

Exploring autonomy and metacognition to inspire EFL students in English proficiency

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Specialized Analytical Summary

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Contents	<p>Este estudio analiza cómo la metacognición puede ayudar a los estudiantes a desarrollar autonomía en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera. Explora cómo los alumnos reflexionan sobre su proceso, establecen metas y ajustan sus estrategias para mejorar sus habilidades lingüísticas. La idea es simple pero poderosa: cuando los estudiantes son más conscientes de cómo piensan y aprenden, están mejor preparados para tomar las riendas de su progreso.</p> <p>La investigación reúne ideas que muestran que la autonomía no se trata solo de trabajar por cuenta propia, sino de tomar decisiones conscientes, mantenerse motivado y saber cuándo cambiar de enfoque. También se aborda cómo ciertas prácticas docentes y herramientas pueden apoyar este tipo de</p>

	<p>desarrollo, especialmente cuando se invita a los estudiantes a pensar sobre su propio pensamiento.</p> <p>Al final, el estudio destaca que la metacognición y la autonomía van de la mano. Ayudar a los estudiantes a desarrollar estas habilidades no solo mejora su aprendizaje del idioma, sino que también fortalece su confianza, resiliencia y sentido de responsabilidad. Este trabajo se suma a la conversación actual sobre cómo hacer que la enseñanza de lenguas sea más centrada en el estudiante, más reflexiva y empoderada.</p>
Research Line	<p>This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive approach grounded in the field of pedagogy and didactics of languages. It explores how metacognitive strategies support the development of learner autonomy in EFL contexts, focusing on reflective practices, strategic decision-making, and the role of instructional mediation. Through document analysis, the research identifies recurring themes related to self-regulation and learner agency, emphasizing how teaching practices can foster autonomy by encouraging students to think about their own thinking. The interpretative nature of the design allows for a deeper understanding of the pedagogical implications behind metacognitive awareness and its impact on language learning.</p>
Conclusions	<p>This study underlines the powerful connection between metacognition and learner autonomy in the context of English language education. By exploring how students reflect, self-regulate, and make strategic decisions, it becomes clear that autonomy is not a fixed trait but a skill that can be cultivated through intentional pedagogical practices. Encouraging learners</p>

	<p>to think about their thinking not only enhances their language proficiency but also empowers them to take ownership of their learning journey.</p> <p>Ultimately, fostering metacognitive awareness is a transformative step toward building resilient, reflective, and self-directed language learners an essential goal for modern education.</p>
Advisor	Karen Jinneth Rojas Nieto.

Dedication

This project is something I truly dedicate to myself. It has been a journey of learning, reflecting, and pushing through one that has taught me a lot about autonomy and growth. But I did not walk alone. I want to thank Humberto, Silvia, Javier, Ángela, Natalia, Paola, Fernanda, and Manuela. Whether through words, actions, or simply being there, each of you encouraged me in your own way. Your support mattered more than you know.

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Thanks to all my professors for their support, guidance, and for always encouraging me to think beyond the obvious. Your influence has truly shaped this journey.

Abstract

This study looks into how metacognition can help learners become more autonomous when studying English as a foreign language. It explores how students reflect on their learning, set goals, and adjust their strategies to improve their language skills. The idea is simple but powerful: when learners become more aware of how they think and learn, they are better equipped to take charge of their progress.

The research brings together insights that show how autonomy is not just about working alone, it is about making thoughtful decisions, staying motivated, and knowing when to shift gears. It also touches on how certain teaching approaches and tools can support this kind of growth, especially when learners are encouraged to think about their thinking.

In the end, the study highlights how metacognition and autonomy go hand in hand. Helping students develop these skills does not just improve their language learning, it builds confidence, resilience, and a sense of ownership that can carry over into other areas of life. This work adds to the ongoing conversation about how to make language education more learner-centered, reflective, and empowering.

Keywords: Autonomous learning, metacognition, EFL students, language proficiency, and introspection.

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Introduction

The effectiveness of the procedures involved in learning a foreign language has enhanced in the last three decades. One of the most relevant factors implicated to corroborate that has been the steady evolution of human cognitive capacities. These capabilities have been stimulated through different factors like social relationships, access to information, culture, technology, needs, and the language itself. Considering these conditions of stimulation of human cognitive, in the learning field the concepts of autonomous learning and metacognition have emerged. The analysis of this revolutionary theory has permitted the approaches, methods, strategies as the roles of teachers and students had improved to develop efficacy and efficiency in each procedure. Nevertheless, autonomous learning and metacognition theory are oriented principally on the attitude and behaviors of each student in front of their process to guarantee proficiency of learning English as a foreign language.

Consequently, Autonomous learning widens the introspection of the learning process regarding students' aptitude and behaviors. These variables are measured by employing the concept of self-regulation, self-learning, and self-determination. For example, self-regulation helps students to manage their time efficiently, designing a schedule depending on their disposition. Self-learning is straightaway in how to learn according to time, resources, and commitment. And self-determination is essentially the capability to keep motivated with the process and the objective.

Because of this, it is decisive to provide students with guidance to help them develop their self-criticism into the effectiveness of their own learning strategies. This assessment may be applied through the application of the vision that offers concepts as self-evaluation, self-direction, and self-monitoring. These concepts support students in defining their learning

objective, progress efficiency, and method efficacy. In this sense, by recognizing the learning skills, students can approach their cognitive processes toward their skills by increasing the variables to acquire significant information, for instance, what they read, listen, observe, play, and so on. This information is employed by designing their strategies, methods, and resources to continue growing forward in English language proficiency.

