows that his memorizing ability is poor, he will also be aware of the necessity to solve this by note-taking and studying the notes he wrote.

Metacognitive strategies are considered as the most essential ones in developing learners' skills and it was emphasized by O'Malley et al. (1990) that learners without metacognitive approaches have no direction or ability to monitor their progress, accomplishments, and future learning directions. Similarly, Chamot (1990) points out those less successful language learners do not have the metacognitive knowledge needed to select appropriate strategies.

According to Brown (2004), metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring of comprehension or production while it is taking place, and self-evaluation after the learning has been completed. O'Malley (1990) also states that metacognitive strategies are divided into three groups:

1. Planning. It includes advance organizer at a general level. Learners review before they go into the class and try to arrange the appropriate conditions for learning. The students make a plan of what they have to do and organize their thoughts and activities in order to engage in complex tasks. This preparation helps them to complete more complex tasks than would otherwise be possible. Organizing or planning is helpful before starting any large assignment that can be divided into smaller parts in order to make it more controllable. Pemberton presents a series of steps that one can follow, from the first step of thinking about what students need to improve right through to evaluating their progress.
 - a) Think about what specific areas of Grammar students need to improve
 - b) Prioritise the areas students need to improve
 - c) Set learning goals
 - d) Choose learning material and strategies that suit them
 - e) Evaluate their progress
2. Monitoring. It includes checking one's performance as one expresses. Learners will question whether what they express make sense or not in order to check the clarity of their understanding or expression in the target language. Students are aware how well a task is progressing and notice when comprehension breaks down. Here is the process the students should do in monitoring their learning.
 - a) Reflect on the learning process, keeping track of what works and what doesn't work for them.
 - b) Monitor their own learning by questioning and self-testing
 - c) Provide their own feedback
 - d) Keep concentration and motivation high
3. Evaluating. It is checking how well one is doing against one's own standards whether he or she needs some help for the next time. Deciding for themselves how well they acquired some material or performed on a task helps students categorize their strengths and weaknesses so they can do even better the next time. Assessing how well a strategy works for them helps students decide which strategies they prefer to use on particular tasks.

Hence, metacognitive strategies refers to strategies used by learner to emerge their awareness of their own knowledge and their ability to understand, control, and manipulate their own cognitive processes which are planning, monitoring and evaluating. On the other words through the metacognitive strategies, students are demanded to know what they know about how they

process information, what difficulties belong to them and what they know about the nature of strategy or how that strategy can be used effectively for them.

To know about how they use their metacognition skills, there is supposed to be an aid which can reflect the process on realizing them. Some tools that are often used to attest them are learning logs, learning journals and learning diaries. This study illustrates the metacognitive strategies used by the students through diary keeping.

Learning Diaries

Thinking about students' learning helps them to clarify their thoughts and emotions. Reflection also assists them to focus and become active to participate in their development as an independent and critical learner. However, all mental processes can't be observed directly. Hence, there are some personal reflections, learning journals, and learning diaries, that can be used as a record of students' progress throughout their study and will help them to discover the strategies and processes that work well for them.

The terms journals and diaries are often used interchangeably in the literature. Both journals and diaries aim to reflect introspective learning experience. The essential difference pertaining is whether that reflection is public or private. The term diary tends to refer that only an author who can read his or her own. In contrast, if there is an interaction between the writer and the reader who may write responses to the writer on a regular basis, it is called as a journal. Nonetheless, although diaries are written as private, no one else will read them, for research purpose, the diarist will often get any response from the researcher.

According to Jepsen *et al* (1989), cited from Rainer, diaries are well-known media for private, personal reflection. He also describes the general intention of keeping a diary as the personal development of the author. The idea is to understand oneself better, to obtain greater self-confidence, to feel more integrated and balanced, to discover one's own patterns of behavior and so forth. On the other hand, diaries are considered a useful means for personal reflection and development.

One way to improve language learners' metacognitive awareness is to have them reflect upon their language learning processes regularly by keeping learner diaries. Learner diaries are expected to help learners become more aware of their language learning. Oxford (1996) from Nunan asserts that learning diaries are important introspective tools which help learners gain confidence, make sense of difficult material, and generate original insights, and they are also excellent sources for self-assessment since they are excellent sources for the exploration of affective, social and cognitive variables.

