

Effectiveness of Certain Instructional Strategies Towards Strengthening the Metacognitive Awareness of Malayalam Language Students at Secondary Level

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Introduction

Language is a system of communication that offers countless possibilities for representation, expression and construction of meaning and thought. It is constructed using interacting symbols of sounds, meanings and sentence formation and permeates human thought and life. Halliday (1978) has defined language as 'meaning potential' and has created the following model that shows the function of language developed by children by the time they come to school.

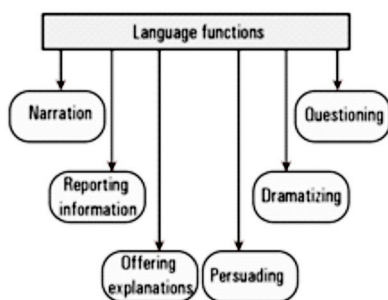


Figure 1: Language functions

It is clear from figure 1 that language unlocks the human minds and thereby extending to access information and entertainment. It also gives definite configuration to man's thought, feelings and emotions. Students in today's classroom are more diverse than ever and this diversity creates the need for inculcating differentiating instructions in the classroom. A metacognitive environment encourages awareness of the process of learning and thereby promotes self-regulation and self-

direction, which are the critical ingredients to successful learning (Dul, 2011). According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990) metacognitive strategies are higher order executive skills that may entail planning, monitoring or evaluating the success of a learning activity. These skills are the main recursive processes or parameters that contribute in the building of abundant learning environments that strengthen metacognition through the experiences shared in the classroom.

Need and Significance of the Study

In 2000, the National Reading Panel recommended some metacognitive strategies, which held the promise of enhancing student performance, but the intended changes in teaching and learning have still not been fully realized. When process instruction becomes the content of instruction, transfer is enhanced and learning becomes crystallized. This may come in the form of planning, monitoring and finally evaluating the content in a sequential mode of practice. In an interaction with the current transaction modalities of Malayalam Language curriculum at the secondary level, the investigator being a teacher educator in Malayalam Education felt that the prevailing classroom practices were not enough to cultivate a metacognitive classroom climate and thereby facilitate the growth of successful learning communities in both the classroom and across the school. The energetic experience involved in the teaching of Malayalam coupled with a proper

recognition of strategies provides the learner with ample opportunities for ensuring richness in language competence.

Hence, the investigator wanted to explore the effectiveness of metacognitive classroom practices in enriching the metacognitive awareness of students at the secondary level. Moreover, there is a paucity of literature on how metacognitive practices can be used for enhancing the academic outcome of Malayalam language learners at this level.

Review of Related Studies

Ahari et al. (2012) investigated the impact of metacognitive strategy training through the use of explicit strategy instruction on the development of lexical knowledge of EFL learners. Dul (2011) examined the effect of metacognitive strategies on achievement and retention in developing writing. Rahimi and Katal (2012) investigated metacognitive listening strategies awareness among Iraman University and high school students learning English as a foreign language. Clearly there is no dearth of studies that exploit the benefits of metacognitive strategies. However, there is no study on the interlinking of these strategies towards facilitating a self-directed approach in Malayalam language learning.

Getting to the hub of Malayalam Language Learning: An effective pedagogical practice that is designed to strengthen the skills and competencies required for the learning Malayalam language and literature will also provide learners with opportunities for exploration and exposure to new ideas. This in turn will spark their interest and motivation in learning the language. Expertise in handling Malayalam requires certain basic skills such as competency in communication, rich vocabulary and vibrancy in expression of ideas. In addition to that, a good language learner is an active decision maker in the learning process and a

creative generator of newly acquired information. Explicit and integrated strategy instruction illumines the thought and actions of the individual and verbalization of their experience triggers their learning which in turn makes them better performers in language learning.

Objective of the study

To assess the effectiveness of certain instructional strategies towards strengthening the metacognitive awareness of Malayalam language students at the secondary level, this study aims to understand:

1. To identify the prevailing modalities of classroom practices with respect to the development of metacognition at the secondary level.
2. To identify the metacognitive awareness of students selected for the study
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of select instructional strategies towards enhancing metacognitive awareness of students at the secondary level.

Hypotheses

1. The prevailing modalities of classroom practices are inadequate for developing metacognitive awareness among students at the secondary level.
2. The selected instructional strategies are helpful for strengthening the metacognitive awareness of students selected for the study.