That is overall, how currently students of English as a foreign language have a great variety of alternatives for structuring their learning. By considering this guide, students could design strategies and resources according to their preferences and objectives. Likewise, they could have a different perspective about how they capture and use the information in support of their learning skills. And to recognize how crucial self-knowledge is to the students to focus all their capabilities on learning. These connections increase the holistic knowledge of English language which permit students to structure their learning process and achieve English language proficiency.

Problem Statement

In countries where the English language is taught as a foreign language, the training could be limited to a few fields such as academics and business. “When learning English in non-English speaking countries, the potential challenges of the English learning process might arise bigger than in English-speaking countries” (Frida., 2019, p. 2). In this context, the English language is taught with a narrow focus, limiting the possibilities of learning, prejudiced motivations, and students’ results. Consequently, students must have the ability to focus their learning depending on their tastes, interests, and needs.

Students of English as a foreign language confront a variety of challenges. For instance, by starting their professional training they must tackle outdated curriculums. The subjects normally related to English have a specific approach, most of them, just in passive learning way. In English language learning, it is relevant to have an integrated process that stimulates outputs and inputs. When teaching has only one approach, the methodology can be tedious and unencouraging to students. Similarly, when the teaching approach does not consider active learning, there won’t be opportunities to practice factual communication skills. Resources also play a crucial role in learning, when they are monotonous and unsuitable, it could restrict students' expectations and motivations. Consequently, to broaden the learning experience the education system must implement a curriculum where learners have a high influence to foster autonomous learning to confront these drawbacks.

The diverse methodologies of teaching a foreign language in a classroom have specific approaches, purposes, contents, and assessments that are delimited by a syllabus. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these procedures and the learning are evaluated by considering the results of a same assessment mostly written tests, consequently, the motivation of learning is affected to

obtain good grades and not by significant learning in English proficiency. On top of that, students do not participate in evaluating the methodology used. For that reason, incorporating self-assessment within the EFL learning brings up more tools for the whole process, as teaching as learning. “Self-assessment carries considerable benefits for learners, such as academic improvement, activation of metacognitive abilities, and enhancement of self-regulation skills” (Phuong et al., 2023, p. 3).

English teacher selects the topics and resources according to the requirements of the syllabus, restricting the topics that are more captivating for their students. Mack (2010) affirms: “In developing any program, a teacher selects and privileges certain aspects of content knowledge and language. The teacher decides whose voice(s) will be heard and whose will be silenced” (page. 3). Even though this method is effective, students who are silent must invest time at home studying topics and resources, which are not interested in being participative. Therefore, when those topics and resources are not interesting to students, the knowledge is not acquired, instead, participation becomes forced and obligatory that may not generate any learning. Whereas when teachers plan some activity but with topics and resources suggested by students, the motivation changes, generating real learning and research stimulation through autonomous learning and metacognition. Orakci And Durnali (2022) affirm “When teachers consider what students want to do, their specific interests and needs, it is likely that students' perceptions of all psychological needs will increase, resulting in autonomous motivation” (p. 16).

The information that is produced and managed in learning English as a foreign language must guarantee debate and critical thinking. This approach considers to communication as the main resource to base on English language structure and proficiency. Therefore, students must have opportunities to strength their communication skills in their learning of English.

Nevertheless, although current teaching methodologies offer opportunities to enhance communication skills, Teachers insist on leading to learning the language as a structure. Branson (2012) claims that “The ultimate importance of foreign language learning is not the acquisition of a shared body of knowledge, but the ability to say what one wants to say in more than one language” (p. 9). Eventually, there are scarce opportunities to practice factual English communication to achieve this purpose, considering once again the context where EFL students learn. “Due to the limited role of using English, it leads the EFL students to have bigger learning problems than other learners who use English in their daily language, such as ESL students” (Frida, 2019, p. 2).

Time distribution in the learning process is also determined by factors that the students do not control or do not generate by themselves. For instance, regular students invest their time in the learning process in a classroom, and the learning activities that they conduct at home are those that are designated as homework by a teacher. This is the most traditional method that teachers and students have carried out for a long time; however, autonomous learning offers several opportunities to take advantage of time, nevertheless, students do not receive any instructions about managing time considering autonomous learning and metacognition process, and for that reason, the role of the teacher is noteworthy important. “Learner autonomy is intricately connected with (or even dependent upon) teacher autonomy – it is hard to imagine, at the same time, traditional teacher-centered methods that expect learners to be free and independent” (Demetrashvili., et al. 2024, p. 4).

Justification

The teaching models traditionally have been focused on transmitting information to students. This information delimits the learning field of action and students' critical thinking. This practice evaluates written text focused on grammar without considering other skills (speaking, writing, reading, and listening). This system has worked in elementary, secondary, and higher education with most of the subjects. Nevertheless, EFL students besides confronting those kinds of tests, also must demonstrate their knowledge through something more tangible: proficiency in the English language. Autonomy and metacognition develop students the opportunity to go beyond and stimulate their critical thinking according to their motivations, interests and expectations in order to have an integral learning process.

