Enhancing EFL Learners' Self Efficacy Beliefs through Raising Metacognitive Awareness

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the possibility of improving EFL learners' self-efficacy by implementing a metacognitive strategies instruction program. The participants were 53 female EFL learners who were divided into two experimental and control groups. The experimental group received an eight-week treatment on metacognitive strategies through descriptions, modeling, and practice. At the beginning and at the end of the program a self-report questionnaire has been used to measure the Participants' self-efficacy belief and metacognitive strategies awareness. The results revealed that the experimental group participants outdid the control group learners. Their self-efficacy belief improved considerably and they became more confident in their ability to cope with L2 learning tasks and activities. The findings bear significant meaning regarding the importance of both metacognitive strategies and self-efficacy. It was suggested that building deeper awareness of the metacognitive strategies can be a powerful tool to develop self-efficacious learners who are more confident and reassured about

their own capabilities in dealing with the complicated tasks and activities of learning a foreign language.

Keywords: Metacognition, metacognitive strategies, self-efficacy

Introduction

During the recent decades, language educators have demonstrated a steady shift from "teacher-centered to more learner-centered approaches" (Riazi, 2007, p. 433) in the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Researchers have investigated several variables which are influential in academic performance. Particularly, metacognition and self-efficacy have attracted ample attention (e.g., Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2007; Wong, 2005). Bandura (1997) stated that when self-efficacy is low, students tend to underachieve, despite knowing what it is they need to do to be successful. They may have the knowledge, skills, and strategies needed to succeed, but are not able to use them successfully. Beliefs are more important than knowledge in organizing and approaching tasks and are stronger predictors of achievement because they lead to different ways of thinking and behaving (Schunk & Meece, 2006).

Another psychological element, differing from individual to individual, which seems to have an effect on the learning process, is the extent of being aware of one's metacognition. Awareness and understanding of the process of the learning help an individual to take control of one's learning (Ghanizadeh & Moafian, 2011).

The present study has been conducted to find out the contribution of metacognitive awareness to self-efficacy beliefs among Iranian EFL learners.

Literature Review

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is the core concept of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. It can be defined as people's judgment about their capacity for a task (Bandura, 1986). It also includes feelings, thought, and emotions for the coming task situation. Broadly, the answer of "Can I do this task?" refers to people's self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Zimmerman, 2000). Self- efficacy is an important motivational belief, since people make effort and invest energy according to their self-efficacy when engaging in a task (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Schunk & Pajares, 2009).

Studies have indicated that self-efficacy beliefs correlate positively with academic achievement and motivation (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2003; Pajares & Miller, 1994), thus substantiating Bandura's (1997) contention that learners with higher self-efficacy participate more readily, work harder, pursue more challenging goals, spend more effort toward fulfilling identified goals, and persist longer in the face of difficulty. Even teachers' self-efficacy beliefs have been shown to be critical in effective teaching, in the degree of personal commitment, and in enthusiasm in teaching (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). In L2 contexts, investigations have focused on the contributing role of learners' self-efficacy to their success, its association with their level of emotional intelligence and their language learning strategies use (Safdari & Maftoon, 2016; Wong, 2005).

Metacognition

First coined by Flavell in the mid 1970s, metacognition is defined as thinking about thinking (Anderson, 2002). It is accounted as self-awareness of mental processes. Oxford (1990) believes

that "metacognitive strategies provide a way for learners to coordinate their own learning process." (p. 136).

Self-regulation and metacognition are sometimes used interchangeably. However, Whitebread and Pino Pasternak (2010) state that, a consensus is now emerging in the research literature "that metacognition refers specifically to the monitoring and control of cognition, while self-regulation refers to the monitoring and control of all aspects of human functioning, including emotional, social, and motivational aspects" (p. 693).

Research indicates that metacognition is a powerful predictor of learning (e.g., Schunk & Meece, 2006; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). Metacognitive practices contribute to learning beyond the influence of intellectual capacities. Improving learners' metacognitive awareness may compensate for any deficiencies and limitations in cognitive ability (Veenman, Wilhelm, & Beishuizen, 2004)

Metacognitive awareness improves academic achievement across all ages, cognitive levels, and learning subjects and practices such as reading, text comprehension, writing, reasoning, and problem solving (Dignath & Büttner, 2008).

