INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF ALGERINE MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS IN ENHANCNG ACADEMIC   SELF- REGULATION: A KEY TOWARDS TEACHING HOW TO LEARN

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Abstract

Academic self-regulation or self-regulated learning is the field that underlines the autonomy of learners and self-directed steps to learn. Accordingly, academic self-regulation is the process by which learners plan, monitor and evaluate their learning process to gain a successful learning experience. Despite extensive research in the area of self-regulated learning, bounded research has unfortunately been done on such an idea in the Algerian context. This research paper examines the attempts of middle school teachers in improving academic self-regulation and teaching pupils how to learn. It examines the role of these teachers as models in approaching the development of self-regulated learners. To conduct this study, a mixed-methods design was followed. As such, it was made use of observation and questionnaire to gather data from eight middle school English teachers. The results indicated that explicit attempts by Algerian middle school teachers to improve academic self-regulation are limited.

1. Introduction

Helping pupils learn academic self-regulation has become among the goals of education because it is considered as a predictor of pupils' academic achievement and motivation (Zumbrunn et al., 2011; Sahranavard et al., 2018). Academic self-regulation is defined as the self-directive process involving meta-cognitive, motivational and behavioural sub-processes initiated by pupils to acquire new knowledge (Zimmerman, 2001). This notion has become a substantial topic in the secondary school context (Istance & Damount, 2010). Therefore, research has emphasised the importance of promoting academic self-regulation among pupils

of secondary school (Salter, 2012; Kindekens et al., 2014; Nugteren et al., 2018). In this light, many scholars suggested that academic self-regulation can be thought by different means of demonstration and modelling (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007; Zumbrunn et al., 2011). Some scholars further contended that academic self-regulation is not an innate ability but a process that can be developed through modelling and instruction (Judd, 2005).

In the Algerian context, however, limited endeavours have been done to explore how secondary school teachers of English approach the development of academic self-regulation in their classrooms. Further, there is a limitation in understanding the factors that hinder EFL teachers from enhancing autonomy and self-regulated strategies among their pupils. This study aims at exploring the EFL secondary school teachers' level of awareness in implementing and developing pupils' academic self-regulated strategies. Specifically, it is to examine the role of teachers in demonstrating and modelling strategies of academic self-regulation. Therefore, the following issue has been raised: What are the procedures carried by EFL middle school teacher to teach academic self-regulation?

While answering this question, it was relied on a sample of EFL middle school teachers. Specifically, consent was given by two groups of teachers: Experienced and novice teachers. The advantage of this study lies in informing Algerian middle school teachers and basic education programme designers about the need to foster skills of academic self-regulation among middle school pupils.

2. Theoretical Overview: Academic Self-regulation

The initial interest in how students regulate their behaviour from a socio-cognitive perspective emerged as a result of answering some questions related to pupils' achievement. These questions included: 'why some students fail while others do not?', 'how students become aware of their learning process?' what instructional methods and techniques can teachers use to produce life-long learners? ' While answering these questions, theorists embraced Bandura's social cognitive theory to support the emergence of academic self-regulation as a primordial notion to promote long-term learning (Zimmerman, 1998; Pintrich, 2000; Schunk, 2001). The theory introduced by Bandura (1986) viewed individuals as active agents in the process of learning and development. This view of human development informed the basis of Zimmerman notion of academic self-regulation. Zimmerman (2002) introduced an exclusive definition of self-regulated learning (SRL) as the degree to which students are metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally active participants in their learning process. Self-regulated learning became a field that stimulated the interest of different researchers to introduce similar definitions. According to Fluminhan and Murgo (2019), academic self-regulation is defined as the active process through which students systematically control and direct their actions to achieve certain learning goals. In addition, Fluminhan and Murgo (2019) emphasized the need to teach students how to self-regulate their learning. In this regard, Sharon et al. (2011) suggested that teachers need to instruct self-regulated learning through modelling and demonstration.

Research has accumulated enormous evidence that self-academic regulation is of great benefit in the academic context. From a self-organised point of view, pupils are no longer seen as passive recipients (Salamanca, 2015, p.77). Additionally, Cubucku (2009) stated that the benefits of academic self-regulation are evident in the behaviour of some learners in the classroom. Accordingly, academic self-regulated learners are generally themselves, confident, strategic, resourceful and responsive to the results of the execution of tasks. Another notable

comment by Cubucku (2009) on the benefits of self-regulated learning is the control students have over their thought, impact and behaviour.

