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Shalala Bunyadzade
Baku State University
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7854-6352>
shalalabunyadzadeh@gmail.com

The Impact of Metacognitive Strategies on English Language Learning

Abstract

This article explores the role of metacognitive strategies in English language learning and their theoretical grounding within major SLA frameworks. Drawing on Flavell, Brown, Oxford, Wenden, Anderson, and Zimmerman, the study shows that metacognitive knowledge and regulation enhance learners' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning. Integrating insights from information processing, self-regulated learning, schema theory, and sociocultural theory, the article demonstrates that metacognitive strategy use improves comprehension, autonomy, problem-solving, and long-term retention across listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The findings highlight the importance of incorporating metacognitive training into English language teaching to support independent and strategic learners.

Keywords: *metacognitive strategies, english language learning, Self-regulated learning, SLA theories, learner autonomy*

Şəlalə Bünyadzadə
Bakı Dövlət Universiteti
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7854-6352>
shalalabunyadzadeh@gmail.com

Metakoqnitiv strategiyaların ingilis dili öyrənməsinə təsiri

Xülasə

Bu məqalə ingilis dili öyrənməsində metakoqnitiv strategiyaların rolunu və onların əsas SLA (İkinci Dil Qazanılması) çərçivələrindəki nəzəri əsaslarını araşdırır. Flavell, Brown, Oxford, Wenden, Anderson və Zimmerman kimi tədqiqatçıların işlərinə əsaslanaraq, araştırma göstərir ki, metakoqnitiv bilik və tənzimləmə öyrənənlərin planlaşdırma, monitoring və öz fəaliyyətlərini qiymətləndirmə bacarıqlarını gücləndirir. İnformasiya emalı, özünü-tənzimləyən öyrənmə, sxem nəzəriyyəsi və sosiomədəni nəzəriyyənin prinsiplərini birləşdirən məqalə, metakoqnitiv strategiyaların dinləmə, danışaq, oxu və yazı kimi dil bacarıqları üzrə anlama, müstəqillik, problem həlli və uzunmüddətli yaddaşa müsbət təsir etdiyini göstərir. Nəticələr ingilis dili tədrisində metakoqnitiv hazırlığın tətbiq edilməsinin müstəqil və strateji öyrənənlərin formallaşması baxımından əhəmiyyətini vurğulayır.

Açar sözlər: *metakoqnitiv strategiyalar, ingilis dili öyrənməsi, özünü-tənzimləyən öyrənmə, SLA nəzəriyyələri, öyrənən müstəqilliyi*

Introduction

In modern language education, achieving success in foreign language learning depends not only on mastering linguistic forms but also on learners' capacity to consciously manage their cognitive processes. Metacognition—often described as “the ability to think about one's own thinking”—has become a key theoretical concept within second language acquisition (SLA). As Flavell (1979)

explains, metacognition consists of both awareness of cognitive processes and the ability to regulate them, placing it at the heart of effective learning.

Scholars such as Brown (1987), Baker and Brown (1984), Oxford (1990), Wenden (1998), Anderson (2002), and Zimmerman (2000) have shown that metacognitive strategies help learners plan, observe, and assess their own learning performance, which strengthens autonomy, deeper comprehension, and long-term improvement. As English language learners increasingly interact with digital environments, multimodal materials, and global communication networks, the development of metacognitive competence becomes even more crucial. The purpose of this article is to analyze the theoretical basis of metacognitive strategies, their place within major SLA theories, and their contribution to the development of English language skills.

Research

Theoretical foundations of metacognition

Flavell's (1976, 1979) influential work laid the groundwork for subsequent approaches to metacognition. He differentiates between metacognitive knowledge—information learners possess about themselves, tasks, and strategies—and metacognitive regulation, which includes planning, monitoring, and evaluating cognitive activity. Nelson and Narens (1990) elaborated on this by introducing a two-level model of cognition: the *object-level*, where cognitive processes occur, and the *meta-level*, which supervises, evaluates, and directs those processes. Together, these theories help explain how learners manage language-related tasks.