Metacognition and self-efficacy are both related to task performance ability, problem solving skills and skills acquisition (Cuevas, Fiore, Bowers & Salas, 2004). Enhancing individuals' metacognitive judgments has also been reported to bring about improvement in learning and task performance (Kruger & Dunning, 1999).

However, there are also differences between self-efficacy and metacognition. Within Bandura's social cognitive theory, self-efficacy determines behavior and is capable of influencing performance. On the other hand, metacognition is connected to both behavior and performance in a different way. It affects both of them by initiating the behavior, monitoring performance, and

changing behavior if the results are not satisfactory. Besides, while self-efficacy has been found to positively correlate with behavior and performance, metacognition is said to disagree with objective measures of learning.

Purpose of the Study

The major aim of the present study has been manifested in the following research question:

RQ: Does metacognitive strategies instruction have any effect on EFL learners' self-efficacy belief?

Method

Design and Participants

This study was based on quasi-experimental research design and the participant groups were recruited through convenience sampling. The participants were 53 EFL learners studying English in two language institutes located in Chalous, Iran. Their first language was Persian and they included only female learners. Because private language schools are segregated, access to male learners in the same classroom has been impossible. All of them were adult intermediate learners aged 17-35 (Mean= 22). In the time of data collection, they had successfully passed the achievement test of the previous term. Since they were adult and mature learners, it was expected that their language learning self-efficacy beliefs and metacognitive awareness have been developed through learning English courses, and they had reached a stable level regarding their individual characteristics. The learners attended English classes twice a week and their academic semesters lasted for 11 weeks. The intact groups were used as experimental and control groups. The experimental group consisted of 25 learners and the control group contained 28 learners.

Instrumentation

In order to conduct this study, the researchers used a questionnaire and designed a metacognitive strategies instruction program to be implemented in the experimental group classroom.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire contained two main sections: a demographic information section that focused on personal information such as age, first language, and other relevant information. The next section consisted of two major multi-item scales and a total of 25 items: the self-efficacy scale and the metacognitive strategies awareness scale. The items of the questionnaire are scored using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (entirely disagree) to 7 (entirely agree).

The self-efficacy belief scale contained nine items which were adopted from Pintrich and De Groot (1990). The items ask how confident students are in their ability in their current class, or their capability to complete and concentrate on EFL courses.

The metacognitive strategies awareness scale included 16 items. The items were adopted from Oxford's (1990) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). This scale measured respondents' awareness and skill at employing various metacognitive strategies such as planning, using advance organizers, monitoring learning, self-valuation and seeking opportunities for communication.

Metacognitive Strategies Instruction Program

In order to train the experimental group participants on metacognitive strategies, an intervention program was devised. This program was presented to the participants during the class time through various learning activities. The main tenets of the program were adopted from a number of classifications offered by Oxford (1990), and Chamot and O'Malley (1990). Considering the major components of the metacognitive strategies, i.e., planning, monitoring, and evaluating, the following program was developed and implemented (Table 1):

Table 1

The Metacognitive Strategies Instruction Program

Component	Strategy	Description
Planning (before the learning tasks)	Self-management	Understanding the conditions that help one learn and arranging for the presence of those conditions
	Advance organizers	Making a general but comprehensive preview of the organizing concept or principle in an anticipated learning activity
	Selective attention	Deciding in advance to attend to specific aspects of language input or situational details that will cue the retention of language input
Monitoring (during the learning tasks)	Comprehension check	Check one's understanding, accuracy and appropriateness of the over-all reading task/process Check one's own abilities and difficulties in each reading task
	Self-correction	Correcting one's speech for accuracy in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, or for appropriateness related to the setting or to the people who are present
Evaluation (after the learning tasks)	Self-assessment	Make an assessment of whether one succeeds in achieving the specific learning goals
	Self-evaluation	Evaluate how well one learned and making an overall evaluation of one's ability after the learning task is over
	Self-reflection	Reflect one's own problems whether he/she needs to go back through the learning materials or the learning process for a better understanding

Procedure

Prior to administrating the questionnaires, the respondents were informed on how to fill in the questionnaire. This guidance was presented through describing and exemplifying the process. Then, the questionnaire was administered in the first session in order to collect the pre-test data of this study. It should be mentioned that, the researchers were present throughout the data collection procedure and provided help if necessary. However, the intermediate learners had no

problem in reading and understanding the items and filled in the questionnaire without any major problem. The administration of the questionnaire took about 20 minutes.