Autonomy and metacognition renovate the system of traditional learning and education. The renovation consists of changing the mindset of students when they begin their professional training. High school students have a high sense of responsibility for their academic duties; nevertheless, this responsibility is not inspired by their motivations but by their grades, teachers, and parents' pressure. This theory offers teachers to rethink their practices considering their students' background and focusing on how they learn. Students use this knowledge and motivation to design their strategies, resources, and time investment. As a result, an integral and significant learning process renovates the system and teachers' and students' roles.

Consequently, autonomous learning and metacognition stimulate the behavior and conscience of EFL students. These concepts allow students to be mindful in finding methods that offer optimization of approaches, strategies, resources, and time. However, this process is not as easy to implement as it seems, since students start with an imposed form of learning, and throughout their experience this idea results in not being as effective in a more complex learning

process. Therefore, implementing new concepts in learning will be always relevant topics to discuss, due to the teachers' and students' backgrounds and resistance to adopting new strategies of teaching and learning.

Subsequently, teachers and students benefit from the results of the analysis of autonomous learning and metacognition. Teachers would acquire tools to generate significant learning thanks to the support shown in the results of some cases of study that corroborate their efficacy. Likewise, students will have the capability to understand how they acquire information which will allow them to design their learning process. Eventually, motivation will increase, the results will be more tangible, and the experience and expectations for teaching and learning will be more gratifying.

Autonomy Learning and metacognitive have been studying objectives since the 20th century, and the evidence about their effectiveness is documented in several bibliographies. The most remarkable and precursors researchers in this field were Leslie Dickinson, Henri Holec, David Little, and John Flavell among others. They have gained land lately on account of free management and access to information thanks to the technological era, and more recently thanks to the effects of the pandemic in 2020 in the traditional education field. In this last scenario, the students' weakness in managing their education process was the most accurate proof that education needs a new approach. This infallible conclusion is the one that recent researchers come across.

Furthermore, the bibliographies related were analyzed to support the theories of the effectiveness of the influence of autonomous learning and metacognition on EFL students' processes. This support is based on studies of cases where these students are encouraged to apply these techniques. The results show a remarkable difference between the ones that were not used,

that is, in a more traditional way. The design of these cases of study permitted the collection of information about self-planning, design strategies, self-regulation, self-evaluation, motivation, and commitment.

In summary, throughout the academic history of learning a foreign language, autonomous learning and the development of metacognition are theories that have had an impact and have generated novel and effective methods to teach and learn a foreign language. The roles of teachers and students have been changing progressively, although not much, considering the period when these concepts were studied for the first time. Nevertheless, the technological era has been offering them alternatives that significantly improve their results, optimize time and resources, and most importantly, foster their creativity to find inspiration and motivation to reach English proficiency.

Objectives

Objective General

Demonstrate the development of autonomous learning and metacognitive abilities as an effective method and approach to acquire proficiency for EFL students.

Objective Specific

Study the evolution, relevance, and application of metacognition and autonomy concepts in English learning.

Reflect on strategies to develop metacognitive and autonomy abilities as the foundation to guarantee proficiency in the English language.

Determine the challenges of EFL students in acquiring autonomous learning and metacognitive skills considering their background from traditional methods.

Delimitations

This study acknowledges the following delimitations, which define the scope and boundaries of the research.

Limited Consultation of Local Research

The study does not extensively incorporate investigations conducted in Colombia or other South American countries. This delimitation may affect the regional relevance and contextual depth of the findings.

Lack of Data on Current Professional Competencies of English Teachers

The research does not include comprehensive data regarding the present-day pedagogical and linguistic competencies of English language educators in Colombia and South America, which could influence the interpretation of instructional effectiveness.

Absence of Data on Students' Current English Proficiency Levels

The study does not provide empirical data on the actual proficiency levels of learners of English as a foreign language in the local context, potentially limiting the applicability of conclusions related to learner outcomes.

Exclusion of Psychological Constructs Related to Learning Disposition

Although the study references cognition and introspection, it does not delve into psychological theories or constructions that explain learners' disposition toward language acquisition, which may narrow the theoretical framework.

Omission of Diverse Instructional Modalities

The research does not consider the various modes of English language instruction (e.g., face-to-face, virtual, hybrid), which may influence both teaching practices and learner engagement.

Literature Review

The effectiveness of autonomy and metacognition in learning English as a foreign language has been an object of study for researchers from the main universities in Saudi Arabia, The United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Turkey, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Iran among others. These investigations have allowed them to promote the syllabus updating and resetting the teachers' and the students' roles. The main tool in their research to prove their effectiveness was pulling in place of the theory through cases of study. Their results concluded that the implementation of autonomy learning strategies and the development of metacognition abilities are not just the responsibility of the students, but it must be an integral process where each person involved in the education must assume.

Lay before this, the question below emerges: How does a student learn to be autonomous and develop metacognition abilities, whether their education system is designed without considering these concepts? While the researchers make progress, syllabuses are updating and teachers' role change, unquestionably EFL students must take the first step toward learning to be an autonomous learner and develop their metacognition abilities.

From this perspective, this research provides students with the opportunity to widen the range of alternatives to structure their learning process to reach English proficiency. Technically proficiency is when we can express what we want to say in another language. Nevertheless, in theory, English language proficiency goes beyond: "vocabulary, syntax, pronunciation, accuracy, spontaneity, fluency, understanding, coherence, cohesion, functions, and situations" (Bachman & Sauvignon, 1986, p. 3). Consequently, autonomous learning and metacognition are the main concepts studied in the literature to inspire EFL students to know themselves, recognize their true

potential through designing effective strategies and methods, and commit to their process to speak fluently in English.

