

Enhancing Learners' Literacy Practices through Self-Regulated Learning

تعزيز ممارسات محو الأمية لدى المتعلمين من خلال التعليم المنظم ذاتيا / (التعليم الخاضع للتنظيم الذاتي)

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Abstract Literacy practices prove to be a major determinant of academic success. For the learners of English as a Foreign Language, the reading and writing skills prove to be closely intertwined. The lack of proficient reading may subsequently have a detrimental impact on students' writing performance and ultimately results in academic underachievement. Nevertheless, these literacy skills can be cultivated by adopting corrective learning behaviors that would guide the learner to reach successful learning. This can be done by means of acquiring and/or applying the adequate strategies and processes that enable students to detect the dysfunctioning areas in their literacy practices in order to bring about remedial work accordingly. Within this perspective, Self- Regulated Learning offers a useful framework to optimize learners' progress and outcomes by clearly defining the component processes involved in the efficient mastery of the required literacy skills. The aim of this paper is to highlight the relevance of self-regulation model in optimizing students' literacy skills in English at Badji Mokhtar –Annaba University, leading them to be good learners that would become proficient writers. This is carried out by means of suggesting ways to enhance the relevant knowledge, skills and proactive use of learning strategies in students' regular academic tasks in view of optimizing their literacy practices and reaching academic success.

ملخص : تثبت الممارسات الأدبية أنها عامل رئيسي محدد للنجاح الأكاديمي. بالنسبة لمتعلمي الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، تثبت مهارات القراءة والكتابة ارتباطاً وثيقاً نظراً لأن قلة القراءة الفعالة قد يكون لها تأثير على أداء كتابة الطلاب وتؤدي في النهاية إلى فشل بالتحصيل الدراسي. ومع ذلك ، يمكن تنمية المهارات الأدبية هذه عن طريق تبني سلوكيات تعلم تصحيحية من شأنها توجيه المتعلم للوصول إلى التعلم الناجح. ويمكن القيام بذلك عن طريق الحصول على و تطبيق الاستراتيجيات والعمليات المناسبة التي تمكن

الطلاب من اكتشاف المناطق التي تعاني من اختلال وظيفي في ممارساتهم من أجل تحقيق العمل العلاجي وفقا لذلك. ومن هذا المنظور، يوفر التعلم التنظيم الذاتي إطارًا مفيدًا لتحسين مستوى المتدربين ونتائجهم من خلال تحديد عمليات المكون بوضوح في التمكن الفعال لمهارات القراءة والكتابة المطلوبة. الهدف من هذه الورقة هو تسليط الضوء على أهمية نموذج التنظيم الذاتي في تحسين مهارات الكتابة لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة باجي مختار - عنابة ، مما يجعلهم يصبحون كُتَّابًا جيدين. ويتم ذلك عن طريق اقتراح طرق لتحسين المعرفة والمهارات والاستخدام الفعال لاستراتيجيات التعلم في المهام الأكاديمية المنتظمة للطلاب في ضوء تحسين الممارسات الأدبية وتحقيق النجاح الأكاديمي.

Introduction

University students experience some serious problems in carrying out their learning tasks appropriately which influence the well-ongoing of their academic performance. The causes of underachievement do not always lie far from the learners' potential deficiencies in learning skills. Learners of English are faced with a twofold requirement; they are supposed to master some content in the foreign language, which also cannot be achieved without proficient processing via the literacy skills. Nevertheless, a number of students in the English department do not have a clear understanding of how learning works nor of the way to achieve it efficiently.

1. Deficient Learning Patterns

A number of common symptoms lie at the root of students' unsuccessful learning experiences. One particular issue lies in some erroneous beliefs that students hold about the nature of the learning process as well as of the methods to be used to achieve it. They tend to have a passive view of learning and usually complain about the workload and the instructional tasks without taking into consideration the actual efforts and the literacy skills required to undertake them. (Nilson, 2013)

Besides, students fail to evaluate the degree of effectiveness of their learning methods and to adapt them, when necessary, in order to reach their specific goals and improve their results. They also show difficulty to control their emotions and motivation during performance as they usually lack interest in learning for learning's sake which may ultimately result in

interrupted learning. These problems, among others, point out to students' poor learning skills that reflect more specific poor cognitive skills, lack of motivation as well as serious behavioral weaknesses.