After the collection of the preliminary data, the treatment was given. The first researcher took the role of the instructor in both control and experimental groups classes. In fact, the two groups started to attend their respective classes and underwent normal institutional instruction. However, the experimental group participants received a special treatment that was meant to improve their metacognitive strategies awareness. As shown, in Table 1., there were three major components and eight strategies. Each one of the strategies was presented, described, and practiced in one session alongside other normal instructional activities. The implementation phase consisted of verbal description of the strategy, emphasizing its significance and then, modeling the strategy through an example. Finally, a classroom task or homework was assigned to the learners which required them to exercise their newly acquired strategy.

For instance, in order to work on comprehension check strategy, the instructor modeled the activity by bringing a short reading passage about the impact of bacteria on human life. Then, he modeled the process by thinking and reading aloud and pausing at the end of each meaningful chunk, especially after each paragraph, and demonstrated how he was checking his own understanding through posing questions and trying to answer them by connecting ideas and concepts in the passage and making use of his background knowledge and the context. This process was repeated for each of the eight strategies and let the learners see how the metacognitive strategies work in reality.

After the treatment phase was finished and the training program was fully delivered to the experimental group, near the end of the semester, the same questionnaire was administered once again to all the participants. The interval between the pre-test and the post-test was about two

months. The same procedure, as had been employed for the pre-test administration, was used for the post-test. All the participants took part in the activity and filled in the forms. The researchers were personally present during the session and supervised the process. Similar to the previous administration, it took around 20 minutes or less for every student to complete the form and hand it in.

Results

Prior to dealing with the main data, the reliability of the questionnaire was estimated through Cronbach alpha. As Table 2 shows, the Cronbach alpha reliability indexes for the questionnaire scales exceed .60 which is considered the minimum acceptable value for reliability of a multi-item scale. Therefore, the questionnaire had acceptable indexes of internal consistency.

Table 2

Reliability Estimates of the Questionnaire

Scale	Cronbach α
MSA	.85
SEB	.82

Note. MSA= metacognitive strategies awareness, SEB= self-efficacy belief

Descriptive Statistics

According to the descriptive statistics (Table 3), the participants in both groups gained higher mean scores on the metacognitive strategies awareness, compared to self-efficacy belief. Also, both the experimental and control groups displayed improvement on the post-test measurement. However, the appropriate statistical analyses are required to determine the significance of the gained increase in either group.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for the Pre-test and Post-test Data

	Experimental Group (n=25)	Control Group (n=28)	Full Sample (n=53)

	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test	Pre-test	Post-test
MSA mean score	3.85	4.92	3.60	3.88	3.70	4.48
SEB mean score	4.55	5.60	4.33	4.64	4.44	5.03

Note. MSA= metacognitive strategies awareness, SEB= self-efficacy belief

Testing the Research Hypothesis

Before running any statistical tests, the data was checked for the normality of the distribution so that the appropriate statistical procedure could be chosen. As the results indicate, no violation of the assumption of normal distribution of the data was observed and the data was fully compatible for applying parametric test (Table 4).

Table 4

Results of the Normality Tests

variables	Kolmogrov-Smirnov Test					
	Experimental group		Control group		Full sample	
	Statistics	Sig.	Statistics	Sig.	Statistics	Sig.
MSA	.963	.108	.824	.066	1.02	.133
SEB	.941	.095	.737	.059	.920	.085

Note. MSA= metacognitive strategies awareness, SEB= self-efficacy belief

Trying to answer the research question which focused on the effectiveness of metacognitive strategies training on raising learners' sense of self-efficacy, a comparison between the post-test results was necessary. As Table 3 shows, the two groups obtained close results on the pre-test measurement of both variables. However, the experimental groups demonstrated mean scores that were slightly more than those of the control groups. In order to check whether the observed difference bears any statistical significance, a statistical comparison was necessary.