Becoming an Autonomous Learner

The students have studied under an imposed learning system throughout their trajectory from elementary to high school. This system is structured in given instructions to the students about what, how, and when to study, limiting their sense of responsibility and motivations. At college, this sense changes a bit, nevertheless, not enough to generate a learning system with a different approach. Autonomous learning emerges to change this teaching and learning perception to stimulate students' awareness and attitude toward a high sense of responsibility and independence with the learning process. In other words, go from being a student to being a learner.

In the last four decades, theories have emerged to define autonomy in learning. The most remarkable concepts have been proposed by Holec (1979, 1981), Dickinson (1987), Little (1991), and Benson (1991), Thanasoulas (2000). Their target was to orient learning and teaching from a new perspective where teachers and students adopt a different approach. They claimed that to appropriate this theory, the learning results would have a significant improvement. In summary, they have defined autonomy as the responsibility that the learners have with their learning process. Therefore, we find here the first along the way of reach English proficiency. EFL learners are responsible when they have initiative, ambition, curiosity, and commitment.

Considering this approach of the learner's attitude, Holec (1979) describes some features of autonomy: "the first criterion of autonomy learning is determining learning objectives, defining the contents and progression of learning, selecting methods and techniques to be used, procedures of acquisition, and evaluating what has been acquired" (p. 3). Haque (2018) adds:

“Learning autonomy can also be considered as an attitude to learning, and as autonomous learners are motivated and reflective in nature, their learning is quite reasonably efficient and effective” (page,194).

Caciki (2015) concluded that learner autonomy grows out of the individual learner’s acceptance of responsibility for their learning. This means that learner autonomy is a matter of explicit or conscious intention: one cannot accept responsibility for learning unless she has some idea of what, why, and how she tries to learn (p. 2).

Nevertheless, Collier (2002) adds a pragmatic definition to being autonomous where it brings out a different perception. “Autonomy means self-governing and comes from a Greek word meaning independent” (p. 1). Likewise, this attachment between being autonomous and to being independent also was considered by other authors afterward. Sabitha and Najeeb (2012) affirmed: “Independent language learning is characterized by optimizing or extending the learner’s choice, focusing on the needs of individual learners, not the interests of a teacher or an institution, and the choice of decision-making to learners” (p.2). Eventually, students become autonomous learners when they are independent and can make decisions to benefit from their motivation and self-reflection in a classroom as well as outside of it. By the same token, the authors coincide then with the idea that self-regulation is the key point to becoming an autonomous and independent learner. This reflection has its foundation in concepts like self-evaluation, self-direction, self-encouragement.

According to Panadero and Alonso-Tapia (2014) “Self-regulation is the control that students have over their cognition, behavior, emotions, and motivation through the use of personal strategies to achieve the goals they have established” (p. 450). Therefore, motivation and self-regulation permit learners to plan their learning given effective solutions to their

requirements. Considering reach English proficiency like their goal the plan must involve and inquiry about interests, needs and difficulties. Likewise, setting parameters to be followed and objectives to be met. Organize the proposed activities and verify the development of progress and finally, make decisions based on the results and start again, that is, self-evaluation. Self-evaluation plays a remarkable role in the planning of learning to define effectiveness, quality, acquired knowledge, weaknesses and strengths. To summarize, “the student is able to regulate their educational process using personal criteria, controlling their behavior constantly to improve their cognitive development” (Alcívar, et. al. 2024, p.7).

On other hand, other more contemporary authors have done an opposing position to the theory mainly exposed by Holec, Dickinson, Little, Benson, and Thanasoulas, from different perspectives. For instance, Oxford (2003) In her chapter *Toward a More Systematic Model of L2 Learner Autonomy*, Oxford highlights the ideological inconsistencies and semantic conflicts within the autonomy framework itself. She notes that even Holec and Dickinson used reversed definitions of autonomy and self-direction. Considering that view, the EFL students must be conscious about the difference between one and another, without permitting that this kind of inconsistencies affects their process. The point is being autonomous enough to define how they manage their self-direction.

Likewise, more recently the concept of autonomy has been doubted from the assessment and practical limitations perspective. Holmes (2021) In his paper, “Can We Actually Assess Learner Autonomy?” He argues that autonomy is a vague and ill-defined concept, making it extremely difficult to assess authentically in formal education settings. He critiques the assumption that autonomy can be reliably measured or developed through standard curricula. Nevertheless, autonomy is not considered as a subject itself; that is, in the current methodology it

is integrated to orient to teach the students what and how to learn, considering their needs and abilities, and the manner of knowing whether that is effective or not is through the students' expectations being met.

Finally, from a social-cultural perspective another important view was made with the purpose of focusing on the changes and needs of the last century. O'leary (2018) explores learner autonomy from a postmodern and social constructivist perspective, emphasizing the ontological and epistemological challenges of applying autonomy in formal education. She argues that autonomy must be understood through both individual and social lenses, which complicates its implementation. For that reason, it is relevant to be conscious that the contextualization of each student plays a crucial role in the disposition of learning, therefore, a critical and analytical thinking are the remarkable tools to incorporate the theory into their context to reach the target of English proficiency.