Metacognition within SLA theories

a) Information Processing Theory

Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968) propose that learning involves the movement of information through sensory registers, short-term memory, and long-term memory. Metacognitive strategies play an important facilitating role in this system by helping learners focus attention, structure input, and consciously regulate how information is processed.

b) Self-Regulated Learning Theory

Zimmerman (2000) emphasizes that successful learners actively participate in setting goals, monitoring their progress, and adjusting their learning behaviors. In the context of language learning, this means using strategies deliberately, reflecting on performance, and maintaining persistence—all core elements of metacognitive functioning.

c) Schema Theory

Rumelhart (1980) argues that new information becomes meaningful when it connects with prior knowledge stored in cognitive structures known as schemata. Metacognitive strategies assist learners in activating relevant background knowledge, linking ideas, and refining their mental representations during comprehension.

d) Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky (1978) stresses that cognitive development is shaped by social interaction. Metacognitive abilities develop through scaffolding provided by teachers or peers, enabling learners to internalize strategies for planning, controlling, and evaluating cognitive tasks.

Metacognitive strategies in language learning

Oxford's (1990, 2011) classification highlights the central role of metacognitive strategies among learning strategies. These include the ability to:

- plan learning activities,
- concentrate attention,
- observe comprehension processes,
- identify and analyze errors,
- assess learning progress.

Wenden (1998) argues that metacognitive knowledge is essential for learner autonomy, noting that proficient learners consistently reflect on their learning experiences and consciously select effective strategies, while less successful learners often lack such awareness.

Anderson (2002) proposes a five-stage metacognitive model—preparation, planning, monitoring, problem-solving, and evaluation—which provides a structured basis for incorporating strategy instruction in English language teaching.

Listening

Listening is recognized as one of the most cognitively demanding language skills, and metacognition is indispensable for effective listening performance. Vandergrift (2003) describes listening as a deliberate, strategic activity rather than a passive process. Skilled listeners use a range of metacognitive strategies:

- **Planning:** activating relevant background knowledge, predicting themes, defining listening goals, and deciding which cues to attend to.
- **Monitoring:** checking comprehension, adjusting listening focus, and detecting points of confusion.
- **Problem-solving:** using inferencing, identifying key words, and reconstructing meaning when misunderstandings occur.
- **Evaluation:** reflecting on the strategies used, analyzing mistakes, and considering improvements for future listening tasks.

These processes enable listeners to cope with rapid speech, diverse accents, and incomplete information, reinforcing the essential role of metacognitive awareness.

Speaking

Oral communication requires constant cognitive regulation, and metacognitive strategies help learners manage their speaking performance. Metacognition in speaking involves:

- **Planning speech:** organizing ideas, choosing suitable linguistic forms, and anticipating communicative needs.
- **Monitoring fluency and accuracy:** ensuring clarity, checking pronunciation, and correcting grammatical errors in real time.
- **Adjusting communicative strategies:** adapting to listeners' reactions, cultural norms, and the flow of interaction.
- **Evaluating performance:** reviewing what was successful, identifying challenges, and refining future speaking strategies.

Through such regulation, metacognition enhances communicative efficiency and accuracy.

Reading

Reading comprehension depends heavily on metacognitive control. Effective readers engage in deliberate, reflective cognitive activity:

- **Predicting content:** drawing on prior knowledge to anticipate the text's structure, vocabulary, and purpose.
- **Recognizing text organization:** understanding text structures such as comparison, cause-effect, or problem-solution patterns.
- **Monitoring understanding:** adjusting reading speed, rereading difficult segments, and switching strategies when necessary.
- **Evaluating comprehension:** checking the accuracy of interpretations, identifying misunderstandings, and determining whether additional reading is needed.

Metacognition enables readers to develop flexibility, strategic awareness, and high-level comprehension skills.

Writing

Writing is often viewed as the most metacognitively intensive skill because it involves extensive planning, real-time monitoring, and detailed revision. Metacognition contributes to writing through:

- **Planning:** generating ideas, outlining structure, defining purpose and audience, and selecting appropriate language.
- **Monitoring:** ensuring coherence, clarity, grammatical accuracy, and alignment with intended meaning.
- **Revising:** making content-level adjustments and surface-level edits.

- **Evaluating:** reviewing the completed text, analyzing its strengths and weaknesses, and deciding which strategies were effective.

Learners with strong metacognitive abilities produce more coherent, accurate, and well-organized written texts.

Conclusion

Metacognitive strategies are among the most powerful contributors to successful English language learning. Research across multiple theoretical perspectives—including information processing, self-regulated learning, schema theory, and sociocultural theory—shows that metacognition enables learners to manage, control, and evaluate their learning processes more effectively. These strategies improve comprehension, strengthen learner autonomy, enhance motivation, and support long-term retention of language skills.

Incorporating metacognitive training into English language instruction is therefore essential. Learners who possess metacognitive awareness become more strategic, independent, and efficient language users—qualities that align with the cognitive and communicative demands of 21st-century learning environments.

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