First of all, the two groups were compared in terms of the pre-test measures of the self-efficacy beliefs. In order to achieve this goal, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare their mean scores. There was no significant difference between the experimental group (M=4.55,

SD=.72) and the control group (M=4.33, SD=.68) in terms of their self-efficacy mean scores (t(51)=0.52, p> 0.05). The results indicated that the initial observed differences were not significant and the two groups can be considered equal regarding their self-efficacy beliefs. The major statistical comparison targeted the final differences between the experimental and the control groups. In order to find out whether the treatment has been effective in improving the self-efficacy of the participants, another independent samples t-test was run to compare the experimental and control group on their post-test measures of the self-efficacy belief. Therefore, their post-test mean scores where used and the results demonstrated that the experimental group (M=5.60, SD=.78) has significantly outperformed the control group (M=4.64, SD= .92), (t(51)=1.38, p=.000). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and it was evidenced that the metacognitive strategies instruction has been significantly effective in enhancing the self-efficacy belief of EFL learners. While the two groups displayed no important difference before the treatment, at the final spot, those participants who had received the treatment, obtained a much stronger sense of self-efficacy. The results of the comparison are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Results of t-test Comparing the Post-test Self-efficacy Mean Scores

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Difference in self-efficacy belief	Equal variances assumed	.386	.537	1.381	51	.000	.96385	.11375	-.28744	.16975
	Equal variances not assumed			1.381	50.948	.000	.96385	.11359	-.28711	.16942

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was to determine if a metacognitive strategies instruction program can influence L2 learners' overall self-efficacy in an EFL context. The findings reassure that the instruction has been effective and improved the sense of self-efficacy among the participants who received the treatment.

According to the findings, it can be interpreted that learners with a high degree of metacognitive awareness are better language learning strategy users. This is in line with Anam and Stracke's (2016) findings that suggest strong metacognitive awareness and the use of language learning strategies empower learners with a sense of self-sufficiency and increases their confidence in their own capabilities. Consequently, L2 learners develop stronger self-efficacy beliefs and tend to believe in themselves and begin to rely on their own abilities. As a result, such learners take the initiative and utilize their personal resources to overcome learning obstacles and direct their learning mechanisms. These interpretations can be corroborated by the findings of several other studies (Green & Oxford, 1995; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007).

Students who perceive themselves as more confident in their language learning abilities are better language learning strategy users. Self-confident learners are more ready to take on challenging learning tasks. As Zimmerman and Schunk (2011) claim employing strategies have been linked to a sense of self-efficacy which leads to anticipation of good learning. The growth of an individual's self-efficacy or level of confidence in successfully completing a task is closely related to efficient use of language learning strategies (Zimmerman, 2000).

In addition to that, using metacognitive strategies and adjusting learning strategies in learning may result learners to obtain higher achievements standards. They may accomplish the assigned activities and tasks, get higher grades or scores, and receive encouragement as a result of

competent performances. This process can also lead to a boost in their self-efficacy beliefs and greater confidence in their abilities to learn. That is why a number of studies indicate that metacognitive awareness determines students' success in second language learning (e.g., Chamot, Barnhardt, El-Dinnary, & Rubbins, 1999; Oxford, 2001; Wenden, 1991).

The results are also consistent with Mevarech & Kramarski's (2003) idea that metacognition should be embedded in the learning process, and supports Rasekh & Ranjbary's (2003) conclusion that metacognitive awareness contribute to improvements in students' performance.

An important aspect in regarding oneself as a successful learner can be self-control over the language learning. Paris and Winogard (1990) insisted that self-control would improve if language learning strategy instruction is merged with metacognitive awareness. Learners who have greater metacognitive awareness comprehend the similarity between a new learning task and previous ones, recognize those strategies required, and predict that using these strategies will bring about success.

Similarly, a number of empirical studies substantiate the link between EFL learners' self-efficacy beliefs and their use of strategies (Li & Wang, 2010; Su & Duo, 2012; Yang, 1999; Yilmaz, 2010). Their results revealed that students had rather high levels of self-efficacy which were positively associated with their use of the vocabulary learning strategies in general and the use of memory strategies in particular. They concluded that learners who are highly self-efficacious use strategies more often.

When learners believe in their abilities to perform tasks, they would create deeper interest in learning and developing their confidence in order to overcome difficulties of learning. Learners who enjoy high levels of self-efficacy also exhibit higher engagement in the classroom and gain more satisfying academic achievement. Accordingly, instructors should improve the sense of

self-efficacy in their students which would be beneficial to their achievement. Oxford (1990) has stated that it is crucial to provide teachers with a means of identifying and supporting individual learners who need to develop their sense of self-efficacy. If this can be done before they engage in learning tasks, the ensuing intervention in their language learning experience should result in superior performance.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

This study was an attempt to examine the possibility of enhancing EFL learners' sense of self-efficacy by implementing a metacognitive strategies instruction program.