In Nilson's terms (2013), learners lack certain kinds of literacy knowledge that prove to be essential for efficient learning. First, students tend to lack substantial strategic knowledge. They do not know about the learning strategies available to them to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning tasks. Second, they seem to lack knowledge about the nature of the assigned tasks as well as that of the appropriate ways to assess the difficulty of the work, which would enable them to decide about the most suitable strategies to use. Third, they tend to show serious lacks of self- knowledge, namely about their own strengths and weaknesses as learners.

In order to optimize academic performance and achievement, students need to be more aware of their literacy practices and patterns of study. They need to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and build the adequate academic skills that make them fully responsible of their own learning. This requires redefining learning as a self-disciplined practice that students develop through a proactive use of adequate strategies involving personal – cognitive and motivational- and behavioral dimensions intended to achieve academic mastery.

2. Literacy Skills

Among the plethora of definitions devoted to the concept of literacy, Blake and Hanley (1995, p.89) state that: 'the attribute of literacy is generally recognized as one of the key educational objectives of compulsory schooling. It refers to the ability to read and write to an appropriate level of fluency.' There is, however, no commonly accepted definition of what 'an appropriate level', 'effectively' or 'well' mean. In other words, 'there is no universal standard of literacy' (Lawton and Gordon, 1996, p.138).

Literacy is presently witnessing active interest at all levels, from classroom concerns up to governmental focus. It is becoming a high stake issue all over the educational world, expanding both in nature and scope. One instance lies in the New Zealand government Statement of Intent 2010–2015, in which literacy is defined as : '[the ability to] read, write, listen [and] think creatively' (Cambridge assessment, 2013, p.11).

Another instance is the Alberta educators' agreement on the paramount importance of the teaching and the developing of a wider set of literacy skills so that students know how to

'filter, evaluate and make critical judgments as to the accuracy and the ethical use of information that they acquire. It is imperative that the education system prepare students for today and also for the ever-evolving future of tomorrow by ensuring students are able to solve problems, think critically and creatively, collaborate and communicate, master digital literacy and know how to learn in diverse environments.'(Cambridge Assessment, 2013)

The latter takes literacy out of the confinement of the traditional four language skills, being merely the listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities to more comprehensive critical and communicative skills. While literacy events are connected to some setting like the classroom, « a literacy practice is often connected to out-of-classroom settings and can be observed as a regular, iterative event » (Pahl & Rowsell, 2012).

Furthermore, Edward and Potts (2008) identify a shift in focus from 'language' to 'literacy'. They describe its representations according to the emphasis it lays as encompassing many aspects such as: Literacy as employment, marking economic stability; Literacy as levels or competences; Literacy as skill, where the tools become themselves the primary focus rather than the way they are used by individuals; and lastly, Literacy as morbidity, standing as a metaphor that denotes the link between literacy underachievement and individual's poor behavior and lack of well-being.

Narrowing down the scope, 'functional literacy' offers one type of literacy practice that attempts 'to link literacy to purpose, and thus to some kind of level. In this particular sense, it is defined as 'the level of skill in reading and writing that any individual needs in order to cope with adult life'. This perspective emphasizes the need for explicit instruction in how to 'transfer literacy knowledge and skills' whereby 'literacy instruction must be embedded across the curriculum [...] and developed by the growing complexity of content' (Lawton and Gordon, 1996, p.108). In this particular light, literacy practices stand as the ongoing process of acquiring the skills and knowledge that requires from the learner to be fully engaged and responsible of his/her learning and improvement.

3. Self-Regulated Learning Framework

Self-Regulation theory brings to the foreground the crucial processes that make students responsible of their learning enterprises by clearly defining the metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral activities inherent in the process. The latter form the learners' main resources to build deep and lasting learning that requires mastering a range of literacy skills and practices (Nilson, 2013). Within this perspective, Zimmerman defines learning as “an activity that students do for themselves in a proactive way rather than as a covert event that happens to them in reaction to teaching” and where “Self-regulation refers to self-generated thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are oriented to attaining goals.” (2002, 56)

As stated by Nilson, ‘a major goal of higher education is to create lifelong learners – intentional, independent, self-directed learners who can acquire, retain, and retrieve new knowledge on their own (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2002, 2007; Wirth, 2008a, cited in Nilson, 2013, 1).

