

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN METACOGNITIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND PROFICIENCY IN EFL CLASSROOM IN CHILE

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: The main aim of the present study is to analyze and explain the use of metacognitive strategies in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Chile. To comprehend the metacognitive strategy usage of EFL learners, [Oxford's \(1990\) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning \(SILL\)](#) was used in this study.

Methodology: The present research is a quantitative study within the characteristics of the descriptive correlational framework in which the metacognitive strategies used by participants were examined in a university EFL setting. Further, the mid-semester grades were used for quantifying proficiency to see the correlation between proficiency and the use of metacognitive strategies.

Main Findings: Results showed that the participants used metacognitive strategies more frequently with an average use of 4.16. Two groups of strategies showed a positive relationship with language performance; cognitive ($r=.26$) and metacognitive strategies ($r=.585$). The measured R^2 (coefficient of determination) was found to be .342 which means 34% of the variance for the language proficiency of the participants was explained by metacognitive strategy use.

Applications of this study: The results of this study can be applied by the language teachers in their classroom teaching practices and by researchers for furthering their research in the field of language learning strategies. It can also be used by the students to facilitate their learning process.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The present study is a contribution to our understanding of how the learners use metacognitive skills and strategies in learning a foreign language. Language teachers can use these strategies in their classroom for successful learning.

Keywords: *Metacognitive Strategies, Proficiency, Learning Strategies, English as a Foreign Language, EFL Classroom, Relation.*

INTRODUCTION

The idea of “good and bad” language learners, in the opinion of the researchers, is an erroneous notion. Through their personal experiences, they have seen “bad” students turning out to be quite “good” by adopting several strategies, which on one hand, helped in acquiring language proficiency by various means like reflecting upon their learning process, and on the other developing their autonomy and self-regulation. The foreign language learning process entails conscious as well as unconscious actions, plans and efforts from the learner's side to acquire the language successfully. [Oxford \(1990\)](#) points out that these plans and efforts are geared towards facilitating the learning process and help the learners in internalizing as well as storing the new language for its further recovery and use. Some scholars refer to these efforts made by the learners to ease their learning process as strategies. One of the categories of the strategies is metacognitive strategies, which deal with the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of the learning process. This particular strategy was reported as one of the most used amongst all the other strategies and hence the topic of the present research studies.

Research in the area of language learning strategies started in the mid-70s with the appearance of the seminal of J. Rubin. In this research work, [Rubin \(1975\)](#) examined the individual dissimilarity while learning and questioned the degree of difference in success among students and provided a list of activities, which was normally carried out by the successful language learners. [Takeuchi \(2019\)](#) mentions that in the beginning, the research was more focused on reflecting the behaviors of “good language learners” and the characteristics, which were shared by the successful language learner. Many scholars have defined and looked at the learning strategies in the field of language learning ([Stern, 1975](#), [Wenden and Rubin, 1987](#), [O'Malley and Chamot 1990](#), [Oxford, 1990](#), [Richards and Platt, 1992](#)). They have all given their scholarly input defining and classifying language-learning strategies. The language learners attempt to find the easiest way to complete a task given by the teacher in a classroom setting or even while processing new information. These efforts and eagerness to carry out the tasks given by the teacher in the classroom may be called strategies. For some time this field was criticized during the beginning of this millennium but as [Pawlak \(2019\)](#) rightly points out that the research in the field of language learning strategies has “never lost its appeal to practitioners, probably on account of the fact that the steps learners take to enhance their language learning are seen as tangible and amenable to pedagogical intervention.”

Another pioneering work done in the field of language learning strategies which is worth mentioning is that of Rebecca Oxford. She defined and classified the strategies in a more holistic way which is also most accepted. [Oxford \(1990\)](#) tried to define the strategies from a psychological perspective as “an action plan, behavior, step, or technique” which the

learners employ for enhancing their language skills. She further explains that the strategies help in “internalizing, storing, recovering and using the new language” and they help in achieving “greater student autonomy.” [Wenden and Rubin \(1987\)](#) have explained this concept as a “set of plans, steps... to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval and use of information”. Looking at these explanations about the term, it is quite evident that the learners in their learning trajectory use actions, plans or ways to make the learning process easier. These plans or efforts may be called learning strategies. [Oxford \(2017\)](#) in her recent book has taken all the concepts and prevalent notions in the historical development of this term and summarized the second language learning strategies as “complex, dynamic thoughts and actions, selected and used by learners with some degree of consciousness in specific contexts in order to regulate multiple aspects of themselves” and these strategies serve as tools for enhancing long-term proficiency.