The advantages of diaries are assumed to be more reliable providing the data suited for looking at individual learner factors, and able to gather thoughtful and reflective data on acquisition process. In the light of assumption, Allwright and Bailey (1991) define that a learner's diary may reveal aspects of the classroom experience that observation never have captured, and that no one would have thought of including as questions on a questionnaire. By reflecting learning strategies on diaries, it is assumed the responsibility for their learning process by taking active part in all the decisions concerning their foreign language acquisition. As keeping reflective diaries in which one reflects on his/her most important experiences is important, this research is to adopt a format and approach which suits one's personal style and which helps him or her to learn.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive design to identify, analyse and describe how adult learners use their metacognition skills in learning grammar. Since the purpose of the study is to inquire how learner diary, as a tool of implementing metacognitive strategies on learning If-Clauses, influences the group of students' behavior in their learning, a case study, the type used, is chosen to carry out as a framework for collecting data in a class of Advanced English Structure, a subject lectured for third semester students of 2020-2021 Academic Year at UHAMKA, Jakarta Indonesia. The identified description could then be categorised into individual motivational change, different goals, recognition of strategy use, their awareness in monitoring their strengths and their weaknesses, and the solution they take over their problem.

In the classroom, teacher as the researcher fostered students' metacognitive skills by regularly incorporating curricular activities that require learners to access and manipulate that knowledge base. Designing questions that examine and assess learning strategies is one way to accomplish such goals. For instance, a teacher will ask students the following questions: "Why is this activity or concept significant?; When do you attempt a new task, what do you need to think about first?; What should you do if you get stuck?; How does context affect the skills you utilize?; How do you know if you've succeeded in an attempt and; What have you learned and how can it be transferred to other situations?"

This study was carried out in an EFL class where the researcher was the teacher. The students received 100 minutes of Advanced English Structure class for 8 weeks. Students were taught explicitly what each individual strategy, the context or situation in which the strategy should be used or applied, and how to employ the strategy. After learning session, participants were asked to write a diary to record the session, addressing whatever factors they found to be relevant to their experience. Prior to beginning the study, participants were provided with diary training to assist them with this task. During the study, participants were instructed to collect three diaries, according to the topics they learned, and once to arrange an interview.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Many previous studies have shown that reflective diaries are useful tools in facilitating reflection and reflective learning. The nature of diary writing itself requires the writer to think back on events taken place and provides opportunity to express personal's thoughts. Used in the academic context, reflective diaries provide opportunity for the students not only to think back on the learning activities, to explicitly and objectively identify what they have learned, but more crucially, to relate what they have learned, evaluate their practice in light of theories, and formulate action plans for improvement. The nature of a diary also allows students to find out and express their learning in a personal way, a learning that makes personal meaning.

Reflective diaries, as a personal task, or as part of a portfolio, could be implemented as a learning and an assessment tool, which facilitation and assessment of reflection could be effectively achieved. The followings are the general discussion what the writer could describe from what she had obtained after conducting the study:

Group 1

From the diaries of this group, it was found that these students gradually focused more on language content and learning processes rather than the language use and their mental process. The learners from this group did not have any concrete goals to set up their learning. Even if they had some difficulties, they still expected the teacher's defense rather than modifying the strategies used.

Though the diaries helped them document the various learning approaches selected by the teacher, they did not engage those opportunities to provoke different strategies until they were truly in line with their progress they would accomplish. Their capability in monitoring was limited only in finding the mistakes they did but they failed to design new approach to resolve their oversights. They might not realize when they fail to plan means they plan to fail. When they built a misunderstanding and uncertainty, they also did not try to clarify their confusion by finding some information. It was written also that they had only one or two strategies in learning and did not adjust another in different situation.

Group 2

In their first diary, all of them considered memorising the patterns to be the principal grammar learning strategy they commonly used. They more focused on the rules rather than how and when to use the patterns. They might have stumbled on finding the appropriate strategies for them.

Towards the end of the course, the students began to realise that merely memorising the rules would not assist them become more proficient. One possible reason is that diary-keeping had stimulated them students to rethink their strategy use. They found that they should have not only learned new patterns, but also learned how to use them. Quite similar to the first group, the learners from this group did not have any specific plan as well in designing their next learning. They tended to hope that on next meeting, the teacher would explain something different in the classroom. They failed to pay more attention to the problems that they needed to overcome on the next meeting.