All these contributions widen the features of EFL learners have according to their mindset of how they have been learning so far. They must be aware of English proficiency is long- term goal but with their commitment, it will be delightful and therefore effective. "Success in learning is often associated with the understanding and practice of strategies that help learners take and monitor the actions needed to perform given tasks" (Cuesta Medina, Anderson, & McDougald, 2017, p. 90). All the previous definitions are focusing on motivation and self-reflection; these concepts could be the central idea to cope with each challenge that EFL learners have along their purpose. In conclusion, the theory proposed permits us to respond to the question formulated previously and now we already know how to become an independent, efficient and effective EFL learner.

Metacognition Towards English Proficiency

Metacognition is carried out when EFL learners' field is developed the ability to focus their everyday life towards their learning process. By developing metacognition, they would have the ability to decide how, what, and when to learn. Therefore, it is essential that the students know themselves, that is, they must know how they acquire information, what kind of information they like, and what time it is better to study, among other variables. Overall, metacognition is a process that allows an increase in learning alternatives, considering autonomy learning as a vital condition to develop this ability. On the ground of this, metacognition has been the target of research by different authors with a focus on language learning during the last four decades, which has concluded that it is a crucial part of an efficient and integral language learning process with a focus on the students' attitudes.

The theories of Flavell (1976, 1985), Holec (1979), Garner (1994), and Anderson (2002, 2005), (Griffiths, 2008, 2015) define metacognition as the awareness of learning. Students develop the ability to design their strategies. Select and adapt the resources according to their preferences. Implement an appropriate study routine designing a schedule according to their availability. Adapt a specific study area, which offers a good learning atmosphere. And finally, the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the measures adopted, which would provide the manner to adjust the process and improve constantly.

Smith (2021) recently has also broadened the concept of metacognition by considering the learner awareness: "Learners who are aware of their learning process can monitor their learning progress and make changes to their process. They can adapt new strategies if they are not learning as well as they expect they should be learning" (p.1). Griffiths (2015) adds that "the

criteria of learning metacognition are preparing and planning for learning, selecting and using strategies, monitoring learning, orchestrating strategies, and evaluating learning” (p. 428). In summary, an EFL learner must foster their critical thinking regarding how they have been traditionally learned versus considering the theory that metacognition offers, designing the best strategy, with accurate resources and with the best schedule. To reflect on it, “an EFL learner must know that strong metacognitive skills empower language learners when they reflect upon their learning, they become better prepared to make conscious decisions about what they can do to improve their learning” (Anderson, 2008, p.1).

The Relation Between Autonomy Learning and Metacognition

Although some authors have studied these concepts separately, others like Haque (2018), Alvarez (2010), Little, (2010), and Ali et al (2021) have established an intrinsic relation theoretical practice of these concepts to empower the learning process, making it more integral, efficient, and effective. This relationship has as a generality that they both are complementary to each other. EFL students could not be autonomous without stimulating their metacognition, therefore, from its analysis, comprehension, and application, EFL students will be inspired enough to achieve their English proficiency.

The most recognized author is Haque (2018) connects these concepts by stating that “metacognition can be considered a building block of learner autonomy since autonomous learners display great engagement in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning” (p. 183). In addition, Haque also considers in his research the concept of other authors to prove the effectiveness and opportune relation between metacognition and autonomous learning. For instance, Alvarez (2010) confirms that “autonomy is part of the palpable results students control at the end of the metacognition process” (pp. 74–75). Metacognition in the form of conscious

reflection initiates “the growth and exercise of autonomy in formal learning” (Little, 2010). Ali et al. (2021) finally support that learning autonomy and metacognition are two of the variables of good language learners and these two variables share similar criteria.

Designing Strategies

Strategy is one of the words that most of the authors refer to defining the framework of autonomy learning and metacognition. The design of a strategy responds to EFL students’ questions of how to learn. Planning permits students to define resources (videos, podcasts, books, social media, chat partners, apps among others) and time (when studying). The strategy must be directed to strengthen knowledge, recheck concepts, foster communication skills, and gain confidence. According to their introspection, each student must know how to design a strategy according to their motivations and needs. This research brings up some concepts to prove the relevance of the strategy for EFL students to acquire English proficiency.

Bonyadi et al. (2012) recognizes the importance of this process in their research. They cited Oxford (1990) argued that much research has emerged focusing on language learning strategies in the last 20 years because strategies are especially important for language learning as tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence (p. 114). Michael (2015), referencing Burden (1997), highlights that language learning strategies began attracting scholarly attention in the 1960s, largely due to the growing influence of cognitive psychology on language education. (p. 139). Likewise, Rezalous and Firat (2022) define the objective of the use of strategies in the English learning process: “Students use learning strategies in the processing of new information and the realization of learning activities” (p.2).

Considering the prior concepts and the importance of the autonomy of learners of English as a foreign language and their responsibility to evaluate and design strategies Haque (2019) affirms that “Language learners use various learning strategies for successful language learning and notably employ them when they encounter difficulties. Usually, learners are aware of the application of their learning strategies and can explain the way they use it while trying to learn something” (p.5).

With the advancement of the research results searching for efficacy in acquiring English proficiency, researchers continue to focus the study of the strategies considering the EFL students’ motivation and behavior, therefore, it is relevant for them to the students’ attitudes toward their learning process, with this focus results in the division of strategies in three categories: cognitive, metacognitive and socio-affective (Chamot and Kupper, 1989, p. 19).