As far as the taxonomy of language learning strategies is concerned, there have been many attempts. For example, [O'Malley and Chamot \(1990\)](#) divided them into three types; Metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective. [Rubin \(1981\)](#) classified them into two main categories; direct and indirect. According to her, the first category contributes directly to the learner's language learning like clarification, monitoring, guessing, etc. whereas the indirect ones are those, which contribute indirectly such as using production tricks, creating opportunities, etc. [Oxford \(1990\)](#) categorized them into the same types; direct strategies, which require mental processing and indirect strategies for supporting and managing language learning. Memory, cognitive and compensation strategies from part of the first category while metacognitive, affective and social are included in the second one.

In the present study, there is an attempt to see how one learns (EFL) in the Chilean context, focusing primarily on the usage of metacognitive strategies involved in the learning path and how students process ideas towards the same goal. In addition to that, the researchers have also tried to look into the correlation between the students' use of metacognitive strategies and their proficiency. The present research work reflects the usage of metacognitive strategies in learning EFL and their relationship with language achievement. This is important because it opens new avenues to the already existing research works to continue considering a holistic view of the whole language teaching-learning process. Language learning happens at both social as well as individual level. This research looks into the individual internal processes through which the learning takes place. The strategies also act as an important tool for fostering learner autonomy and developing skills for “learning how to learn”. Thus, they encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and to become independent learners.

METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES

Metacognition can be defined as thinking about thinking ([Anderson, 2002, 2005](#)). The American developmental psychologist John H. Flavell coined this term in 1976. [Flavell \(1976\)](#) defined metacognitive knowledge as “one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them, e.g., the learning-relevant properties of information or data”. For [Anderson \(2002\)](#), metacognitively conscious learners know “what to do when they don't know what to do”. Metacognition means knowledge and understanding of one's own thought process. [Wenden \(1998\)](#) refers to metacognition as “a form of cognition and a high-level thinking process that involves active control over cognitive processes”. So metacognitive skills involve the internal processing of the learning behaviors and thereby influence the learning process. [Oxford \(1999\)](#) has very well established a connection between the learning strategies and Vygotskian psychological work of self-regulation, which, in Vygotsky's vision, is similar to what metacognitive strategies refer to. In other words, the whole process of internal planning, monitoring and assessment carried out regarding his/her own learning encompasses the metacognition. [O'Malley and Chamot \(1990\)](#) highlight the significance of metacognition and affirm that the learners lacking metacognitive approaches are essentially like learners not knowing the learning path and without any opportunity to design their learning and monitor their progress. According to [Anderson \(2002\)](#), metacognition combines various attended thinking and reflective processes and he divided metacognition into the five primary components presented below in Figure 1.

Metacognitive strategies help the learners to plan, guide, monitor, along with organizing and evaluating their learning. [Wenden \(1998\)](#) highlights the importance of metacognitive knowledge and she underlines that it influences the “self-regulation of learning in planning, monitoring and evaluating skills.” [Vandergrift \(1997\)](#) points out that the usage of metacognitive strategies like identifying problems, selective attention and monitoring comprehension are some of the important factors, which differentiate the successful listener from unsuccessful ones. A lot of research work has been carried out to examine the relationship between language proficiency and the use of language learning strategies in general and metacognitive strategies, in particular. Some of them have been discussed below.

In a research study conducted in South Africa on 305 Afrikaans speaking learners, [Dreyer & Oxford \(1996\)](#) found that the strategy used on the SILL strongly predicted language proficiency on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). In the same study, Metacognitive strategy use was found to be the best predictor to explain the variance in the TOEFL score. In another research study conducted by [Oxford and Ehrman \(1995\)](#) at the U.S. Foreign Service Institute on 262 adult participants, the SILL correlated with foreign language proficiency. In this study, the correlation was strong, $r = .61$ between foreign language proficiency and use of metacognitive and cognitive strategies. [Mauricio Véliz C., \(2012\)](#) conducted a case study in Santiago-Chile University with the title “Language Learning Strategies (LLSs) and L2 motivation associated with L2 pronunciation development in pre-service teachers of English”. The researcher found that