It has also been reported that academic self-regulation has a massive influence on students' motivation and self-efficacy. Lavasani et al. (2001) conducted a study to explore the effect of teaching academic self-regulation on student motivation and self-efficacy. The research followed a comparative study model where they included two groups. The first group received instruction of some academic-self regulated strategies while the other group did not. Through the questionnaire, the results indicated that the teaching of academic self-regulation had a positive effect on pupils' motivation and self-efficacy.

The fact that academic self-regulation is not an innate ability but a process that can be developed through modeling and instruction, has triggered the interest of different researchers (Judd, 2005). These researchers attempted to investigate the attitudes of stakeholders toward the implementation of academic self-regulation in middle schools, and whether pupils in their early stages are provided with the adequate support to enhance their academic self-regulation. Salter (2012) conducted a study to explore stakeholders' beliefs and attitudes around the development of self-regulated learning in Australian schools. The results gathered from online surveys, group interviews, and documents indicated that stakeholders highlighted the role of academic self-regulation in enhancing critical thinking and creating a joyful learning experience. In addition, stakeholders reported their unawareness of the specific approaches that best help pupils learn academic self-regulation. Overall, findings indicated that academic self-regulation in Australian schools is not implemented because Australian schools do not have self-regulated learning curriculum or a specific policy on how to teach and develop academic self-regulation. In a more recent study, Kistner et al. (2010) investigated teachers' direct and indirect endeavours in promoting academic self-regulation. Through the analysis of videos recorded while teachers were teaching in the classroom, the results indicated that teachers' explicit efforts to teach academic self-regulation were rare. The current study joins these studies to explore whether Algerian ELF middle school teachers are aware of academic self-regulation, and if so, what kind of strategies of academic self-regulation they enhance in their classrooms.

3. Methodology

Mixed method research is the sibling of multi-method research in which either solely multiple qualitative approaches or solely multiple quantitative approaches are combined (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017, p,108). The current study, therefore, used quantitative models to obtain precise numerical results for participants' responses. At the same time, qualitative models were used to collect non-numerical data and follow the role of teachers as models while developing the strategies of academic self-regulation of students. The data collection tools used in this study are classroom observation, and a questionnaire addressed to teachers.

The questionnaires are among the widely used tools in mixed methods to gain confirmatory results (Harris & Brown, 2010). For that reason, a questionnaire was given to teachers to collect accurate answers. According to Zoharbi (2013), quantitative data is best obtained through close-ended questions. This type of question was used to collect consistent opinions from teachers and allow them to choose an option. As for a class observation, it was implemented with four teachers of English as a foreign language at the level of rural middle schools to capture their routinely based instructional behaviour within the classroom.

3.3 Context

This research study took place in two middle schools situated in rural areas of Mostaganem and Relizane. The first middle school 'Baghdadi Benattia' is located in Sirat (Mostaganem); whereas the second middle school 'Ben Dehmane Belgandouz' is located in Yellel (Relizane).

3.4 Participants

For this study (8) middle school English teachers were selected to scrutinise their English classes and reveal the procedures they follow to enhance academic self-regulation. This selection focused on two groups of teachers. The first group made of novice teachers (4 teachers), while the second consists of experienced teachers (4 teachers). This selection will help compare between the two groups to capture the similarities and differences, if found, in enhancing academic self-regulation. Besides, it is to explore whether experience could have an influence on teachers' awareness of academic self-regulation. The experience of teaching fluctuated between 6 months for the newly recruited teachers and 11years for most experienced teachers.

3.5 Data Collection Instrument

The data collection instruments used in this research are questionnaires handed to teachers (4 experienced teachers and 4 novice teachers) to compile the strategies they follow in English classes to promote academic self- regulation of their learners. In addition to observation to capture the routinely based activities and strategies teachers employ in their classrooms. This observation was held with four EFL (with 2 experienced teachers and 2 novice teachers) middle school teachers. Hence, it directs attention to the following principal areas:

• When dealing with exams' correction in the classroom

• When dealing with classwork

• When starting a new trimester

• When dealing with one of the language micro-skills such as reading

While observing these areas, the aim was to explore the different strategies that might be promoted and enhanced by teachers in their classroom. As such, a close attention was given to their role as models and demonstrators in the classroom.

