

Second National Conference on New Perspectives in ELT
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**Metacognitive Syllabus for Tertiary Students:
Bridging the Gap between Language Needs and
Language Skills**

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Abstract

In the field of second language acquisition, language learning strategies have a prominent role. They are mostly based on sociology, linguistics and psychology (including the critical age phenomenon). Psychology based language learning strategies, in recent years, are proven to be very effective in the field of second language acquisition. Several such strategies are in practice, throughout the world, based on the needs of learners. Among those strategies that evolved from cognitive theory of language learning, metacognitive strategies have proven to be the most effective one. This paper aims to identify the elements of a syllabus that integrates metacognitive strategies with regular learning goals and thereby turning the students into autonomous learners.

Key words: Metacognitive Syllabus, Gap between Language Needs and Language Skills, Tertiary Students.

Traditional Popularity of Grammar Translation Method in India

In India from the end of the seventeen century to the middle of twentieth century, English teaching was based on Grammar Translation method. Grammar Translation method was the classical or traditional method which was practised during the fourteenth century in the western world to learn Greek and Latin. It was later used by British to teach English in their colonies for administrative purposes. From the end of 17th century to early 19th century this was the only method used to teach English in India.

This method focuses on learning English by contrasting the grammar rules of L1 with that of English. It requires the learner to be fluent in their mother tongue; only then English grammar rules can be effectively learned. The weakness of this method is that it does not focus on spoken communication. Instead it only sharpens the learners writing skills. This method was very popular and was practised in India for nearly three hundred years. It was very popular among the first generation English teachers as they themselves were taught using this method. It was very suitable for large Indian classrooms. The lack of development of other skills especially speaking skills was a huge drawback of grammar translation method.

Indian Situation

The pedagogy of ELT was initially developed in the West. The socio-political realities are different in India when compared to the west. The developments made in the field of ELT took many years to reach India. Only during 1980s the policy makers in India gave adequate attention to the importance of English in India. English is not considered as a foreign language now, but in the past, the teaching of English had to consider a number of pedagogic factors. The rate of development of English Language Teaching in India is very slow.

In terms of methodology, ELT in India seems to be affected by geographical and economic reasons. In the schools and colleges that are run by the government, the primary aim is to provide education to all. ELT is not considered the most important goal in these institutions. The lack of Economic support as well as location of these institutions makes it impossible for them to access the new trends in ELT. Most of the institutions are located in rural background, where one can fulfil the basic requirements alone. The other kinds of institutions are those which are funded by the government and are run by private managing bodies. In these institutions teachers interact with the students, know their needs and use methodologies to cater to the need of their learning process. Among these institutions there are ones which have state of the art equipment and completely equipped language laboratories. There is another set of institutions which are completely run by individuals. As time means money to them, they equip themselves with interactive, multimedia software and make learners proficient in English usage within a stipulated period of time and charge them high amount of fee.

Use of Communicative Language Teaching Method

Most of the educational institutions today make use of communicative language teaching method. This method gained prominence during 1970-1980 in the West. It became popular in India after 1990s and it is still practiced. After 1995, teaching methods in India is oriented towards the generic category of Communicative Approach (CA), by using many methodologies that come under it. Majority of the educational institutions especially technical and business related training institutions want their graduates to be proficient in English speaking skills. CA approach can very well cater to their needs. These institutions frame their own teaching methodologies by integrating audio-lingual, situational or direct method of language teaching. All these methods are CA oriented and focus only upon communication skills. The issue related to this kind of language teaching is that these methods are very insensitive to the response of the learners and do not take into account the individual difficulties that a learner might face while encountering a learning task.

New Language Learning Strategies Yet to be Introduced

The field of second language acquisition in the west has practices Language Learning Strategies that is yet to be introduced in Indian context. Language learning strategies can be defined as “techniques for understanding, remembering, and using information that are intentionally used and consciously controlled by the learner” (qtd from Rahimi and Maral).

The research in language learning strategies began during 1960s which was influenced by the developments in cognitive psychology. The primary focus of the research done in this area was to find out those strategies that a good language learner makes use of while learning a new language. Rubin, who pioneered most of the works in strategies, classifies strategies into those directly and indirectly contributes to language learning. The three main strategies that contribute to language learning are cognitive strategy, metacognitive strategy and socio effective strategy. Among the three main strategies, this paper focuses on metacognitive strategies.

Metacognition

The term *metacognition* was coined by American linguist John Flavell in the late 1960s. Cognition refers to the mental processes involved in attaining knowledge and comprehension whereas metacognition is the ability to be conscious of one’s own mental

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 17:6 June 2017

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processes or the “ability to consciously and deliberately monitor and regulate one’s knowledge, processes, cognitive and affective states, motives and intentions.” (qtd in Lauca-Papaleontiou). Recent research shows that learners who make use of metacognitive strategies perform comparatively better than those who are unaware of learning strategies.

Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies that can be made use of in the learning of English language are as follows

Selective attention- Focusing on special aspects of learning tasks, as in planning to listen for key words or phrases

Planning/ monitoring- Planning for the organization of either written or spoken skills.

Evaluation –Checking comprehension after completion of a receptive language activity, or evaluating language production after it has taken place. (qtd. in O’Malley and Chamot 44).

Using these strategies in the learning of English language in the Indian context would be beneficial as such use would make the learners understand the learning process explicitly. The learners could overcome the individual difficulties they encounter while doing a learning activity. The actual challenge is to tailor these strategies to meet the necessities and ambience of Indian class rooms.

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