the most used indirect strategies by both participants were metacognitive strategies and the subjects in this study reported using the strategy of evaluating their learning strategy, which is a metacognitive strategy. In another research study carried out on 135 university students using SILL, [GarcíaHerrero and Amparo Jiménez \(2014\)](#) found that the participants used the metacognitive strategies the most amongst all the categories of strategies. They added that the participants in their study were primarily concerned with organizing, planning and evaluating their learning. [Jesús J. RisueñoMartínez et al., \(2016\)](#) conducted another study in Spain on 206 Spanish students of English, with the title “Language learning strategy use by Spanish EFL students: the effect of proficiency level, gender, and motivation”. They found metacognitive strategies (3.75) being used more than any other category of strategies. In [Haifa Al-Buainain’s study \(2010\)](#) on 120 Arab students titled, she found that the participants reported using the metacognitive strategies most followed by cognitive. In another study on 200 tertiary level female students in the Vellore district in India by [Feleciya and Meenakshi \(2016\)](#), the researchers found that the participants used the metacognitive strategies the most (mean= 4.14). In the study, the learners using more metacognitive strategies scored above 80% in English. They further added that those learners who are capable of planning, gathering materials, organizing, monitoring and evaluating one’s learning process were found to be successful in achieving language proficiency.

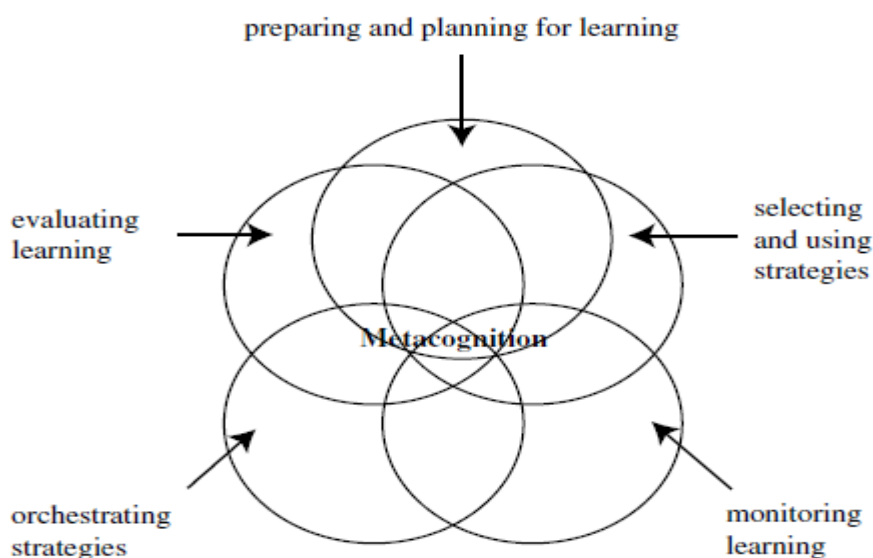


Figure 1: A model of metacognition [Anderson \(2008\)](#)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the current study, the researchers have tried to comprehend the overall pattern of the use of metacognitive strategies while learning EFL in Chile. The research questions that form the core of the present work about the use of the learning strategy in teaching and learning English in Chilean universities are detailed below:

- Which category of language learning strategies amongst the six categories do learners employ more frequently in the process of learning EFL in Chile?
- What is the average use of the nine metacognitive strategies mentioned in the SILL questionnaire?
- Is there any relationship between language proficiency and the use of metacognitive strategies?
- Which other metacognitive strategies (apart from SILL questionnaire) do the participants use in learning EFL in Chile?

METHODOLOGY

The present research is a quantitative study within the characteristics of the descriptive correlational framework in which the metacognitive strategies used by participants were examined in a university EFL setting. Further, the mid-semester grades were used for quantifying proficiency to see the correlation between proficiency and the use of metacognitive strategies. This study serves as a reflection of the students regarding their own process of learning a foreign language taking into consideration their viewpoints. A study of this kind was also necessary to get to know the place of metacognitive strategies in the learning trajectory of the learners.