Accordingly, the self-regulated learner is the one who is able to use efficiently his/her own cognitive/metacognitive, behavioral and motivational resources to initiate, adjust and evaluate his/her literacy practices in order to attain academic success (Zimmerman, 1996).

The theory emphasizes the importance of learners' proactive use of strategies and skills such as setting goals, selecting and implementing strategies, self-monitoring one's effectiveness as a way to ensure efficient learning and improve academic outcomes. The cognitive and metacognitive skills represent the first founding element in Self-regulated theory. They encompass such mental activities as concentration, information processing and selecting ideas, and include strategies such as: rehearsal, organization, elaboration, critical thinking and self-evaluation.

The Behavioral skills deal with resource management and control of one's own learning including environmental structuring, monitoring learning and reviewing progress as well as seeking assistance when needed. The Affective or motivational factors are concerned with motivation, task valuing, goal orientation (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) and self-efficacy beliefs. These components operate within a cyclic model of learning that goes through three major phases of planning, monitoring and evaluating. Each phase, in turn, encompasses a range of key self-regulatory subprocesses. (Zimmerman, 1986a)

When tackling any learning task, the self-regulated learner goes through three main stages that operate within a cyclic model of learning. Adopting Zimmerman's self-regulated cycle

(1998; 2002), the Forethought activities stand for the first stage of planning where all the mental processes are triggered to prepare for the learning task, such as setting the goals of the learning task and planning the adequate strategies to be adopted. These processes are inevitably affected by personal self-beliefs about one's capabilities as well as the importance of the task, which both fall respectively in the components of self-efficacy and task valuing. Second, the Performance or Volitional Control phase, which is about learner's actual implementation of the learning strategies, mainly involves the process of keeping track of key indicators of personal effectiveness during performance or what is known as self-monitoring. The last phase deals with Self-reflection processes that mainly aim to evaluate the outcomes of the carried out task, diagnose the causes of the results, and make readjustments when necessary in the suitable methods for future use in the next forethought phase (Zimmerman, 1996).

The previously-stated subprocesses come into interplay and influence each other in a cyclical model that leads to determine the successfulness or failure of the learning enterprise and outcomes.

In the same vein, Paris and Paris (2001) highlight the role of the teacher as a major guide in the present enterprise. They contend that literacy instruction stands as one of the three main direct applications of self-regulated learning in the classroom, in addition to cognitive engagement and self-assessment. In literacy instruction, the teacher can impart to students the necessary skills that enable them to become self-regulated learners by using strategies such as reciprocal teaching, open-ended tasks, project-based learning as well as pertinent tasks that foster self-regulated practices like authentic assessments, autonomy-based assignments, and portfolios. Nevertheless, knowing the learning strategies alone does not ensure the efficiency of the undertaken literacy tasks, without calling on the affective readiness of the learner. The latter need to be more aware of the importance of adopting the right set of beliefs and attitudes that ensure the well-ongoing of their literacy performance.

4. Selected Strategies enhancing Literacy Skills

A wide range of self-regulation strategies was developed by Zimmerman and his colleagues in his book *Developing Self-Regulated Learners: Beyond Achievement to Self-Efficacy* (1996) where they tackle the different ways of applying self-regulation processes

within classroom contexts in order to reinforce learners' literacy skills for more proficient academic learning.

As far as the writing skill is concerned, the foreign language teacher can assist his/her learners in more than one way by acting as a tutor. Instead of imparting readymade information, the teacher can guide and provide feedback all along the different steps of the writing process. This starts from the very first stage of setting process goals for their strategic efforts to correct problems encountered in their writing. These strategies enable students to get better ideas about the activities involved in producing good pieces of writing such as making and organizing notes, generating, critiquing and revising the text at hand, and seeking editorial assistance. (Zimmerman et al., 1996, 113)

Besides, the teacher can suggest a set of effective strategies related to the three major processes of writing, namely: Planning, drafting, and revising. Students are free to combine other strategies adopted from other skill areas such as reading, or devise their own as appropriate. Following the general model of Self-Regulated learning, the processes of monitoring, assessing and reflecting learning are to follow in a cyclic way.