Data

A total of one hundred and sixty five secondary school students from four schools across three districts of Kerala namely, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha and Kottayam were selected for the experimental and control groups.

Methodology

In the present study, a mixed method of research design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis was used. A pre and post-test non-equivalent non-group design was selected for the study. An interview schedule, lesson designs based on metacognitive classroom practices and a metacognitive awareness rubric was used. In the first phase, a semi structured interview was conducted to gather responses from select school practitioners, language experts and teacher educators at various levels. An interview guide was created with a view to analyse the prevailing instructional practices of Malayalam language learning, and assess the improvement needed for creating an independent and autonomous learning climate in the classroom. The guide was prepared by analyzing the opinions and discussions with experts of Malayalam language education. The validity of the content was ensured by incorporating the comments and recommendations made by experts.

Most of the respondents (91%) supported the view that instruction and learning experiences require certain prerequisite skills on the part of the learner such as communication, analytical mindfulness, extended practice and the like. A handful of them (10%) opined that they were giving ample opportunities for learners to plan the content material by formulating strategies such as planning, monitoring and evaluating. A significant number (85%) stated that overcrowded classrooms and dearth of time are the main impediments that prevent teachers from becoming metacognitive instructional practitioners and structuring the task accordingly. From the interview, the investigator felt that a metacognitive classroom climate will help to create self-responsibility and a sense of ownership among learners. This result compelled the researcher to implement metacognitive classroom practices in the classroom set up.

In the second phase, the investigator prepared learning designs based on the metacognitive components and interlinked them with the routine classroom practices. These strategies included planning which emphasizes on articulating the learning task, 'monitoring' which deals with the conscious awareness about the topic and processes and 'evaluating' which helps in looking back at how the work has been done. The following section looks at these strategies in detail.

Planning: It is difficult for learners to become self-directed and independent when the procedures are planned by someone else. For nurturing a metacognitively oriented learning environment, there is an urgent need to make the learners the designers of their own learning through explicit guidance about the learning goals and to give them techniques to make the content unified and coherent. All of this is depicted in the 'Plan of Action Wheel' in figure 2.

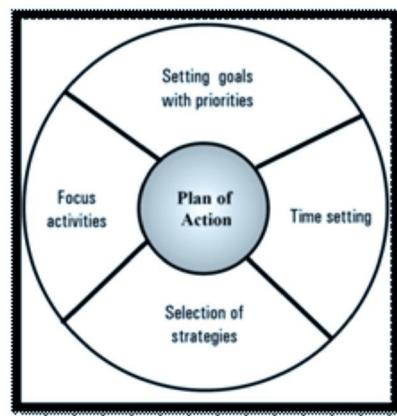


Figure.2. Plan of action wheel

Monitoring: Systematic monitoring is a part of self-regulation cycle that distinguishes novices from expert learners. The interactive classrooms provide ample opportunities and possibilities for the learners to engage in periodical recording and self-testing of their progress. Periodical assessments in the

form of monitoring questions in the worksheet act as a reminder about what is going on in the classrooms which really helps to open up the right path for learning. The focal points of the monitoring phase are given in figure 3.

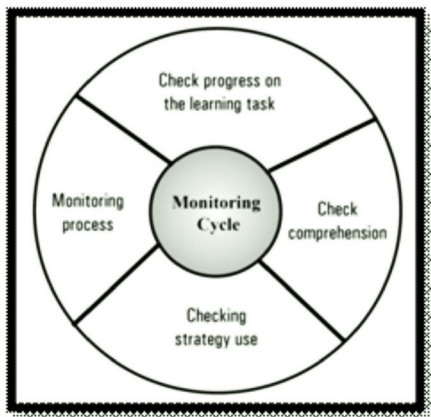


Figure 3. Monitoring cycle

Evaluation: Evaluation is more effective when it includes individual self-assessment and appraisal of the content material the learning processes. Self-assessment is an important devise in the tool kit of autonomous language learners and a mile stone in the ongoing process of reflection. The cognitive and metacognitive discussions and debriefing sessions allow the learner to expand the discussion on the practices they learn. The evaluation process is portrayed in figure 4 below.

