Evaluating Foreign Language Teachers' Self-regulation Learning Promotion and Students' Views on SRL in Writing Instruction

[1] AYÇA DİNÇER & [2]MERAL ŞEKER

[1] Çukurova University, Adana, Turkey / Contact: adincer@cu.edu.tr

[2] Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University, Antalya, Turkey / Contact: meral.seker@alanya.edu.tr

Abstract

Developing self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies has been emphasized to be crucial for effective writing skills in second language learning contexts. However, implementing SRL skills and guiding learners to become self-regulated individuals requires special consideration by teachers and program developers. In addition, language learners should also take the responsibility of their own learning through the use of strategies employed by their teachers in order to be competent in the target language. Since integrating SRL in writing instruction is a rather complex process, teachers should internalize and integrate them in their teaching efficiently and enable students to be aware of their learning process, plan how to proceed, monitor their own performance and take their following action upon the tasks. In this respect, the study aims to determine whether language teachers promote SRL in their writing course instruction and if they do, what kind of methods they use is the other issue that will be explored. The study also seeks to reveal language learners' views on SRL in their writing classes in order to indicate both teachers' and students' perspectives on SRL. The data was gathered via Teaching and Learning Strategies Questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with English Language teachers and students at a state university. The results reveal that students reported use of goal setting, metacognitive knowledge activation, task value activation, and time management strategies are at moderate levels. It has also been found that teachers implement those strategies at low to moderate levels with limited number of methods and tasks utilized to guide learners. The findings are meant to emphasize the need for higher levels of SRL instruction in second language writing to promote autonomous learners.

Keywords

Self-regulation, writing, metacognitive knowledge, goal setting

Introduction

Although there is a rich bulk of writing resources and so many efforts to apply them, second language learners still face difficulties in writing and struggle to become

efficient in writing. In general, language learners try to comply with a pre-defined framework including content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, style and other discourse functions in writing instruction process. Facing various impediments, language learners need teachers' assistance, guidance, and feedback. Likewise, second language teachers confront various problems in teaching writing skills to students. Research in the writing literature shows that cognitive and motivational variables play a significant role in acquiring those skills (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). One of the most important cognitive and motivational variables in writing is self-regulation. Self-regulation refers to self-generated thoughts, feelings and actions that are systematically designed to affect one's learning of knowledge and skills (Zimmerman, 2000). When learners can effectively operate SRL strategies in their learning, they can plan their learning; set realistic goals; maintain motivation; become active; manage the necessary cognitive and metacognitive processes; and evaluate their learning outcomes (Andrade & Bunker, 2009; Nicol, 2009; Oxford, 2011; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008). The process of equipping learners with self-regulatory skills in writing instruction, however, is complex and multi-layered. For a learner to become an efficient user of self-regulated strategies, he or she needs to acquire the necessary cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies and skills in an appropriate learning context. Such a learning environment requires both teachers and the other learning elements (e.g., learning materials, physical infrastructure, learning tasks, evaluation procedures, etc.) to be suitable and encouraging for teachers to implement and model and for learners to learn and internalize SRL strategies (Beishuizen & Steffens, 2011; Rasekh & Ranjbary, 2003). In this respect, the present study aims to find out whether language teachers promote SRL in writing instruction, and if they do, what kind of tasks, activities, or methods they utilize to accomplish such implementation in their foreign language classes. As a second focus, the study also examines language learners' views on SRL in their writing course instruction and the level of their SRL use.

Literature Review

For second language learners, writing is a highly complex process where learners try to comply with a pre-determined framework of writing tasks while trying to make meaning for themselves as well as to learn how to think and communicate in

particular domains (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1988; Herrington, 1985). During this process, language learners face various impediments and need teachers' assistance, guidance, and feedback on the way to develop effective writing skills in their second language. However, students need to be aware of, know about and activate self-regulation strategies because it is mostly not possible for a language teacher to teach a foreign language fully to her/his students for various reasons. These reasons are stated as the dynamic nature of language, the requirement of much time for writing processes, different learner objectives and individual differences in learning (Shirkhani & Ghaemi, 2011). The reasons mentioned require language learners' efforts to manage their own learning. Thus, language learners could regulate their own learning.