4. Data Analysis

4.3 Description of The Class Observation

This section offers a comprehensive description and discussion of each classroom observation. It focuses on the strategies English teachers use to promote academic self-regulation in the classroom. As mentioned earlier (see data collection instrument section), the main focus of the observation was on whether teachers enhance academic self-regulation strategies during exam correction, classwork, new trimester, and when teaching micro skills like reading. Below is a description of classrooms` observation considering the four principle areas.

4.3.1   Classroom observation 1

The class took place shortly following second-trimester exams, i.e. it was the session of exam's corrections. Pupils were asked to copy the uncorrected version of the exam's exercises from the board and wait for a collective answer. Once pupils put their pens down, the teacher asked them to share answers to a given exam exercise.

The pupils started to respond after the teacher agreed. However, the teacher did not bother to involve who had no answers to share and who were generally sitting at the back. After correcting a particular exercise, some students (often only 2) were asked to read the corrected version of the task audibly. At this point, the teacher did not spend part of his time commenting on the pupils' reading, such as marking the end of a sentence when these pupils encountered a period.

 Throughout the session, the teacher selected and involved certain pupils to respond and participate in her session. This routine action lasted during the time of the exam correction, as the teacher asked one of pupils to write the exercise on the board and correct it with peers. Sometime before the end of the hour-long session, the teacher handed over the papers to the pupils to check their grades.

It was no surprise that pupils did not have questions or comments to add; besides the teacher did not encourage them to ask questions or reflect upon their work; and the one-hour session followed the same routine of engagement. This was done so based on the teacher deciding who needs   to answer the questions and who needs not do so. In addition, during the classroom observation, the experimenter has rather expected to see the teacher asking those who had good marks to share the strategies they followed when revising for exams. However, the one-hour session ended, and the teacher did not devote time for good achievers to share the strategies they followed to get a good mark.

4.3.2   Classroom observation 2

For this second classroom observation, just after holidays, the focus was on the first session. It was the onset of the trimester and the first thing that was noticed was the classroom embellishment. Pupils' group work as well as individual work were posted on the walls. This was to motivate pupils and enhance peripheral learning. With pupils' enthusiasm to begin the lesson, the teacher revised the previous course before starting a new one.

For this trimester, the novel teacher's strategy was involving the pupils to guess the lesson's title. The teacher did not write the title of the lesson on the board. After being intensively exposed to the present perfect tense and how to use it, the teacher invited the pupils to deduce the title of the lesson.

While explaining the same   lesson on the present perfect, the teacher followed another teaching strategy which is asking pupils   to conjugate the verb between parentheses: 'The teachers (have written) the lesson on the board', then   he explained that the easiest way to know how to conjugate this is to replace the teacher by something else. One of the pupils replied by saying 'they'.

During the classroom activity, it was observed that both the teacher and the pupils were engaged in the session. In other words, there was an interaction between the teacher and the pupils in that the teacher did his best to involve his pupils through reinforcing their prior knowledge. As mentioned earlier, the session was after the holidays which is a period where pupils might feel in need of more rest. Despite this, pupils were attentively engaged with the

lesson. During the observation it was expected from the teacher to lead-in pupils to the first session with a careful consideration of sharing the objectives and skills that will be developed during the third semester. However, this form of warm-up was not observed in the classroom.

4.3.3 Classroom observation 3

This observation occurred in tutorials1 (often referred to as TD). Pupils were divided into groups of four.

Tutorial or Td1 occurs in small classroom with a limited number of students, approximately ten, where the teacher provides student with the adequate activities and support to reinforce their understanding of what they have learned in the classroom.

The tutorial focused on exercises on the lesson of rights and duties in school. On that basis, the teacher explained to pupils what duties and rights mean. While explaining this, she did not dwell on translating what duty and right mean to pupils` mother tongue.