PARTICIPANTS AND RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

For the present study, 12 students (approximately 67%) on a total of 18 belonging to the course of “Research on Teaching-Learning of English” of the Department of Pedagogy in English at the Universidad Catolica del Maule were

randomly chosen. By using the current study as a case study, the researchers have tried to see the perspectives and views of the students themselves and their approach towards learning EFL. The survey was conducted in December 2017 and among the participants, there were seven females and five males. In the current study, the questionnaire has been used as the main instrument to collect the data. This questionnaire has the following parts

Part 1: Questionnaire to collect background information

Part 2: SILL (Questionnaire measuring metacognitive strategies)

Part3: Questionnaire with some common strategies

Part 1 of the questionnaire dealt with collecting the background information of the participants. Part 2 consisted of SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) which is a questionnaire developed by Oxford in 1990 designed to evaluate the use of language learning strategies. It is perhaps the most famous (Macaro, 2001), although it is not the only questionnaire of its kind. There are other types of questionnaires and several rating scales of strategies to evaluate the use of language strategies, however, the SILL is considered to be most accepted and with more reliability. The SILL is divided into six groups of strategies, which are classified according to the original system of identification and classification of Oxford (1990). Part D in this questionnaire deals with metacognitive strategies. The participant has to think about each strategy and then answer them on a Likert scale of five. Part D of the SILL questionnaire dealing with metacognitive strategies has nine questions. These metacognitive strategies include strategies such as paying attention, planning linguistic tasks, looking for practice opportunities, self-evaluation, etc. Part 3 of the questionnaire comprised of a list of common learning strategies. Apart from the questionnaire, the mid-term grades of the students were used to quantify language proficiency.

DATA COLLECTION PHASE

The questionnaire was given out in keeping with the practice summarized by Nyikos and Oxford (1993). The aim of the investigation was made clear to the participants. The questionnaire was distributed and the participants were asked to finish them during class time. The objective was focussed on getting learners to indicate and reflect on their learning and to increase familiarity with strategy choices. One of the researchers was present for the entire time while the students filled out the questionnaire to clarify any doubts or questions that may arise during the process.

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

The findings of the research diagnose the participants' responses to the questionnaire. In this study, it is found that with the average of use 4.16, Chilean learners use metacognitive strategies more frequently. The finding of using metacognitive strategies most frequently was consistent with other earlier studies like Haifa Al-Buainain's study (2010), Feleciya and Meenakshi (2016), Jesús J. RisueñoMartínez et al., (2016). Table 1 shows the list of nine metacognitive strategies that are part of the questionnaire SILL.

Table 1: Result of metacognitive strategies in order of higher to lower mean

| SILL | Part-D Metacognitive | Mean | SD |
|------|---|------|------|
| 32 | I pay attention when someone is speaking English. | 4.92 | 0.29 |
| 30 | I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English. | 4.67 | 0.49 |
| 38 | I think about my progress in learning English. | 4.50 | 0.52 |
| 31 | I notice my English mistakes and use that information to help me do better. | 4.33 | 0.78 |
| 36 | I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English. | 4.17 | 0.83 |
| 37 | I have clear goals for improving my English skills. | 4.08 | 1.16 |
| 33 | I try to find out how to be a better learner of English. | 4.08 | 1.08 |
| 35 | I look for people I can talk to in English. | 3.75 | 0.75 |
| 34 | I plan my schedule so I have enough time to study English. | 2.92 | 1.08 |

From table 1, it is perceived that students pay close attention when someone is conversing in English. They also think about their progress while learning English, which is very much important and pertains to the metacognitive abilities of the learners. Teachers often do not realize the internal processes that play an important role in learning a foreign language. Metacognitive strategies belong to these internal processes and act as motivating tools for the learners, which help them in the successful learning of a foreign language. The other strategies that students reported using in this category are taking note of their mistakes, looking for people or opportunities to practice English, trying to discover the process of improving their English. Metacognitive strategies are also important because they help to generate motivation and are like steps to make the students autonomous. The problem with this type of strategy is that they are unobservable. Hence, it is sometimes difficult for a researcher to consider and quantify them. From table 1, we can see that all the items

are in the high usage category (above the average of 3.5) except the last strategy, which falls in the medium usage category.

Below is the result of nine items of metacognitive strategies student-wise. From Table 2, it is clear that almost all the participants employ metacognitive strategies most frequently and that is why all of them (except one) fall into high usage group as defined by Oxford (1990).

