ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКИЕ НАУКИ / PEDAGOGICAL SCIENCES
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DIDACTIC AND PRACTICAL VALUE OF METACOGNITIVE SKILLS IN EL CLASSROOMS

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ДИДАКТИЧЕСКАЯ И ПРАКТИЧЕСКАЯ ЦЕННОСТЬ МЕТАКОГНИТИВНЫХ НАВЫКОВ В КЛАССАХ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

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Abstract. The article discusses the importance of metacognitive strategies in teaching reading in higher education using media materials. This is put forward in theoretical part of the article referring to a number of scholars who previously studied the issue. Practical part deals with analyzing the problems supposed to arise if students are not aware of and do not use metacognitive competence; and suggesting some guidelines about how EFL teachers can help students to develop that competence.

Аннотация. В статье обсуждается важность метакогнитивных стратегий в процессе обучения чтению в высшей школе с использованием медийных материалов. Данная проблема освещается в теоретической части статьи, ссылаясь на ряд ученых, которые ранее изучали этот вопрос. Практическая часть посвящена анализу проблем, которые могут возникнуть, в случае когда учащиеся не знают и не используют метакогнитивную компетентность; и предлагая некоторые руководящие принципы о том, как учителя могут помочь студентам развить эту компетенцию.

Keywords: metacognitive strategies, self-evaluating, planning, self-monitoring, media materials, support strategies, problem-solving strategies.

Ключевые слова: метакогнитивные стратегии, самооценка, планирование, самоконтроль, медиа материалы, стратегии поддержки, стратегии решения проблем.

Acquiring a foreign language is not a simple process, requiring a learner well-organized, goal-oriented, and practical strategy to use. If the student fails to find and exploit the appropriate way to language acquisition, the process turns to be extremely long, complex, and most importantly, ineffective [1–6].

For this reason, in recent years, working out effective learning strategies and applying them to context is the foremost aim and duty of scientists and EFL teachers. There are a number of categorization of learning strategies according to the different authors and sources, including O'Malley and Chamot (1990) who divide learning strategies into three — social-effective, cognitive, and metacognitive [6].

The article intends to focus on one of them, on the importance of metacognitive strategies in English language classrooms and find out the ways of developing those strategies through, particularly, media materials (newspaper articles).

Before going into further details of the issue, we should comprehend what is metacognition itself. The term "metacognition" refers to thinking about thinking. In other words, it is the self-awareness of knowing what a learner's strengths and weaknesses are and when and how to apply and compensate them respectively. Thus, as N. Dhieb-Henia (2006) states that metacognitive strategies encourage learners to reflect on thought processes and to plan, monitor, and evaluate aspects of their learning [3].

As multiple types of research into reading strategies showed, successful readers are better at monitoring their comprehension than poorer readers, they are more aware of what strategies they use. It means that good readers, with the help of their particular strategies, they are capable of differentiating the most important information from not important one or overcoming challenges of understanding unknown words of the text.

In accordance with O'Malley and Chamot (1990), several core types of steps can be included in metacognitive strategies [6]. They are as follows:

–Selective attention to the task, in other words, identifying the purpose for reading e.g reading to get a general idea or specific information.

–Planning–thinking about how to read the text.

–Self-monitoring, which means analyzing and working on errors in reading comprehension.

–Self-evaluating how well the overall objectives are accomplished, which gives a chance for a reader to take corrective measures in the case comprehension is not being achieved.

Raising and, consequently, strengthening students' awareness of all about these strategies which help them make their learning successful is, especially, important for EFL teachers. However, only suggesting students these lists or teaching them cannot be sufficient until we create the context to put that knowledge into practice and develop learners' metacognitive competence. As people learn best not by hearing or knowing but seeing and experiencing. If strategy training is set in EFL classrooms and learners to have an opportunity to incorporate metacognitive elements of selecting, planning, self-monitoring, and self-evaluating into the assignment, they will be able to comprehend long complex scientific materials in a limited period of time reaching sophisticated outcomes in their majors.

Another categorization suggested by Anderson (1983) says that metacognition is divided into declarative and procedural knowledge [1]. Declarative knowledge refers to knowing what something is while procedural one is to know how to do something or to put that knowledge into action. These two subtypes are the irreplaceable components of metacognition as by only transferring declarative knowledge into procedural one, learners will be able to use first language strategies in foreign language acquisition as well.