Alternatively, she made use of some examples such as "you have to wear a uniform in the school" as a duty, and "you have the right to learn" as a right. After the teacher made sure his pupils understood the concept of right and duty, she wrote the exercise of ten sentences on the board with a table for answering by 'Yes, I do' or 'No, I do not'.

The primary observation made is that pupils were asked to bring the dictionary from the library to look up words to enlarge their repertoire of vocabulary. The teacher asked pupils to highlight or underline the   keywords that they were asked to explain in order to grasp the meaning. Sentences like 'I respect my friends', 'I cheat in exams', etc.

Tutorial One was given in a small classroom with ten pupils. They were given to reinforce their understanding of what they have learned in the lesson (which is done in large classroom).

Contrary to what happened during the lesson in a large classroom, in Tutorial One pupils seemed to be engaged probably because of the class size. During such activities, it was observed that pupils worked rather collaboratively and responded positively to teamwork.

4.3.4 Classroom observation 4

In this classroom, the teacher started the session with a warmup that consisted of asking pupils to remember the last lesson. Reviewing the previous lesson before starting the new one was an advantageous technique that kept pupils engaged at the beginning of the session.

After that, teacher started reading a dialogue between a patient named Amina and a doctor. For the reading, the teacher focused on three stages of reading: The first was very quick, while the second and third readings were slow, with a complete focus on the gesture (body language) to explain certain words as fever,   stomach upset, etc.

When the reading part was over, the teacher wrote keywords on the board and asked pupils to memorize them. Then the teacher wrote the dialogue on the board and asked the pupils to write it down. A pupil asked: "What does a butterfly mean?" The teacher responded by drawing the butterfly on the blackboard instead of translating it into Arabic.

The teacher rewrote the dialogue creating some gaps and asked the students to fill in what is missing, using the keywords they already knew and supposedly memorized. This activity occurred in pair work

After correcting the exercise, the teacher asked a few pupils to perform the dialogue. During their performance, the teacher kept correcting their mistakes and pronunciation. Although the teacher used some of the classroom reading techniques, explained above such as skimming and scanning, she did not expand them for her students. Instead of allocating some time to explain to pupils that what she has used are techniques that are useful during reading comprehension, she carried out her lesson without any clarifications on how to use these techniques while reading.

4.4 Questionnaire Analysis

The questions asked for promoting meta-cognition are the following.

- In reading comprehension, how often do you demonstrate or model some reading comprehension strategies such as summary, using graphs, locate words, evaluate understanding?
- How often do you ask your pupils to reflect upon their learning process to know their strengths and weaknesses?
- If you have pupils who got good marks in a given test, how often do you ask them to reveal the strategies or ways they followed to have this mark?

a.   Novice EFL teachers' responses on enhancing meta-cognition in their EFL classes

The following figure demonstrates novice EFL teachers' frequency of enhancing meta- cognitive strategies.
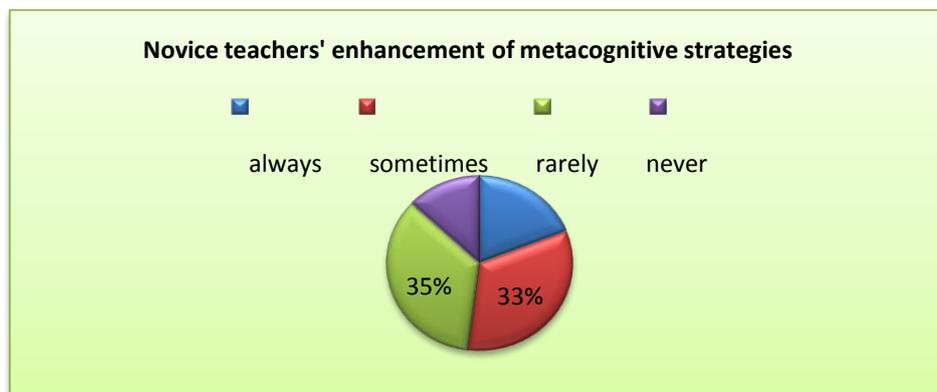

Figure 1. Novice EFL Teachers' Enhancement of Meta-cognition

Figure one displays the variable rate of novice teachers' responses to the enhancement of metacognitive strategies of their pupils in the classroom. (19%) of the permanent novice teachers always attempt to inaugurate the metacognitive plans; however, (33%) of novice teachers sometimes attempt to enhance meta-cognition. Furthermore, (35%) of teachers rarely attempt to enhance meta-cognition. The remaining (13%) of teachers never demonstrate their attempts and effort to develop meta-cognition. This result remains low as compared to their continuous efforts to develop meta-cognitive strategies. On that account, this graph's results indicate teachers' narrowed efforts towards the development of the meta-cognitive strategies in their English classes.