Table 2: Result of metacognitive strategies student-wise

| Part D | | Metacognitive Strategies | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|------|--------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|---------|------|
| Students | A1 | A2 | A3 | A4 | A5 | A6 | A7 | A8 | A9 | A10 | A11 | A12 | Average | SD |
| Total | 39 | 34 | 32 | 42 | 44 | 39 | 38 | 38 | 42 | 38 | 31 | 32 | 37.42 | 4.29 |
| Average of Use | 4.33 | 3.78 | 3.56 | 4.67 | 4.89 | 4.33 | 4.22 | 4.22 | 4.67 | 4.22 | 3.44 | 3.56 | 4.16 | 0.48 |

The third question of this study deals with the correlation between the metacognitive strategies and proficiency of the participants. In the current investigative study, the researchers have taken the mid-term grades of the students to quantify the level of proficiency. The proficiency level as indicated by the mid-term grades was found to be related positively to the use of metacognitive strategies ($r = 0.585$). Below is a table showing that relation.

Table 3: Correlation between Mid-term grade and the use of different types of strategies

| Category | Correlation (r) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| SILL | 0.001 |
| Use of Memory strategies | 0.06 |
| Use of cognitive strategies | 0.26 |
| Use of strategies of compensation | -0.47 |
| Use of metacognitive strategies | 0.59 |
| Use of effective strategies | -0.67 |
| Use of social strategies | -0.02 |

Table 4: Correlation between Grade and use of metacognitive strategies

| | Grade | Metacognitive |
|----------------|----------|---------------|
| Mid-term grade | 1 | |
| Metacognitive | 0.585033 | 1 |

If one looks at the table of correlations, one can see that the mid-term grades obtained by the students have a positive relationship with the metacognitive strategies: Pearson $r = 0.59$. While there is no correlation between Grade and SILL; Pearson $r = 0.001$. Interestingly, apart from the metacognitive, the only other category showing positive correlation is cognitive strategy; Pearson $r = 0.26$. Other categories of strategies were not found related to the competency indicated by mid-term grades. There is a negative correlation between Grade and affective strategies: Pearson $r = -0.67$ and mid-term grades and the use of strategies of compensation: Pearson $r = -0.47$. From the above table, it is apparent that the metacognitive strategies are the only group of strategies having a moderate positive correlation with the proficiency indicated by the midterm grades obtained. It also underlines the fact that the learners have more metacognitive control and exercise this metacognition in their learning process to enhance their learning experiences.

Table 5: Measurement of R^2 : coefficient of determination

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. The error of the Estimate | Durbin-Watson |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | .585 ^a | .342 | .269 | .2287 | 1.442 |

a. Predictors (Constant), Metacognitive.

b. Dependent Variable: Final Grades.

R^2 is used here to explain the variability of language proficiency that can be caused by its relationship to the use of metacognitive strategies. In the present study, $R^2 = 0.342$ means that 34% of the variance for the language proficiency of the participants was explained by metacognitive strategy use.

To respond to the last question of the study, there was another set of 25 common strategies provided to the learners to see which strategies they use most in their learning path, apart from the SILL questionnaire. From the list of 25, the following 10 strategies have been listed below in Table 6 those are in high average use category.

Table 6: List of strategies with high average use

| Sl.No. | Language Learning Activities | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|--------|--|------|--------------------|
| 1 | Watching movies in English. | 4.8 | 0.6 |
| 2 | Learning from the teacher. | 4.7 | 0.7 |
| 3 | Listening to songs in English. | 4.6 | 1.0 |
| 4 | Using a computer. | 4.5 | 0.9 |
| 5 | Watching TV in English. | 4.5 | 0.9 |
| 6 | Trying to think in English. | 4.4 | 0.8 |
| 7 | Listening to native speakers of English. | 4.4 | 1.2 |
| 8 | Learning from mistakes. | 4.4 | 0.7 |
| 9 | Talking to other students in English. | 4.3 | 0.8 |
| 10 | Doing homework. | 4.2 | 0.8 |

The strategies numbered 1, 3 and 5 in the table are watching movies, listening to songs and watching TV which shows that learning through entertainment and authentic sources is very common amongst the Chilean students. Chilean learners place more importance on the authentic source of learning, which is also entertaining in nature. Learning from the teacher is a common strategy, which, the researchers have found true in all the research contexts.