From teachers' perspective, teaching writing is also a complex process. Teachers need to consider and control various factors such as teaching techniques (i.e., adopting teaching methods that will enable their students to plan and organize their own learning), identifying and promoting the necessary learning strategies, evaluating and adapting the selected learning strategies to learning objectives. However, teachers are not often able to reflect or apply the aimed knowledge and the skills in classroom contexts (Admiraal, Kothagen, & Wubbels, 2000). In response to this problem, teachers are suggested to create SRL opportunities throughout their instruction since they have been reported to foster students' deep and meaningful learning, which can be transferred to their academic achievement in general (Nam & Leavell, 2011; Randi & Corno, 2000).

Zimmerman (2000) defines SRL strategies as self-generated thoughts, feelings and actions that are systematically designed to affect one's learning of knowledge and skills. The most important aspect of SRL is enabling learners to monitor, control and regulate their own cognitive actions, which are often referred to as metacognition (Randi & Corno, 2000). In line with this, by using such metacognitive skills, teachers can become aware of and monitor their students' progress towards their goals. Thus, teachers can enhance their students' language improvement and comprehension.

The role of language teachers is considered crucial in promoting SRL strategies since a systematic and contingent interaction between the students and the teacher is needed to effectively equip learners with SRL (Cohen, 2003; Nunan, 1997; Oxford,

2001; Pintrich, 2000). However, studies reveal that teachers rarely integrate SRL instruction in traditional classroom settings whereas tutors of individuals or small groups of students use it more widely (Weaver & Cohen, 1994). Carneiro and Veigo Simao (2011) state that teachers should acquire training about SRL instruction to assist learners to develop and apply them into other cross-curricular academic subjects. On the other hand, developing self-regulation skills brings learners an awareness of the language process and strategies that enable them to succeed in the target language. In line with this, Zhang and Goh (2006) state that language learners will understand their own thinking and learning process and accordingly oversee the choice and applications of learning strategies, plan how to proceed with a learning task and monitor their own performance on an on-going basis.

As writing is a challenging productive skill to fully acquire in foreign language learning process, it requires learners to meet specific standards regarding structural, lexical, discourse, and task features (McCutchen, 2011). These features include lower-level writing skills (e.g., spelling, punctuation, sentence construction) and higher-level writing skills (e.g., textual coherence, development of relevant arguments, citations) as well (Wilson, Olinghouse, McCoach, Santangelo, & Andrada, 2016). Therefore, equipping learners with SRL strategies can help them to become more efficient and actively involved in the process of improving their writing skill in a foreign language. The study, at this point, aims to provide a preliminary research to define the level of SRL implementation by teachers and the level of reported use by learners. The findings may guide further studies by describing the current state and revealing the specific needs for SRL integration in foreign language instruction.

Method

The study follows an exploratory design to determine the level of self-regulated strategy promotion descriptively among second language teachers in their writing instruction and to reveal second language learners' views on SRL in their writing course instruction.

Participants

The demographic information of participant teachers is as follows:

Table 1. Participant teachers' demographic information

Age			*Teaching Experience*		*Educational Background*		
25- 35	36- 40	41- 50	1-10	11-20	B.A	M.A	PhD
25	15	10	28	22	10	25	15

The participants of the study are 50 female teachers of English aged between 25 and 50. Their work experience varies from one year to 20 years. The majority of the participating teachers hold MA degrees, yet 15 teachers have Ph.D. degrees. There was no attempt for the study to select participants who would fit pre-determined criteria in terms of demographics. The diverse demographics of the participants are meant to reflect the context more accurately and to provide more reliable results for the study.