Figure 2 shows the variable rates of experienced teachers' frequency of developing metacognitive skills in their EFL classrooms.
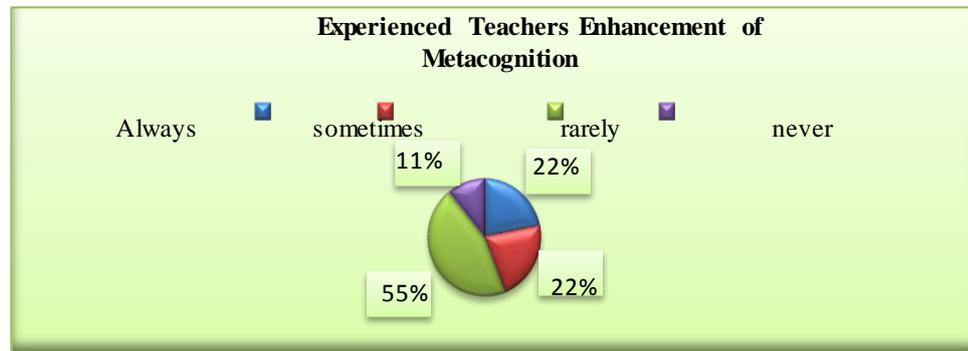

Figure 2. Experienced EFL Teachers' Enhancement of Metacognition

The evidence from this pie chart shows the results of the old generation of teachers' inclination towards the increase of meta-cognitive strategies in their EFL classrooms. Accordingly, (45%) of experienced teachers rarely attempt to launch meta-cognitive skills, while (22%) always attempt to enhance meta-cognition; against (11%) seldom enhance meta-cognitive strategies among their pupils.

b.   Novice teachers' responses on enhancing motivation

Firstly, the main concern in this study is to know about teachers' frequent attempts to reveal different tactics that pupils can use to motivate themselves because pupils regulate their learning   only if they are motivated.

The other questions put are as follows:

- How often do you remind your pupils to have self-talk to increase their motivation?
- How often do you ask your pupils if they are motivated to accomplish a given task?
- How often do you create challenge between your pupils?

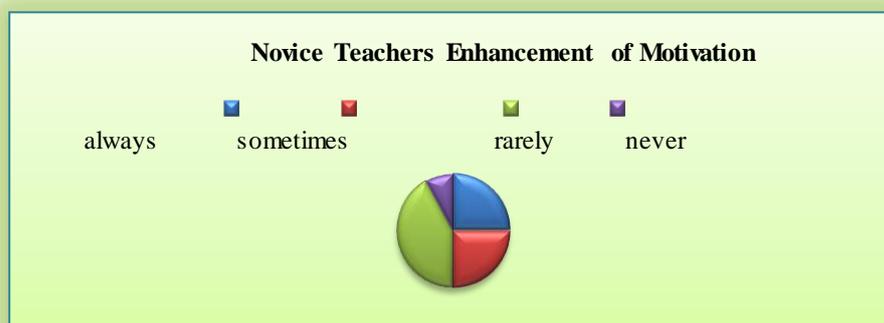The figure below represents the results obtained from the second part of the questionnaire.

