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THE ROLE OF SELF-REGULATION STRATEGIES ON DEVELOPING IRANIAN EFL LEARNER'S OVERALL LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted based on the social cognitive theory of Bandura (1986) and Zimmerman (1989) to investigate how self-regulation strategies can effect on Iranian EFL Learner's overall Language proficiency. The purpose of this study was twofold: its first aim was to investigate different aspects of the self-regulation strategies that are used by EFL learners on completing proficiency tasks; secondly, it attempted to determine the effect of self-regulation strategies on developing EFL learner's Language proficiency. Students randomly assigned to an experimental and a control group by using a modified TOEFL test as a pre-test. In the experimental group, teacher explained about self-regulation strategies. This group at the end of treatment session completed a questionnaire about which self-regulation strategies they used. In the control group, students completed their TOEFL test but teacher did not explain about self-regulation strategies. Questionnaire about self-regulation strategies showed that which strategies are more useful for students in completing TOEFL test. Furthermore, in the post test, experimental group outperformed the control group on completing Language proficiency task. The results of analyses presented that self-regulation strategies have positive effect on TOEFL test. Moreover, it can be concluded that self-regulation strategies have a positive effect on developing Learner's overall Language proficiency.

Keywords: *Cognition, Language Proficiency, Self-regulation Strategies*

INTRODUCTION

In the field of studies on language learning strategies, self-regulated learning (SRL) has become an important topic in educational and psychological researches in the last two decades (Steffens, 2008). Self-regulation or self-regulated learning (SRL) is "an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features in the environment" (Pintrich, 2000).

Some researchers (e.g. Locke and Latham, 1990; Zimmerman, 1989; Zimmerman and Schunk, 1989) found that the extent to which learners are capable of regulating their own learning greatly enhances their learning performances". Moreover, it is vital for individuals to adopt with this continuously fluctuating world and they need to utilize learning strategies such as self-regulation strategies which can be useful for self-education and updating during one's entire life. Using self-regulation has an important role in language learning process and it focuses on the high responsibility and autonomy of learners. Studies on EFL contexts (e.g. Graham and Harris, 1994; Magno, 2009; Zimmerman and Risemby, 1997) have identified self-regulation as a useful strategy to acquire a foreign language and become proficient in using it. Moreover these studies supported the idea that all individuals regardless of their age, proficiency level and background education use different self-regulation strategies. Also, they found that successful learners reconstruct their existing knowledge with new ones and are able to control their behaviors and affects in order to improve their academic learning and performance. Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) developed a description of 14 self-regulation strategies which are used by successful learners, however, Mango (2009, 2010) discovered a new model of academic self regulated learning which composed of seven factors based on the framework of Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986). In his

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studies Magno (2009, 2010) categorized self-regulation strategies in seven main groups; memory strategy, goal setting, self-evaluation, seeking assistance, environmental structuring, learning responsibility and organizing. More importantly, it has to be mentioned that, in line with Social cognitive view toward self-regulated learning (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1989), the development of self-regulation strategies is dependent upon three areas of influences, which determine the direction and the degree of application of self regulation strategies. These three determinants factors are personal, behavioral and environmental influences according to which self-regulation strategies were categorized by Zimmerman (1989, 1995). Self-regulation strategies which are affected by personal influences are referred to as covert self-regulation (Zimmerman, 1989). Some strategies that are affected by these influences usually involve how to organize and interpret information such as goal setting and planning, keeping records and monitoring, rehearsing, memorizing and planning standard setting (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1995). Also learning responsibility which was identified by Magno (2009) is affected by personal determinant factors.

-evaluation strategies which help them to provide information about themselves, to monitor their own performance, to compare it with a standard or goal and to react appropriately to their own performances. Self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reaction are three classes of behavioral strategies (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1995). Environmental self-regulation is a "student's proactive use of an environmental manipulation strategy such as arranging a quiet study area for completing school work at home" (Zimmerman, 1989). These influences refer to the impact of social and enactive experience on human functioning. Some strategies that are affected by these influences are seeking information, seeking social assistance and environmental structuring (Bandura, 1986; Zimmerman, 1995). Bulut *et al.*, (2012) found that Self-regulation had indirect effects on reading scores through attitude towards reading and technology usage for reading. Butler (2012) declared about the positive effect of Self-regulation strategies on developing reading. Ekhlās and Shangarffam (2012) found that behavioral self-regulation strategies have positive relationships with reading, writing, speaking and overall proficiency. Moreover, environmental self regulation strategies positively correlated with speaking. Also, regression analyses indicated that reading is the only language skill which could be predicted by behavioural self-regulation. Zumbunn *et al.*, (2011) found that by teaching students to be more self-regulative, teachers may experience greater success in promoting academic achievement, motivation, and life-long learning. Overall, according to the above mentioned literature self-regulated learning is an important aspect of learning and achievement in academic contexts such as learning English as a foreign or second language, and learners who use self-regulation strategies are much more likely to be successful in learning process. Communicative abilities has become a concerning issue in all developing countries. Therefore, any measure, which may ease the way for improved performance of the language learners, contributes a lot to the future of these learners, especially in some countries such as Iran which face the disadvantage of Lacking enough facilities in order to use English in their curriculum effectively. Considering what was mentioned above in terms of the association between self- regulating strategies and educational success as well as the interests toward learning English, the purposes of this study were as follows. This study tried to determine the most predominant determinant factors of self-regulation strategies which are used by Iranian EFL learners. Social cognitive view towards determinant factors of self-regulation strategies and also the studies of Zimmerman (1989) and Mango (2009) on self-regulation strategies were the bases of this study. In order to find the effect of self-regulation strategies on overall language proficiency, the following questions were asked:

1. What are the effects of the self-regulation strategies on developing language proficiency?
2. Which self-regulation strategies are used by Iranian EFL learners?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

The participants in the present study were 40 EFL students in TOEFL preparation course in Tabriz, Iran. Their ages ranged from 16 to 28. Students were chosen after assigning a modified TOEFL test for having homogeneous groups. The researcher randomly assigned them as the experimental and the control group.

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Instrumentation

Different instruments used in the present study involve a modified TOEFL test for the pre-test and post-test. This test involved 100 questions in listening, reading, grammar and writing. A checklist of academic self-regulated learning scale which is prepared by Mango, 2010 is used (Appendix A).

Procedure

Students randomly assigned to an experimental and a control group by using a modified TOEFL test as a pre-test. In the experimental group, teacher explained about self-regulation strategies. This group at the end of treatment session completed a questionnaire about which self-regulation strategies they found helpful. In the control group, students completed their TOEFL test but teacher did not explain about self-regulation strategies. Questionnaire about self-regulation strategies showed that which strategies are more useful for students in completing TOEFL test. Furthermore, in the post test, experimental group outperformed the control group on completing Language proficiency task.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results of t-test for proficiency test between two groups in the pre-test and post-test scores and descriptive statistics of data for self-regulation strategies will be presented. Finally, the researcher will discuss the results.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of comparing two groups in the pre-test and post-test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig(2-tailed)	F	t	df
pre control	20	60.12	1.2250	.21491	.721	.254	.125	38
experimental	20	59.85	1.3528	.20167	.721		.125	37.66
Post control	20	61.02	1.1147	.27825	.000	.890	-7.18	38
experimental	20	80.54	1.5413	.31285	.000		-7.18	35.44

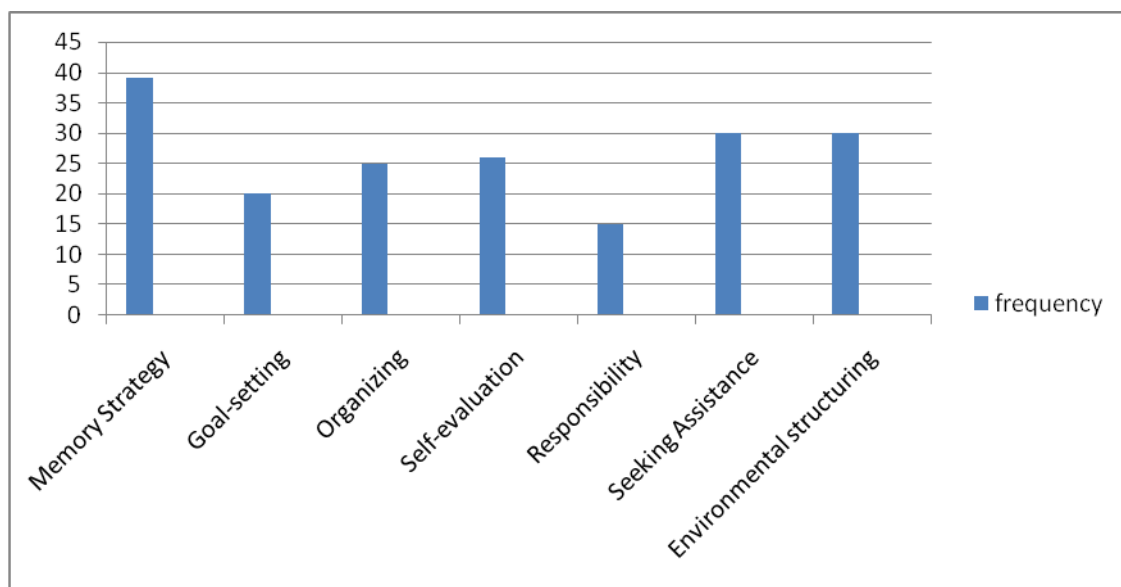


Figure 1: Frequencies of different self-regulation strategies mentioned by the experimental group