Some of the strategies from the list, which are somehow related to the category of metacognitive strategies, have been discussed. Strategy number 6, which is trying to think in English, also belongs to the metacognitive skills that the learners use in their learning trajectory. This strategy, which belongs to the metacognitive group, is also important since it works as a reinforcement and drives the metacognitive skills that are important at the time of making a conversation. According to one of the popular sayings, the moment one begins dreaming in a foreign language, he/she has mastered the target language. Thinking about the learning process itself, about its success, error, lack and everything, helps a lot in achieving proficiency in the language. This also reflects that there is a need to train students in the proper use of the strategies. Thinking in English is a metacognitive strategy and it helps in retaining information in short-term memory and serves to develop concepts in long-term memory. Strategy number 8 is important as it mentions learning from mistakes. This strategy also seems to emphasize the fact that the most competent students pay careful attention to details and learn from experience and perhaps overcomes the emphasis on fluency at the expense of the precision that has been fashionable during some time (Brumfit, 1984). The next strategy, which is strategy number 9 in the table, is talking to others in English. In the case of Chilean students, it is a bit difficult. Practically teaching English in the Chilean context is very difficult since students do not have the opportunity to see and experience the target culture. Their knowledge is limited to books and they usually practice, in most cases, in the situations they find around them, which are Chilean conditions. In other words, one can say that they have a small world in which they try to use the English language but in Chilean contexts. They have two possibilities left; practice English with their classmates or teachers or practice with the natives if they find someone. However, as the result shows that this strategy is very useful and the students have responded positively with the average of 4.3.

CONCLUSION

According to Anderson (2002), strong metacognitive skills empower second language learners. He adds that by reflecting upon their learning strategies, the students learn to make conscious decisions on how to improve their learning. In this paper, the indirect metacognitive strategies have been chosen because of three reasons; first, the participants in the survey reported using the metacognitive strategies the most. Second, of all the strategies only the metacognitive strategies showed a moderate positive correlation with the language performance (mid-term grades) and third the researchers have observed that the learners, in general, don't take full advantage of the metacognitive strategies which could not only help in facilitating the learning process but also help them to be an autonomous learner. The present research work reflects the usage of metacognitive strategies in learning EFL and their relationship with language achievement. This is important because it opens new avenues to the already existing research works to continue considering a holistic view of the whole language teaching-learning process. Language learning happens at both social as well as individual level. Through this paper, the researchers have tried to look into the individual internal processes through which the learning takes place. Another important aspect of metacognitive strategies that needs consideration is their role in autonomous learning. The metacognitive processes that include the organization of learning time, self-control and self-evaluation are like the first steps in becoming autonomous learners. The important role of the learning strategies cannot be denied since they are the tools used by the students themselves in their learning process and indicate the first movements of the students towards

achieving autonomy. There is a need to train the students to use these strategies and take advantage of them, which deal with regulating and planning internal processes of learning a foreign language.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

The present study is a quantitative analysis of the student's response to their choice of leaning strategies and perhaps a qualitative analysis is needed to complement it and to get deeper insights to explain their choice and use of these particular strategies. Another limitation of the study is using the grade to measure the language learning achievements and perhaps a separate test is required to be conducted for evaluating the language learning performance of the students. However, the grade was considered because of two reasons. First, the students pay more attention to the exams and securing good grades is their main intention and second, at the time of the survey, the students were busy with their semester examination. Hence, it was difficult for researchers to carry out a separate test to quantify language-learning performance. Another important point, which we as teacher and researcher have to consider, is in what way we can integrate strategy training in the language classroom for the benefit of learners. The question of intrinsic or extrinsic training of strategies as well as the timing of doing so is an area in which research has been carried out but there is a need to deepen our knowledge in this field, which requires further research both at transversal as well as longitudinal level.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of the current quantitative data show that the EFL learners in Chile apply metacognitive strategies frequently in their learning process and it has a positive relationship with the proficiency. The findings of this study have several implications for educational practices for teacher educators in the classroom. One of the implications is teacher training in the field of strategy instruction in foreign language classrooms. Strategy instruction and its integration into the second language learning program can positively impact and thus make a huge contribution to increase both teachers' and students' awareness of metacognitive strategies. This would help in developing autonomy in the learners.

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