The second group of the participants is 28 second language learners (female: 15, male: 13) who are studying English in prep-classes at a state university. The participant students' ages vary between 18- 20.

Data Collection Tools and Procedure

The data for the study was gathered from two sources: (1) *Teaching and Learning Strategies Questionnaire (TLSQ)* developed by Abrami, Aslan and Nicolaidu (2007); (2) semi-structured interviews with foreign language teachers working at a state university; and (3) foreign language students studying at the same university. The questionnaire is based on Zimmerman's (2000) research and analysis of recent literature on self-regulated learning processes and includes items directed to determine language teachers' level of self-regulation promotion in writing instruction. It has a high confidence level (Zimmerman, 2000). The items are presented in a 5 scale Likert-type design, where *always true for me* is coded in 1 and *never true for me* is coded in 5. Since it was employed to English Language teachers, the questionnaire was not translated but completed in its original version.

The questionnaire was applied to 50 teachers. In order to identify the way teachers follow to promote SRL in second language writing classes, ten of the participant

teachers were subsequently interviewed. The participant students (n=28) were also interviewed in order to find out their opinions on self-regulation in their writing course instruction. The questions in the interview were directed towards the methods, tasks and/or activities they integrate into their writing instruction to promote goal setting, metacognitive knowledge activation, task value activation, and time management strategies. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Findings

The items in the questionnaires were categorized under four sub-scales: goal setting (GS), metacognitive knowledge activation (MKA), task value activation (TVA), and time management (TM). The results of descriptive analyses are presented and discussed in this section.

Table 2. Descriptive results of the subscales in the questionnaire

Subscale	No of Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median Split
GS	9	3.14	0.70	3.27
MKA	2	3.11	0.76	3.25
TVA	2	3.02	0.83	3.00
T M	4	2.95	1.14	2.77
Total	17	3.05	1.05	3.07

The findings displayed in Table 2 reveal that teachers integrate time management and task value activation strategies moderately (M=2.95, M=3.02, respectively). Goal setting and metacognitive knowledge activation strategies are reported to be implemented less frequently (M=3.14 and 3.11, respectively). Computing the sum scores of all subscales, the Mean score (3.05) shows that the overall implementation of the strategies is very close to median split score, indicating that teachers only sometimes integrate the instruction of SRL into their teaching.

Table 3. Descriptive results of the items in the questionnaire

Scales	Statements	Mean
	9. Students describe personal learning goals for my course	2.85
	11. Students describe SMART (specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic, and time processing) learning goals for my course	3.44
	1. Students describe short-term learning goals to master their long-term personal learning goals for my course	2.88
	4. Students describe how their personal learning goals and the learning goals of my course are harmonized	3.25

GS (Median Split = 3.27)	14. Students determine which learning activities they attend to master the learning goals for my course	3.31
	16. Students describe how their learning activities contribute to mastering the learning goals for my course	3.01
	6. Students describe SMART (specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic, and time processing) learning activities for my course	3.37
	3. The learning environment describes how my course can support students in their development	3.22
	12. The learning environment describes the learning goals for my course	2.96
MK A (Median Split = 3.25)	5. Student divide big assignments into smaller parts for my course	3.09
	15. The learning environment describes how students can divide big assignments into smaller parts for my course	3.12
TVA (Median Split = 3.00)	2. Students describe the value of their learning goals for my course towards classroom practice	2.88
	8. The learning environment describes the importance of the learning goals for my course Towards classroom practice	3.16
	7. Students make a time plan to master the learning goals for my course	2.77
TM (Median Split = 2.77)	17. The learning environment/manual describes when the assignments for my course have to be finished	3.01
	13. The learning environment describes how much time students need in general to accomplish the assignments for my course	3.24
	10. The learning environment describes the subject matter that has to be studied for my course	2.77

Item-by-item descriptive results show that the implementation frequency of each item under the same sub-scale varies. In goal setting category, for instance, having students to describe their personal goals (Item 9) has the highest frequency (M=2.85) followed by describing short-term learning goals to master long-term personal learning goals. The least frequent scores are calculated for students' describing learning activities (M=3.37), determining the needed learning activities (M=3.31), and describing how students' own learning goals are harmonized with those of the course (M=3.25). The findings, however, indicate that the implementation of the strategies in this category is at moderate levels (most of the items are either just below or above Median Split score (3.27).