As Table 1 shows, mean score in the pre-test for the control group is ($M = 60.12$, $SD = 1.22$) and experimental group ($M = 59.85$, $SD = 1.35$), $t(38) = .125$, $P > .05$. The mean score shows that the writing scores between two groups in the pre-test were the same. In the post-test, scores for control group (M

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=61.02, SD =1.11) and experimental group (M=80.54, SD = 1.54), $t(38) = -7.18$, $P=.000$. The results show that there is a significant difference between two groups in the post-test. In the post-test, the experimental group outperforms the control group in the proficiency test.

As figure 1 shows students found memory strategies more helpful than the other strategies.

Self- Regulation Strategies supportive practices have potential to support inclusion of diverse learners by:
1- Creating contexts that accommodate diverse learning needs; 2- Drawing students into the process of “individualizing” curriculum; 3- Empowering learners to work more independently (so teachers can target support more effectively).

One of the greatest challenges for instructors in adult education programs is to help students acquire the basic cognitive skills and habits needed to be self-directed learners. A large body of research from both secondary and postsecondary settings suggests that strategy instruction strengthens student’s abilities to engage with learning, benefit from instruction, and succeed. Strategy instruction is an approach that teaches the tools and techniques necessary for understanding, learning, and retaining new content and skills. It involves teaching strategies that are both effective in assisting learners with acquiring, retaining, and generalizing information, and efficient, helping them acquire the information in the least amount of time (Lenz *et al.*, 1996).

There is a range of approaches and a range of uses for strategy instruction in all content areas for learners of all ages. Strategies can be used to teach learners how to learn and study, how to accomplish specific cognitive tasks, or how to apply and communicate their knowledge in a variety of contexts. The goal is for learners to internalize the process and strategies and to select and use them independently and with confidence. Strategies are tools in the learner’s toolbox. Knowing which tool to choose for a given task is a closely related challenge.

This research shows that instructing Self- Regulation Strategies to students may improve learners overall language proficiency. Furthermore, it reveals that memory strategies are considered more helpful for Iranian EFL learners. The authors suggest replications with other tasks and different genders or language groups to come up with more comprehensive results.

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APPENDIX A

Academic Self-regulated Learning Scale (A-SRL-A)

Memory Strategy

I use note cards to write information I need to remember

I make lists of related information by categories.

I rewrite class notes by rearranging the information in my own words

I use graphic organizers to put abstract information into a concrete form.

I represent concepts with symbols such as drawings so I can easily remember them.

I make a summary of my readings.

I make outlines as guides while I am studying.

I summarize every topic we would have in class.

I visualize words in my mind to recall terms

I recite the answers to questions on the topic that I made up.

I record the lessons that I attend to.

I make sample questions from a topic and answer them.

I recite my notes while studying for an exam.

I write messages for myself to remind me of my homework.

Goal-setting

I make a detailed schedule of my daily activities.

I make a timetable of all the activities I have to complete

I plan the things I have to do in a week.

I use a planner to keep track of what I am supposed to accomplish

I keep track of everything I have to do in a notebook or on a calendar

Organizing

I highlight important concepts and information I find in my readings

I picture in my mind how the test will look like based on previous tests

I put my past notebooks, handouts, and the like in a certain container

I study at my own pace.

I fix my things first before I start studying

I make sure my study area is clean before studying.

Self-evaluation

If I am having a difficulty, I inquire assistance from an expert.

I welcome peer evaluations for every output.

I evaluate my accomplishments at the end of each study session.

I ask others how my work is before passing it to my professors

I take note of the improvements on what I do.

I monitor my improvements in doing certain task.

I ask feedback of my performance from someone who is more capable

I listen attentively to people who comment on my work

I am open to feedbacks to improve my work

I browse through my past outputs to see my progress.

I ask others what changes should be done with my homework, papers, etc

I am open to changes based from the feedbacks I received.

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Responsibility

I recheck my homework if I have done it correctly before passing
I do things as soon as the teacher gives the task
I am concerned with the deadlines set by the teachers
I prioritize my schoolwork over other activities
I finish all my homework first before doing unnecessary things.

Seeking Assistance

I use a variety of sources in making my research papers.
I use library resources to find the information that I need.
I take my own notes in class.
I enjoy group works because we help one another.
I call a classmate about the homework that I missed.
I look for a friend whom I can have an exchange of questions
I study with a partner to compare notes. I explain to my peers what I have learned.
Environmental structuring
I avoid watching the television if I have a pending a homework.
I isolate myself from unnecessary noisy places
I switch off my TV for me to concentrate on my studies.