Cognition is defined by the Britannica Encyclopedia as “the states and processes involved in knowing, which in their completeness include perception and judgment, cognition includes all conscious and unconscious processes by which knowledge is accumulated, such as perceiving, recognizing, conceiving, and reasoning”. Therefore, the process of acquiring information by a student is directly proportional to their perception, and is that what makes the difference in the efficacy of their learning process. “Learning a language is not possible without cognition as cognition and language are inseparable” (Haque, 2019, p.1).

Cognition as a learning strategy refers to behaviors, actions, or techniques used by learners to facilitate them in acquiring knowledge. Metacognition techniques are employed to control the learning process through planning, monitoring, evaluating, and modifying. Socio-effective are strategies and techniques used by learners such as

asking for clarification, cooperating, imitating, and repeating. (Chamot and Kupper, 1989, p. 20)

Rezalou and Firat (2002), Bonyadi., et al. (2012), and Machaal (2015) consider mainly the concepts proposed by (Oxford,1990) regarding the classification of language learning strategies, due to also keeping in bear the three concepts of Chamot and Kupper but making a new categorization. She divided these strategies into two parts: Direct strategies (memory, cognitive, and compensatory) and indirect strategies: metacognitive and social affective strategies. Although there is not an important reference that links these previous concepts, Haque (2012) argues that is almost impossible to have metacognitive knowledge without a good grip on cognition and identifies metacognition as “(knowledge of) a set of self-instructions for regulating task performance” and cognitions as “the vehicle of these self-instructions” (p. 9).

Students' Features in Autonomous Learning

The traditional education system does not foster autonomous learning and metacognition. Students normally adopt a passive role in their education, and their responsibility is limited to teachers' instructions. In the EFL arena, the teachers' and students' roles have been changed thanks to this research in autonomy and metacognition stimulation. The purpose of the authors is conceptualizing this new role raises awareness of EFL students on how to cope with their learning process.

According to the articles studied, students must have some consideration to activate their capabilities to acquire significant information in their English learning process to gain proficiency, that is, making an honest introspection of their motivation. Le Ho (2011, as cited in Rahman et al., 2015) describes several common characteristics of good language learners,

including being highly motivated, active, personalizing their learning, differentiating language registers and styles, being self-reflective, and being keen to go native (p. 393).

Success in language learning mostly depends on the extent to which learners are autonomous in their efforts of learning because autonomy entails the basics of successful language learning requirements such as motivation, self-reflection, selection of learning materials, monitoring and evaluating of learning progress, and most importantly, taking charge of learning. (Haque, 2018, p.196).

The features of effective autonomy learners were synthesized to the end of the prior century by Holec, Allwright, and Little cited by Najeeb (2012) “Autonomous learners can be seen as those who can reflect on their learning through knowledge about learning and who are willing to learn in collaboration with others” (p.3). In more recent years, these features have been increasingly specified in detail some personality features.

An autonomous learner has some specific features of behavior. Candy (cited by Casiki, 2015) proposes that they must be: “methodical and disciplined, logical and analytical, reflective and self-aware, curious, open and highly motivated, flexible, interdependent and interpersonally competent; persistent and responsible; venturesome and creative; and self-sufficient, information seekers, knowledgeable and skillful about the process and critical thinkers” (page, 5). Most of these features of an effective autonomy learner are not innate, nevertheless, when students are aware of their challenge to gain proficiency, they can from time to time adopt them as a part of their personalities which is beneficial to life in general.

Metacognition Students' Role

Regarding metacognition features, researchers continue to highlight self-reflection or introspection concepts. If the students can inquire themselves what they are doing to achieve

English proficiency, they already are applying their metacognition. Orakci and Durnali (2022) propose that “metacognitive abilities require students to perceive their learning processes and become aware of their learning characteristics” (p. 164). Moreover, “metacognition results in critical but healthy reflection and evaluation of thinking that may result in making specific changes in how learning is managed, and in the strategies chosen for this purpose” (Anderson, 2008. P. 1).

In conclusion, the effectiveness of gaining proficiency in the English language depends mainly on the student’s attitude toward their learning process, considering autonomy and metacognition approaches, when language learners employ metacognition, they start taking control of their language learning more effectively and thus gaining autonomy in their learning process (Haque, 2018, p.2).

Teachers’ Role

Concerning the role of teachers in fostering autonomy and metacognition of students EFL has gained also ground in the teaching of a foreign language field in the last three decades which provides proof of their effectiveness in acquiring English proficiency. For instance, Phil Benson, a well-known researcher in the teaching language field, starts his research about autonomy by formulating the question: Do language teachers have a responsibility to foster personal autonomy as well as teach language knowledge and skills? The response to the prior question is resolved thanks to the support of different researchers where the role of teachers is remarkable in autonomous learning and metacognition learning process. The role of teachers in the autonomy and metacognitive process is also considered by Haque (2018) to guarantee success in acquiring a foreign language. “Teachers need not only to teach learners the linguistic skills they need but also the study strategies and the autonomy they need as language learners and for their lifelong

needs. One of these essential skills is autonomy, not only in the classroom” (p. 192). “In language teaching teachers need to help students develop motivation, confidence, knowledge, and skills that they require to communicate more independently, to learn more independently, and to be more independent as individuals” (Casiki, 2015, p.3).

