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Beyond Cognitive Development: Emphasis on Metacognition for Better Language Learning in Intercultural Settings

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Abstract:

In the fields of cognitive research, developmental research, and educational research, metacognition has been treated as a distinct idea and has been the subject of much discussion and investigation for a significant amount of time. Top educators have marked cognitive knowledge as an important component of students' collective linguistic knowledge. Researchers in the field of education have identified several focal areas for improving upon the tenets of education in our country, and one of their primary focuses has been determining how much more advanced language learning and teaching strategies in intercultural settings might be if language learning focused on more than just cognitive knowledge. The purpose of this study is to contribute to research on metacognition that adds to the holistic development of students and aids the expansion of the research community in the field of language learning. It describes how the theory of metacognition may be put to use in the real world with the assistance of activities and exercises to make language learning for students more convenient in the backdrop of multicultural settings. The pupils will profit from this strategy, and as a result, they will learn languages such as English quickly. On the other hand, instructors will be able to educate students in a more all-encompassing manner while simultaneously making their lessons more engaging and intriguing. The approach that has been mentioned in this article may be put into action to achieve the goal of improving language learning, especially English.

Key Words: Metacognition, Multicultural, Language Learning, Education, Cognition

The Indian National Education Policy 2020 has introduced several important ideas for the holistic development of students in India. “Holistic,” a word that has been used more than forty times in the NEP 2020 policy document, makes a powerful remark on the shift of attention that the Indian education system will experience in the near future. While “cognitive development” has been mentioned fifteen times in the document, each time it is done with the remark of going beyond just cognitive development. Cognition, in a general sense, is defined as an individual’s ability to think about or conceptualize ideas. A concern that has been the primary goal of the Indian education system since 1986. However, current research details that mere conceptualization of ideas or a latent ability to process thoughts cannot suffice for the holistic development of a student. It recommends that learners and educators move a step ahead of cognitive development and into “higher-order cognitive capacities,” which is a more recognised expression for “metacognition.” Metacognition is the ability to reflect on one's own mental processes, including attention, perception, memory, and reasoning. This involves assessing one's own learning, monitoring personal growth, and selecting the most effective approach to manage one's learning. Metacognition may be defined as "thinking about thinking." This aspect is crucial for the targeted holistic development of language learning. Even the NEP 2020 policy document mentions it several times, mostly in association with how it is an important component of holistic development: “Education policy lays particular emphasis on the development of the creative potential of each individual. It is based on the principle that education must develop not only cognitive capacities—both the ‘foundational capacities ’of literacy and numeracy and ‘higher-order’ cognitive capacities, such as critical thinking and problem solving—but also social, ethical, and emotional capacities and dispositions.”

Metacognition entails knowing how one learns, which methods work best for him/her, and how to approach new material, all of which are crucial for learning language. By reflecting on their thought processes and determining how to complete them, individuals can fill knowledge deficits and enhance their overall proficiency. Another advantage of developing metacognitive skills is the ability to evaluate one's own learning processes and make adjustments based on this analysis. Metacognitive components include “(a) metacognitive knowledge, (b) metacognitive experiences, (c) goals (or tasks), and (d) actions (or strategies).” (Flavell, 1979), or broadly, metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive control, and metacognitive experience. Metacognitive knowledge is the ability to reflect on and enhance one's own cognitive processes, as well as an understanding of learning strategies and procedures. Metacognitive skills include the ability to use mnemonics to recall information, break down complex problems into manageable segments, and ask insightful questions to expand one's knowledge about a subject. Metacognitive regulation refers to the

ability to monitor and control one's own learning processes. Essential to this skill is the ability to plan, establish objectives, evaluate performance, and make necessary course corrections. Strong metacognitive regulators have greater control over their learning and therefore achieve better academic results. Metacognitive experience is a person's awareness of their own cognitive processes. It entails understanding their thoughts, feelings, and motivations for their actions. A person with extensive expertise in metacognition may recognize the indicators of distraction and employ techniques to redirect their efforts, for instance.

In the context of India, being a canvas of multicultural ideas and interactions, language learning becomes difficult. Even with several traditional and modern strategies and classroom techniques assisted by ICT and other fashionable online tools, students find it difficult to engage themselves in language learning. Educators across countries have deduced various factors that affect language learning in students, such as mother-tongue influence, lack of motivation, inaccurate translation, heterogeneity in classrooms, etc. Of these, the "lack of knowledge about the process and methods of language learning" (Kazakov, 2021, p. 20) may be quoted as a very significant one. Although conceptualizing this lack might be very challenging since culturally diverse students may experience varied difficulties in grasping the process and methods of language learning. In general, however, one might presume that most students appear to have a common lack of understanding for certain methods. This process may be assumed to be a general stratification of certain concepts as difficult and others as simple.