Group 3

The results show that the students' awareness of the cognitive and affective factors influencing them could have positive effects on their language learning. From the diary data, it was written that it was difficult for students to become more selfdirected when learning was planned. They had to assume improving responsibility for planning and regulating their own learning.

However, comparing to the previous groups, the third group had better recognition to set up clear goals they would make. They could also predict what they would learn in the class as they found some sources before they learned. It also emerged that these students were able to think about the problems and became more mindful of their own information processing styles and emotional responses. Then, they used satisfactory strategies to get over their shortcomings. They also could modify their understanding and challenge themselves to find other sources in learning. Various grammar books, English library online, lyrics of the songs, Twitter, Facebook and so forth varied their learning If Clause. During learning the course, they also faced some problems that they had to overcome. However, even when they were anxious, they encouraged themselves to persevere. The awareness of the above affective factors led them to use new strategies to solve the problems.

Discussion

This study has provided evidence that, while the metacognitive strategy instruction reflected general increases in group 1 and group 2, there were consistent decreases in figuring out the use of strategies in group 3. This finding strengthens the view that strategy instruction created differential and desirable effects on the target strategies i.e. increases in target strategy use in the predicted direction; hence as Nakatani (2005) states metacognitive strategy gains support for the value of consciousness raising in strategy instruction. Moreover, while Rubin et al. (2007) concludes that there is no evidence of whether the effects of strategy instruction goes on over time, this study encourages support for the view that the impact could continue over a period of weeks.

The finding, however, suggests that the effect of learner diary may not automatically change from target to non-target strategies and that it may not be possible to improve learners' overall strategic awareness. According to the information processing theory asserted by Ericsson and Simon (1996), in strategic awareness and subsequent reporting of strategy use (i.e. declarative knowledge) and in the development of observed strategy use (i.e. procedural knowledge), students' attention can be shifted. It means students' attention in group 3 might be redirected. It raises the interesting issue in education whether it is desirable to direct students' attention away to make them focus only on those strategies targeted in the learner diaries. Probably, similar to Nakatani's argument (2005), the aim of strategy teaching should be enhanced into general strategic awareness instead of inadvertently instructing students to replace group 3 with target strategies.

Hence, from the learning log reflected on the diaries, it can be seen that it is desirable to raise learners' strategic awareness by directing learners' attention not just to strategies that are targeted for learning, but by existing strategies which learners feel comfortable and effective to use. According to Rubin et al. (2007), to make this achievement, the metacognitive instruction for learners may begin with helping them become aware of what strategies are and which strategies the learners have already used. Ideally, the teachers firstly elicit students' prior knowledge about strategies, help them to explore their existing strategies that they might carry out for different tasks and evaluate the effectiveness of those pre-existing strategies. This consciousness raising may help students begin to think about their own learning processes.

Regarding to the use of learner diaries individually, it is interesting to note to the teachers that they can regularly initiate small group discussions to guide students towards better awareness of metacognitive knowledge, clarify anxiety and share experiences about strategies especially that students group 1 and group 2 used. Teachers can also introduce effective strategies to the learners, demonstrate strategies or encourage students to share their belief about language learning with other learners.

CONCLUSION

Metacognition, an essential concept in cognitive psychology, has demonstrated that learning about the learning process is a crucial part in learning a language. Learners' understanding about themselves as learners, their learning tasks and their use of proper strategies are important components of metacognition. Intense research has revealed that successful learners are those who are metacognitively aware to use appropriate learning strategies. Metacognitive instruction

can lead to learner autonomy in language classroom and being autonomous will direct learners to the success.

To find out how one realizes learners' cognition process, there should be a tool to reflect it and writing a diary or journal aims to represent their strategies in learning. Writing a diary can take something from inside of learners' and set it out. In this research, diaries of learners' were utilised to explore university-level Indonesian students' perceptions in learning English as a Foreign Language. In addition, the diaries could also illustrate whether or not the students think about their mental process in learning. These diaries provide students the opportunity to reflect on the day's class, as well as the study activities that go into preparing for class, and the learning strategies which have or have not been carried out. Entries in the diaries should investigate the students' perceptions about whether the student has progressed or stagnated. They could also assist the teacher to gain some information from the students in order to improve the way for him or her who should teach them how to learn as well.

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