In summary, teachers' and students' roles in teaching and learning have changed, the focus of teaching now also leads to fostering students to appropriate the learning processes. Therefore, it is principal for students to analyze and apply strategies, and approaches, that permit them commitment themselves through behavioral behaviors such as discipline, inspiration, motivation, responsibility, and creativity, which means being willing to learn. “The central concern is decision-making in the learning process, which both implies a change in role for the learner and teacher and raises questions about the willingness and ability of the learner and teacher to assume their new roles” (Coterall, 2008, p.19). This willingness could be intrinsic, however, to guarantee proficiency in the English language one must study and incorporate concepts that have been the object of study for the last three decades in this field: autonomy and metacognition.

Empower the Concepts Through Study Cases

Some teachers and researchers have put into practice the theory through recent cases of study to prove the effectiveness of influencing students to acquire autonomous learning and metacognition. From there resides the importance of the conceptualization of autonomy learning, metacognition strategies, and teachers' and students' roles to know how EFL students have learned so far. Each case of study in the articles has different backgrounds and interests, nevertheless, they are aware of the changes in the methodology and approaches when these concepts are bearing in mind to enhance teaching and learning English as a foreign language.

For instance, the study "Could Explicit Training in Metacognition Improve Learners' Autonomy and Responsibility?" by Brahim Machaal was selected for its direct relevance to the core themes of learner autonomy and metacognitive development. Conducted within a Saudi college preparatory context, the research offers valuable insights into how explicit metacognitive instruction can foster greater responsibility and independence among students. This aligns closely with the theoretical framework of the project, which emphasizes the role of self-regulated learning in educational success. The study's empirical foundation based on data from 44 students and 14 EFL teachers adds credibility and depth, making it a strong candidate for illustrating the practical application of metacognitive strategies.

Moreover, Machaal's work contributes meaningfully to the theoretical discourse by proposing a model that integrates literature review with field experience, offering both conceptual clarity and pedagogical utility. While the findings are context-specific, the principles outlined are transferable to other educational settings, enhancing the broader applicability of the case. The availability of detailed methodology and accessible data further supports its inclusion, ensuring transparency and analytical rigor. Overall, this case study enriches the research by bridging theory and practice in a culturally nuanced and pedagogically relevant way.

Other relevant study named "The Relationship between EFL Learners' Self-efficacy Beliefs and Their Language Learning Strategy Use" by Alireza Bonyadi, Farahnaz Rimani Nikou, and Sima Shahbaz was chosen for its strong alignment with the research focus on learner autonomy and strategic learning behaviors. By examining the relationship between EFL learners' self-efficacy beliefs and their use of language learning strategies, the authors address key psychological and behavioral dimensions of language acquisition. Conducted with 130 first-year university students in Iran, the study provides a rich empirical foundation for understanding how

individual learner variables such as confidence and experience shape strategic engagement with language learning. Its emphasis on metacognitive strategies, which were found to be the most frequently used, complements the broader theoretical interest in self-regulated learning.

Additionally, the study contributes to the literature by exploring how factors like gender and years of English study influence both self-efficacy and strategy use. While no significant gender differences were found, the results revealed meaningful variation based on learners' experience, offering nuanced insights into developmental aspects of strategy adoption. The accessibility of the full article and its clear methodological design further support its inclusion as a case study. Overall, this research enhances the theoretical framework by linking cognitive beliefs with practical learning behaviors in a culturally specific yet broadly relevant context

From the perspective of fostering autonomy and metacognition strategies (Coterall, 2008) concludes "An autonomy-fostering approach to language learning is therefore likely to focus first on individual learners' psychological relation to the language learning process, and only then on the strategies they adopt" (p.10). In this sense, EFL students have an advantage, since they already have a true disposition to learn. Anderson (2009) adds "Good language learners develop metacognitive skills which enable them to manage their learning, thereby rendering themselves less dependent on others or the vicissitudes of the learning situation" (p.10). Therefore, the study cases were focused on the strategies adopted by teachers to teach and students to learn. As a result, the process was satisfactory in comparison to traditional approaches.

Regarding teachers' role and strategies, Bonyadi et.al (2012) confirm that EFL teachers encourage their learners to improve their self-efficacy and language learning strategy use by seeking the ways to increase their experience or years of English study. This should

necessarily result in a change in their beliefs and learning strategy used for foreign language learning. (page, 8).

Machaal (2015) after training in metacognition and autonomous learning and their optimum results claims: “This motivation will ultimately contribute to fostering autonomy and life-long learning that has become the focus of educational systems all over the world” (p.12).

In recent years, thanks to the study cases results, researchers have confirmed the importance of fostering autonomous learning and metacognition strategies to guarantee the gain of proficiency in the English language. Rahman et. al (2021) support that “Learning autonomy as one of the learner variables in pedagogy contributes to learners’ success in learning. In the English language learning context, the activation of this variable may lead them to be good language learners” (p. 49).

In an overall view, the concepts studied in the articles evidence the change in how the way of teaching and learning the English language has changed through time thanks to the interest to make the process more effective and significant. Daflizar et. al (2022) resume: “These findings contribute to the existing body of literature particularly on the issue of language learning strategies and the level of learner autonomy among EFL students and validate previous research findings on the relationship between language learning strategies and learner autonomy” (p.19).