Metacognition is not a trait that individuals are either born with or without. Instead, it is something that, with time and effort, can be refined and perfected due to the potential benefits of practice and feedback. Studies have shown that when students are provided with explicit and systematic metacognitive skills, their performance improves. In addition, metacognitive strategies can be adapted for use in various contexts and by a diverse variety of students. Metacognitive procedures that work well may improve one's capacity for learning, problem-solving, and making sound decisions. Some helpful methods of metacognition are as follows:

1. **Define the Objectives:**

These metacognitive practices can help you become a better learner, thinker, and problem solver. The combination of metacognition and theory of mind may also be a valuable addition to the overall learning experience and output of students. It may enhance these metacognitive processes and also multiply the output of such metacognitive regulations exponentially.

The theory of mind is an individual's ability to estimate and assign mental states to other people. The general term for theory of mind is often referred to as "mind reading"; however, it differs significantly from mind reading because it does not involve directly thinking about what another person is thinking. Instead, it focuses on inferring what the other person might be thinking based on common and pre-established situations known to both the guesser and the individual being evaluated. If the teacher is able to correctly exercise theory of mind and metacognition in class, he/she will successfully induce a sense of self-governance and regulation among his or her students. To incorporate theory of mind in metacognition, a teacher must bring in a comprehensive understanding of the outcomes of learning among students. The simplest method to do that is to allow them to assess themselves through the rubrics set by the curricula. After each lesson, the teacher may allow students to assess themselves with a set of questions pertinent to the rubrics and try to answer the questions that satisfy their fellow students.

2. Explicit Modeling of Metacognitive Strategies

In a classroom devoted to holistic growth, it is necessary for educators to move beyond just the delivery of lessons and make thinking processes visible. The teacher's voice, echoing throughout the activity, helps to normalize struggles like confusion, hesitation, or even curiosity. "Students are encouraged to reflect on their thinking and learning processes and...feel comfortable taking risks, making mistakes, and discussing their thought processes and learning strategies with their peers," Learning A-Z suggested in a useful blog focused on metacognitive instruction. By regularly, before tasks begin, discussing goals and available resources and the potential roadblocks that could interfere, the educator shapes the learning landscape where reflection becomes as natural as asking for help or looking up an answer quickly. The value of this is strong, as the Global Metacognition project wrote, "Effective metacognitive strategies encourage students to reflect more deeply on how they learn," and in this way, metacognitive habits can be an improvement for language acquisition.

Monitoring comprehension while progressing through the lesson, teachers might—correct strategies and self-correct mistakes as they demonstrate. A statement like "Does this make sense to me?" or "What can I do to help myself understand?" anchors the importance of real-time adjusting learning processes, which students are encouraged to emulate. "Self-regulated learners… monitor their behavior in terms of their goals and self-reflect on their increasing effectiveness. This enhances their self-satisfaction and motivation to continue to improve their methods of learning," said psychologist Barry Zimmerman. That repeated modeling is helping reflective behaviors to take root.

3. Designing Scaffolding Activities

Scaffolding, for metacognitive skills especially, is structured, careful guidance that so often gradually fades as student competence develops. Stages get sequenced: "You" (where prior knowledge must be activated), "Plan" (goals and the best strategies get set), "Do" (monitoring and adjusting), and "Review" (self-evaluation and reflection)—these are essential for independent, confident learning to occur ("Metacognition in the Classroom: More Than Thinking About Thinking" Learning A-Z). Routinely and explicitly provided sentence starters and helpful reflection prompts such as "What strategy am I using?" or "How will I handle confusion?" are encouraging students as they make choices and adjust their own learning routines without being told what to do.

KWL charts (What I Know, Want to Know, Learned), learning journals and, rubrics for self-assessment, all encourage the ongoing monitoring of progress and evaluation. In classrooms that are multilingual and busy with confusion, scaffolding is helpful especially, because, as students navigate unique and different cultural and language learning challenges, support is individualized, development of confidence is promoted, and learners belong in a process where problem-solving and independence can thrive ("Scaffolding of small groups' metacognitive activities with an avatar" PMC).

4. Providing Constructive Feedback for Metacognitive Reflection

Feedback delivered effectively in a classroom that values metacognitive skills is always more than correcting answers. In the spaces opened by constructive feedback, students will analyze not only what was done, but also how it was approached and why it may be successful or not. "Being given feedback makes students think about what they have done and how they could improve it… it is a key way to develop metacognition," Learning A-Z noted ("Metacognition in the Classroom: More Than Thinking About Thinking"). The teacher, giving process-level feedback, might say, "What strategy did you use when facing difficulty?" or "How did you decide on that approach, and what could you change next time?" guiding students toward self-assessment. Feedback should be, especially in diverse and multicultural classrooms, sensitive to culture, because expectations and interpretations of criticism, direct or indirect, may vary, and misunderstandings could easily arise if care is not taken. "Constructive feedback in multicultural classrooms must be culturally sensitive, addressing varying expectations and interpretations of criticism while promoting self-regulation and adaptability," Galvez Lopez argued (Galvez Lopez). With such feedback, resilience develops; adaptability and independent learning habits, crucial for metacognitive growth, are fostered.

To conclude, it may be asserted that state-of-the-art strategies for language learning may assist students in overcoming the barriers of multicultural settings where learning is usually difficult. Metacognitive practices in class allow students to understand the tasks better and encourage cognitive self-awareness, leading to faster and better learning.

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