Figure 3. Novice Teachers Enhancement of Motivation

The above figure interprets the variable rates of EFL novice teachers to enhance their pupils' motivation. (42%) of teachers' have rare endeavours towards demonstrating some strategies that boost their pupils' motivation; against (25%) of the respondents said they have perpetual attempts. The results confirm to some degree the teachers' limited endeavours to enhance their pupils' motivation.

c.   Experienced teachers' responses on enhancing motivation

The figure below discloses the result of the tactics that experienced teachers use in their classroom to increase their pupils' motivation.
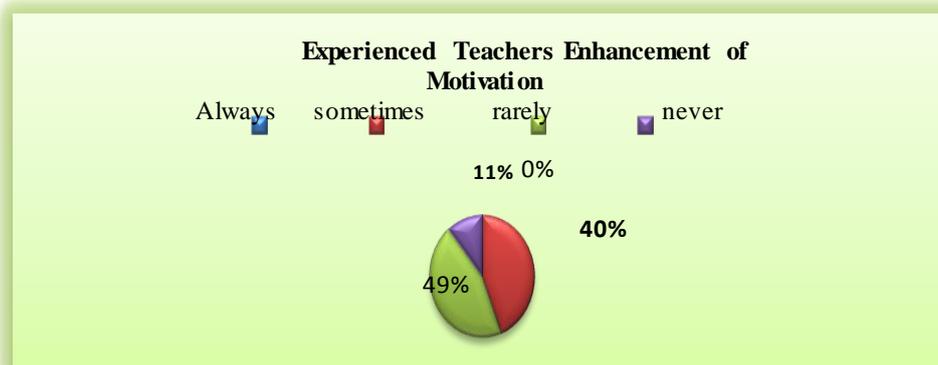

Figure4. Experienced Teachers Enhancement of Motivation

This figure reveals the limited methods and techniques available to experienced teachers in order to improve the academic self-regulation of their students. In effect, (40%) of teachers said they continue to use different methods that allow pupils to regulate their motivations; against (49%) said that they have unusual attempts to use different techniques to boost motivation.

d.   Novice teachers' responses on promoting social strategies

Enhancing social skills is the other important part of the questionnaire. Indeed, the aim is to investigate the different strategies that teachers use to enhance an atmosphere of social support in their EFL classrooms. The focus was on the analysis of the following questions.

- How often do you encourage group work or peer work in your classroom?
- How often do you raise your pupils' awareness of different strategies through small group work?
- How often do you encourage your pupils to ask you/peers questions?

Figure 5. Novice Teachers' Enhancement of Social Skills

The figure above indicates the attempt by novice teachers to improve their pupils' social skills. In effect, (23%) of teachers reported that they have a constant attempt to enhance some social skills within the classroom; against (54%) of teachers who said they have occasionally tried to enhance social skills.

e.   Experienced teachers' answers on promoting social skills in their classrooms

The following figure demonstrates experienced teachers routinely efforts to develop their pupils social skills.
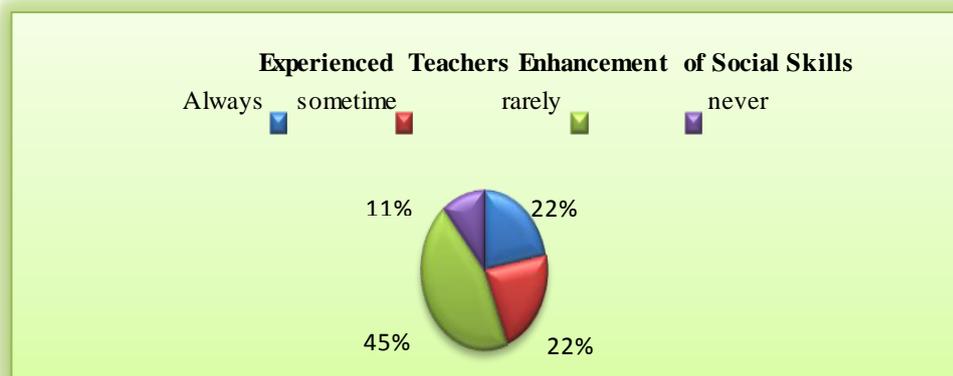

Figure 6. Experienced Teachers Enhancement of Social Skills

The above figure represents the variable rates of experienced teachers' enhancement of social strategies in their EFL classrooms. The evidence from the pie chart indicates that (45%) of teachers' said they have (rare attempts to promote social skills ; against (11%) who said they do not have any attempt to enhance social strategies still, their efforts remain low as compared to their continual (22%) attempt to promote the social skills.