The Technology Role

The last case of study analyzed offered a novel perspective on the role of the technological era in the EFL learning process. Nowadays, access to information provides a range of alternatives to learn autonomously which allows EFL students to widen their expectations and opportunities to interact using their target language in real context. Although

there are several apps, tools, and resources with different purposes like YouTube and Duolingo, the one that has had the most impact on ChatGPT who was incorporated as a case of study.

This study was selected for its direct engagement with the intersection of artificial intelligence and learner autonomy in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. Conducted over a 15-week semester with 120 Korean university students, Van Horn's qualitative exploratory research investigates how ChatGPT influences students' perceptions, engagement, and metacognitive awareness. The study aligns closely with the theoretical framework of autonomous learning, offering empirical evidence that AI tools like ChatGPT can foster independent learning behaviors, collaborative engagement, and increased confidence in language use. Its relevance is amplified by the growing presence of AI in educational contexts, making it a timely and forward-looking case.

Beyond its empirical contributions, the study offers a nuanced view of both the opportunities and challenges of integrating AI into language learning. While most students responded positively, citing enhanced skills and motivation, the research also acknowledges technical limitations and initial skepticism adding depth and realism to the findings. The accessibility of the full article and its clear methodological design further support its inclusion. By bridging technology, pedagogy, and learner psychology, Van Horn's work enriches the research project with a contemporary lens on autonomy and digital literacy in EFL settings.

Van Hord (2024) in this research cites several research to bring up and support the benefits of using that kind of technology in English learning. Hong (2025) highlights that ChatGPT's ability to provide real-time feedback to students is a feature that enhances engagement and tailors learning experiences (pp. 3–4). Koraishi (2023) underscores the efficiency of ChatGPT in automating assessment processes, providing immediate feedback, and

adapting to individual learner needs, thereby enhancing its overall effectiveness in education.

Finally, Kessler (2018) notes that bots like ChatGPT can hold realistic conversations and provide feedback and guidance at a much more efficient rate than a single teacher, especially in a class with many students. Therefore, depending on students apply strategies of autonomous learning and metacognition to take advantage of this and other powerful tools to gain English proficiency.

Results

The foundation of the studies analyzed is to acknowledge the forefathers of the theory of autonomous learning and metacognition. Undoubtedly, these proposals have been revolutionizing the process of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in the last three decades in different parts of the oriental world. This theory is a forceful proof that demonstrates how people absorb and share information and how that changes the perception of teacher's and student's about "learning" means. Learning's concept now embraces according to the authors a wide range of variables that facilitate its purpose, mainly students' cognition, introspection, and conscience. Therefore, it was demonstrated that autonomous learning and metacognition are valuable methods that supply with the teacher's and student's requirements to facilitate considerably the path to gain English proficiency.

Consequently, literature also establishes new roles that teachers and students must assume for the process of teaching and learning to be significant. Teachers must be more sensible to know their students and be creative to foster strategies on the base of the new theories studied. Students must be flexible and conscious that the responsibility does not just belong to their teacher but rather to themselves. This outdated perception of teaching and learning is what concerned the researchers with the foundation of their theories, due to its process and time wear awareness.

This Theory has been then, the main resource for current researchers to design new strategies for teaching and learning the English language according to their needs and contexts. The effectiveness of these strategies has been supplied by documentary evidence through case studies where the impact on EFL students to gain proficiency has been widely recognized. However, most of them also recognize the lack of literature about these concepts in their

countries. In conclusion, Since the argumentation of the theory of autonomy and metacognition in the last three decades, the research has increased due to the prominence of cognitive study in the acquisition of information and knowledge in the language learning process.

Discussion

The study of autonomy learning brings to light concepts that there had not been keeping bear before to acquire proficiency in the English language which emphasis in the students' role and motivation: Self-learning, self-determination, self-regulation, self-efficacy, self-testing and self-reflection. Therefore, the literature establishes that to achieve English proficiency the introspection of the students in their learning process is crucial.

Metacognition permits EFL students to manage their learning process. The efficacy in managing time to design a plan, the own interest to choose the resources, and honestly to monitoring and evaluating the process guarantees gain proficiency in the English language. Therefore, inspiration and motivation are directly proportional to the self-encourage that the students, through autonomy learning, have acquired.

Although the education system, teachers and students have followed the same parameters in language acquisition throughout the time, the last three decades theory studied has proposed and transcendental change to lead education from the phycologist field (cognitive) to the context and not the opposite. Consequently, the effective of teaching and learning to acquire English language proficiency depends on the creativity, ambition, encouragement, willpower, responsibility and discipline as teaching to teach as learners to learn.

The final discussion is the challenge for the system to adapt its process considering the suitable of the theory analyzed. In cases study showed up that definitively when it is fostering autonomous learning and stimulating metacognitive strategies EFL students gain proficiency, therefore, it is essential to continue researching and evaluate the system to lead the necessary changes to adopt these concepts, and ever more in the current technological era, when the information access promotes autonomy learning.

Conclusions

This study underlines the powerful connection between metacognition and learner autonomy in the context of English language education. By exploring how students reflect, self-regulate, and make strategic decisions, it becomes clear that autonomy is not a fixed trait but a skill that can be cultivated through intentional pedagogical practices. Encouraging learners to think about their thinking not only enhances their language proficiency but also empowers them to take ownership of their learning journey. Ultimately, fostering metacognitive awareness is a transformative step toward building resilient, reflective, and self-directed language learners an essential goal for modern education.

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