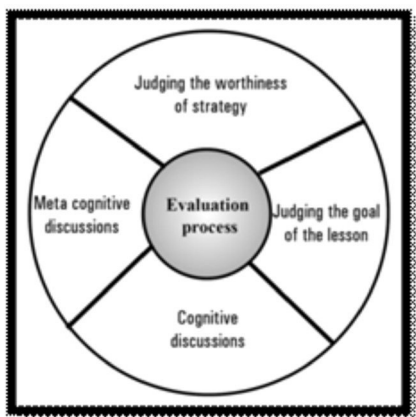


Figure 4. Evaluation process

Administration of Metacognitive Awareness Rubric

This rubric was developed in consonance with the phase specified by Deepka (2007) and Goodrich (1997). The authenticity of the rubric was checked in terms of clarity, comprehensiveness, utility and practicability of the selected components by a panel of experts from the field of language teaching. It was validated by eminent personalities in the field. The metacognitive awareness rubric was designed to assess the metacognitive awareness of secondary school students with regard to planning, monitoring and evaluation. It comprised of criterion levels such as 'Exceeds Expectations' (E.E), 'Meets Expectations' (M.E), 'Partially Meets Expectations' (P.M.E) and 'Doesn't Meet Expectations' (D.M.E). The pre-scores of students from both control and experimental groups revealed that none of them fell in the category, 'Exceed Expectation'. A negligible proportion of students from both control and experimental groups were in the 'Meets Expectations' category. The majority of the students (control: 89.66%, experimental: 86.66%) belonged to the 'Doesn't Meet Expectations' category. In the next phase, the classroom strategies were implemented following which the investigator assessed the performance of the students using the metacognitive awareness rubric. The following section deals with the change in the perceptions of students with regard to their metacognitive awareness.

Levels of performance	E.E		M.E		P.M.E		D.M.E	
	Contl.	Exptal	Contl.	Exptal	Contl.	Exptal	Contl.	Exptal
Planning	Nil	2	4	23	16	45	80	30
Monitoring	Nil	2	3	21	10	50	87	27
Evaluation	Nil	1	4	20	3	51	93	28
Average	Nil	1.66	3.66	21.33	9.66	48.66	86.66	28.33

Table.1. Post scores in the experimental and control groups on metacognitive awareness

It may be noted that there is no significant change in the performance of the learners in the control group. In the case of the experimental group, the levels of performance of the learners in the M.E.E.E and P.M.E categories increased considerably and that of the learners under D.M.E category decreased. Figure 5 represents the classification of students in both groups.

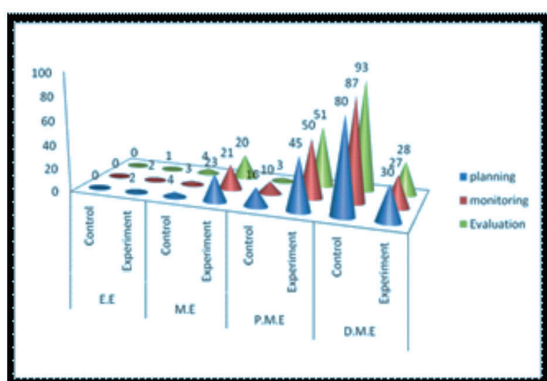


Figure 5: Classification of students in the experimental and control groups based on their post scores.

From the graphical representations it is clear that the students in the experimental group showed a remarkable change with regard to their metacognitive awareness.

Conclusion

The findings of the study reveal that the instructional modalities that stemmed from metacognitive classroom practices could empower the learners to acquire the skills needed for self-directed learning and the dynamics around instructing students would offer a comfortable space for every learner to credibly improve in the process of learning. Awareness about metacognition created a feeling of relaxation in learning process that encouraged better retention of information by the learners. The study substantiated the fact that exposure to select metacognitive practices

sharpened the power of the learners and sparked their interest towards enhancing improvement and intellectual capacities of the learners. The findings of the present study have implications for learners, teachers, curriculum designers and textbook writers. Timely initiatives taken by the educational agencies with regard to the implementation of metacognitive practices will provide a valuable input for lasting success in the learning of Malayalam language.

The new trends in innovative practices and instructional designs need to focus on higher order forms of thinking which depict the process of learning rather than the product of learning. Developing a self-directive as well as a self-reflective behavior acts as the key contributor to such a type of learning. Even though the activity-oriented modes were being adopted in the school curriculum, there was no evidence of an increase in the confidence level of language learning. The mental steps or operations involved in each phase allowed the learners to regulate their efforts to attain the learning output.

It was hence concluded that the social experience and shared journey are influential architects and operators of the metacognitive instructional platform. The explicit training in metacognition gives opportunities to observe and interact with peers and to discuss the classroom practices with team mates and all of these create a fundamental rhythm in language learning.

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