5. Discussion

The results indicate that the English teacher in the two middle schools 'Baghdadi Benattia' and 'Ben Dehmane Belgandouz' demonstrated limited endeavours to develop pupils' academic self-regulation. Based on the observation, some of the teachers (three teachers out of four) demonstrated some unconscious efforts in promoting some skills of academic self-regulation in their classrooms. Some of these strategies used by these teachers

while teaching vocabulary or grammar can be listed. As reported earlier, in some classes, teachers used group work where pupils enjoyed learning some new vocabulary (see class observation 3). Within the same classroom, the same teacher tried to make pupils independent and involved in the process of finding new words and synonyms so that they enlarge their vocabulary repertoire. When asked about these strategies outside the classroom, that teacher reported that the use of these strategies was unconscious with no specific knowledge of academic self-regulation strategies. That teacher also reported that even if they (referring to other teacher colleagues) sometimes try to change their way of teaching, time constraints and large classes prevent them from doing so. This limited knowledge of academic self-regulation and context factors like time, explain why those teachers did not allocate time to enhance some strategies of reading (see classroom observation 1).

In this study, the experimenter tried to include both experienced and novice teachers to gain an understanding of whether the experience of teaching influences teachers' implementation of academic self-regulation strategies in their classrooms. The answers gathered from the two groups of teachers, indicated that the experience of teaching has no specific influence on teachers' endeavours to implement and foster some strategies of academic self-regulation. The result might show that the two groups of teachers followed the same teacher training programme provided by the ministry. This training focuses mainly on developing teachers' disciplinary or subject matter knowledge rather than professional skills (Ghedghoudji, 2005; Maraf, 2012). In this light, many Algerian authors emphasised the need to provide an appropriate training programme to teachers of English (Ghedghoudji, 2005; Maraf, 2012; 2016).

Furthermore, both novice and experienced teacher make use of the same strategies in their classroom to enhance autonomy. The strategy that is constantly used by these teachers is group work. Group work is considered as a challenge in the Algerian classroom because most of the time classrooms are crowded, which makes the process of teaching under such a condition difficult.

6. Conclusion

This research paper attempted to uncover Algerian middle school teachers' role in promoting academic self-regulation. Throughout the whole work, the attempt was to portray academic-self regulation as a learning system that organises pupils in a metacognitive, motivational and social fashion.

The study has established itself as a platform to reveal the potential of academic self-regulation in the Algerian middle schools to generate autonomous English language learners. The integration of academic self-regulation in Algerian middle schools is strictly required, particularly at a very young age where pupils initiate their first steps with a total understanding of how to learn. If Algerian schools decision makers take steps to promote academic self-regulation, it is expected to proffer a journey of learning that is full of control.

This research work aimed to raise awareness towards the necessity to approach ways for helping pupils to become self-regulated knowledge-seekers. Many pupils might show their loss of interest if they are not guided. Hence, this research study focused on the role of teachers in guiding these pupils.

For a systematic orientation of this research, a mixed methods design was followed for yielding better results. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to collect the required data. A classroom observation and a questionnaire were the research tools used in middle schools at Sirat and Yellal in Mostaganem.

As a result, it was discovered that teachers` attempts to develop pupils` academic self-regulation skills were limited to certain strategies that they used in their classroom. These strategies included group work, the use of labels on classroom walls (see class observation2), encouraging pupils to use dictionary to look up for words (see class observation 3). This limited attempt might be linked their little knowledge of academic self-regulation and contextual constrains such as time and crowded classroom.

To sum up, academic self-regulation is viewed as an engaging academic tool that has attracted the attention of many educational researchers in the context of middle school (eg; Dembo and Eaton, 2000; Lee et al, 2014).

This view is based on its contribution towards successful and skilled life-long learners. Academic self-regulation manufactures flexible learners who are ready to take charge of further learning experiences. For that reason, considerations should be given to developing and training Algerian EFL teachers with the professional skills necessary to produce autonomous learners.

Recommendations

For future work, it would be interesting to conduct further research attempting to understand how English language teachers are trained in Algeria. On a cautionary note, it is also important to explore how the graduates in English are trained during their master's degree and assess the content provided to them. It has been reported that the graduate of English students studying under the LMD system (The bachelor's master's doctorate system) have more chances of specialized training (Sarnou, et al, 2012).Therefore, exploring this period of training and what it consists of is of paramount importance to inform stakeholders and higher education programme designer about the need to provide an appropriate training programme for these students.

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