The findings bear a significant meaning regarding the importance of both metacognitive strategies and self-efficacy. As the results suggest, a positive significant correlation exists between EFL learners' self-efficacy and their metacognitive awareness. In the process of learning, if teachers design tasks to help the students increase their self-efficacy and metacognitive awareness, this increase might have positive effect on their academic performance. Since, it is very important for students to understand the importance of using language learning strategies in the process of language learning; hence, EFL teachers should deliver this message to their students. Teachers should help students cultivate and raise their awareness of language learning strategies. Once learners are cognizant of advantages of employing strategies in their language learning, they will be willing to appropriately use these strategies to facilitate their otherwise frustrating learning activities.

From the findings of this study, two pedagogical implications have been suggested, which are (a) to highlight metacognitive strategies in the language teaching, and (b) to give rise to autonomous and learner-centered learning. As found in this research, the self-efficacy levels of the learner are decisive factors that need to be taken care of in the classroom. It is very important that this

characteristic is kept robust. In order to guarantee this, teachers should always give encouragement to students to maintain their responsibility in learning and/or further increase their confidence level by providing specific tasks at the right level of difficulty which challenges but does not defeat them. However, after self-efficacy beliefs are strengthened, the more difficult and challenging their tasks can be. They will have to do more to create ideas, thus they have to be more critical and analytical in thinking. Normally, learners judge their own self-efficacy through social comparisons between their own and others' performances (Shunk & Meece, 2006). Students who detect similar peers learning a task may also make sure that they can learn it. As such, students should work in groups which consist of especially small groups so that they can learn better from each other and apply taught strategies to manage the learning environment and manipulate the learning activities to suit them. Therefore, it is recommended that metacognitive awareness, even if not taught directly, be part of general pedagogical activities in the classroom to empower the learners and let them keep managing their learning outside the classroom.

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Appendix

Metacognitive Strategies Awareness and Self-Efficacy Belief Questionnaire

We would really appreciate your cooperation in filling this questionnaire. Your answers can help us a lot in knowing more about the characteristics of EFL learners and to find more effective ways of teaching English. All the information you provide here will be only used for the purposes of the research and nothing else. Thank you very much!

Please circle the number that best represents your idea about each item.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Entirely disagree	Mostly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Mostly agree	Entirely agree

Your age: ……..

Your native language: …….

1. I preview the language lesson to get a general idea of what it is about, how it is organized, and how it relates to what I already know.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. When someone is speaking the new language, I try to concentrate on what the person is saying and put unrelated topics out of my mind.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I decide in advance to pay special attention to specific language aspects; for example, I focus on the way native speakers pronounce certain sounds.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I try to find all I can about how to be a better language learner by reading books or articles, or by talking to others about how to learn.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I arrange my schedule to study and practice the new language consistently, not just when there is the pressure of a test.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I arrange my physical environment to promote learning; for instance, I find a quite comfortable place to review.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I organize my language notebook to record important language information.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I plan my goals for language learning; for instance, how proficient I want to become or how I might want to use the language in the long run.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I plan what I want to accomplish in language learning each day or each week.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I prepare for an upcoming language task (such as giving talk in the new language) by considering the nature of the task, what I have to know, and my current language skills.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I clearly identify the purpose of the language activity; for instance, in a listening task I might need to listen for a general idea or for specific facts.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I take responsibility for finding opportunities to practice the new language.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. I actively look for people with whom I can speak the new language.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. I try to notice my language errors and find out the reasons for them.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. I learn from my mistake in using the new language.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. I evaluate the general progress I have made in learning the language.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Compared with other students in this class I expect to do well.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. I'm certain I can understand the ideas taught in this course.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. I expect to do very well in this class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Compared with others in this class, I think I'm a good student.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. I am sure I can do an excellent job on the problems and tasks assigned for this class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22.1 think I will receive a good grade in this class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. My study skills are excellent compared with others in this class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. Compared with other students in this class I think I know a great deal about the subject.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. I know that I will be able to learn the material for this class.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7