Grabe and Stoller (2002) point out that reading long texts quickly for general understanding is specific mostly for fluent readers in their native language and is difficult for second or foreign language learners. As most readers spend a considerable amount of time for careful and detailed reading, going through several difficulties to cognize the core concept of the text, metacognitive strategies are one of the crucial ways to overcome these challenges [4].

In terms of practical values of metacognitive strategies, the curiosity and necessity for this certain matter derive from analyzing current context–requirements and objectives put forward for university students majoring in language learning and teaching. To be precise, the graduates of bachelor`s degree are expected to reach a level of reading proficiency equivalent to Band C1 in the

CEFR. Respectively, one of the objectives for the 5th term of 3rd-year students is to help them to read complex reports, analyses, and commentaries in articles, where opinions, viewpoints, and connections are discussed. Obviously, one of the essential text types of course content is newspaper and magazine articles (news, reports, feature articles, popular science articles from magazines as Uzbekistan Today, The Economist, The New Scientist, National Geographic, Teaching English Professional). And so that to approach the target level mentioned above, students should be aware of metacognition and able to effectively use the strategies of it.

Previous researchers on learners' metacognitive aspects of reading strategy use had revealed that successful readers generally displayed a higher degree of metacognitive awareness, which enabled them to use reading strategies more effectively and efficiently than their unsuccessful peers [2].

But how to help students develop these strategies? The study commenced with learning about a questionnaire developed by K. Mokhtari and C. A. Reichard (2002) where it was categorized into three components: global, problem-solving, and support strategies [5].

The questionnaire, which was later adapted into the local context and the aims of the research, consisted of the following statements:

–I have a purpose in my mind when I read.
–I think about what I know to help me to understand what I read.
–I preview the text to see what it is about before reading it.
–I use context clues to help me better understand what I`m reading.
–I try to guess what the material is about when I read.
–I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.
–I try to guess the information provided in the article looking at the headline of it.
–I use the photos, pictures and other illustrations attached to the newspaper article to increase my understanding.
–I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text.
–I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.

The questions were selected and designed in accordance with the preliminary objectives of the research, aiming they will further be developed in line with subsequent research tasks.

Generally speaking, according to the results of the questionnaire, the majority of students tended not to use the above-stated strategies despite their theoretical awareness taught in their reading class. This conclusion led the researcher to assist students to put them into effective practice. The content of the trial as follows.

1. To give information where we can apply extensively (reading for pleasure, fictional stories) and intensive (manuals, instructions of gadgets) reading in real life.

2. To brainstorm about skimming (reading for general comprehension, newspaper articles, etc.) and scanning (searching for detailed information, in science to find an answer for question).

3. To encourage learners to be precise with their aim to read the text.

4. To train students to put questions before starting reading with who, what, where, when, why, and how.

5. To encourage readers to work with illustrations to predict, fix, and have a better understanding of what is given in the text.

6. To teach how to decode the meaning of unknown words with the help of context clues (grammar: parts of speech, sentence order, etc.; reference signals such as that is to say, in other words, this means, etc.; word phrases or collocations used together).

7. To enable students to restate information with their own words to check their comprehension.

9. Last but not least, to train them to analyze what they have read comparing with what they have expected and predicted before and whether objectives of reading were fulfilled.

On the whole, the essence of the trial was to apply four main metacognitive strategies of O'Malley and Chamot (1990) which are selective attention to the task (points 1, 3) planning (points 2, 4–6), self-monitoring (points 7) and self-evaluating (point 8) in the context of authentic materials, in particular, newspaper articles which are critically useful in everyday life of language communicants [6].

With metacognitive strategies, learners will be aware of their goals, monitor the reading process, arrange and adjust strategies if needed and evaluate their reading performance which will, in the end, lead students to reach reading proficiency in a range of text types of media materials.

Developing language learning strategies, in particular, metacognitive skills, is valuable competence in terms of simplifying language acquisition, helping learners to transform declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge, stimulating their active and conscious (by aiming, planning, monitoring, evaluating) reading and, in overall, leading them to the fulfillment of their certain objectives.

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