The following guidelines summarize the list of writing strategies that aims to hone the foreign language student's performance while carrying out his/her writing task inside the classroom (Zimmerman et al., 1996, 113-114):

1. Goal setting. A crucial step in the writing process where the student proceeds with defining and planning for the goals of the writing task, namely drawing from his/her knowledge about the different types of writing like: comparison, analysis, and so on. This step also involves detailing the inherent subgoals, such as the objects to compare or analyze. This helps to determine the quality of the written content.

2. Idea-generating questions. It is a major drafting strategy involving asking questions about the different components of subject of writing in order to generate prose. It covers asking questions about the object, the sequence of events, the facts, the arguments or opinions, the key players, etc.

3. Mapping or webbing. It is about selecting strategies for setting the relations existing between the different parts of the subject matter namely, ideas or events by means of visual concept maps or webs, such as linking scientists to theories and findings.

4. Varying sentence structure. It is another drafting strategy that aims to make varied paragraphs in terms of grammatical structure (e.g. varied simple, compound and complex sentences).

5. Modeling the experts. It is the drafting strategy whereby the student writer finds the work of a model writer and attempts to imitate the style of writing.

6. Locating a peer editor. It is the revision strategy of finding an appropriate classmate to read and evaluate the various aspects of the draft.

7. Becoming a self-editor. An elaborate revision strategy of self- examining the piece of writing by using questions about the introduction and the conclusion, achieving the main goal, unclear or unsupported parts, sufficient examples to illustrate important points, etc. Adopting this type of strategies, the student writer is assumed to be an advanced, more experienced learner.

5. Teacher's Checklist for Developing Students' Writing Skills

The role of the teacher in imparting self-regulated skills in the writing class cannot be undermined. By implementing self-regulated writing, the teacher adopts the role of a tutor or coach. He/she is required to cover a range of instructional activities, such as: finding ways to integrate self-regulated processes within the curriculum; refining the teaching methods to cope with self-regulation framework; demonstrating the efficient use of self-regulated learning techniques to students and anticipating their possible inquiries; devising ways to evaluate students' progress, and providing constructive feedback to assist students remedy to their own performance (Zimmerman et al., 1996, 130- 134). In order to ensure covering all the main instructional stages in writing, the teacher can devise a checklist as suggested by Zimmerman and his colleagues (1996, 126):

1. Planning - Devise writing activities in order to match coherently with the curriculum.

- Make sure that the writing assignments are equal in length and difficulty.

2. Implementation - Introduce the concept of self-efficacy and raise students' awareness of its impact on their academic performance and achievement.

- Prepare adequate materials related to writing charts and model their use.

- Prepare and administer writing assignments to provide adequate feedback to students on the effectiveness of their strategy use.
- Prepare and model draft processes, including raw notes, categorized notes, beginning draft of text, and revision.
- Devote, on regular basis, peer group time in class to allow students to evaluate together their own and others' writing practices and find ways to refine them.
- Observe peer groups in order to obtain insights into which writing strategies work and the reasons behind it.
- Periodically use information gathered from observing groups as a springboard for brief whole-class discussions on ways of strategy selection and refinement.
- Keep records of the writing charts produced by the students along with self-efficacy scores.
- Find out about possible congruence between self-efficacy and other writing chart scores of student. The obtained data may draw teacher's attention to particular students who prove to be either overly high or low in perceived self-efficacy.

3. Follow-up – The teacher plans and implements writing follow-up activities for some time later in the course as a way to reinforce prior writing skills to remedy to given deficiencies, such as poor weekly quiz performance. A teacher can help a student detect problems underlying his/her academic work and subsequently self-monitor key aspects of his/her studying practices.

Conclusion

The literacy events in the foreign language classroom prove to be a rich ground on which language, as well as content learning, is built. Sometimes students do not have a clear purpose and direction when tackling literacy activities because they need more knowledge and guidance about the nature of learning as well as the well-defined processes involved in it. Their motivation in learning might not be to learn the language in an autonomous way, but to fulfill a requirement. Self-regulated learning skills prove to offer learners some efficient remedy to deficient literacy practices, namely, writing in the Foreign Language Classroom. They offer a framework of aspects that deserve awareness- drawing and improvement on behalf of the Foreign Language students in a full supporting structure that assists them in successfully achieving their language learning goals.

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