The results for metacognitive knowledge activation sub-scale are at similar moderate levels (both items are just under Median Split score, 3.25). The two items in task value activation subscale differ in frequency; students' describing the value of their learning goals has a higher frequency of implementation than the median split (M=2.88) whereas describing the importance of the learning goals by the electronic

learning environment scored less frequent (M=3.16). The highest frequency scores are found for two items in time management subscale for students' making time plan (M=2.77) and providing subject matters that describe the learning environment (M=2.77).

Overall results imply that teachers try to integrate these strategies mostly only sometimes (11 items in total scored higher frequency than the Median split scores), or seldom (6 items scored less frequency than the Median split scores). None of the sub-scales or items in the questionnaire received very high frequencies.

Teachers' responses to the interview questions were analyzed following the grounded theory method (Stern, 1994), where participants' opinions were first elicited, and then the emergent themes were grouped to form categories based on the data collected. The categorization of the responses is displayed in Table 4.

Table 4. Activities and tasks for SRL

Strategy Subscale	Method/Task/Activity	%
Goal Setting	Encouraging them to make plans/outlines before starting to write	90
	Providing them with examples of goals/plans/models	80
	Asking questions about their learning goals	50
	Leading them to reflect on the purposes of writing activities	30
	Explaining the importance of improving their writing skills	30
Metacognitive Knowledge Activation	Encouraging them to learn by giving them examples/asking questions	100
	Providing them clues/leads to achieve their task goals	60
	Encouraging them to ask assistance from their peers	10
	Encouraging them to use other sources (e.g. internet, reference books, etc.)	10
Task Value Activation	none	100
Time Management	Assigning the tasks to be completed in a specific time period	100
	Explaining the importance of time management	10

The results of the interviews with participant teachers revealed that teachers try to implement mostly goal setting strategies to improve self-regulation skills. All of the participant teachers claimed to be using some tasks or activities to encourage their students to set learning goals. Similarly, they all suggested being integrating

metacognitive strategy instruction into their teaching, though fewer tasks and activities emerged for this purpose. Time management strategies were also included in teachers' classroom activities and tasks. However, none of the teachers stated that they used any tasks or activities directed toward encouraging students to use strategies for task value activation. However, none of the teachers stated that they used any tasks or activities directed toward encouraging students to use strategies for task value activation. The most frequent reason mentioned by them was learners' inability or reluctance to synthesize the value of the tasks and see their relevance to their learning goals. The most frequent reason mentioned by them was learners' inability or reluctance to synthesize the value of the tasks and see their relevance to their learning goals.

Based on the grounded theory method (Abrami & Aslan, 2007), the students' responses were analyzed by eliciting their opinions about self-regulation skills depending on their classroom experience. Then, the themes emerged in their interviews were categorized. The categorization of the responses is illustrated in Table 5.

The results of the student interviews revealed that most of the students believe that their teachers describe the goals and the context of the tasks (96 %). However, most of the participant teachers were claimed not to present some tasks or activities to encourage their students to set learning goals, only 35 % of the students state that their teachers motivate them to set goals through activities. Some of the students (14 %) state that their teachers explain the importance of improving their writing skills and how to transfer these skills to their career in the future. Giving strategies to write tasks and leading students how to start tasks are the two other elicited ideas from the students 'interviews, which were come across relatively less (4 %). The findings regarding metacognitive knowledge activation indicated that only 25 % of the students think that their teachers encourage them to learn by providing them some examples. Of the participants, 21 % of the students state that their teachers lead them to use other sources of information, such as the internet, reference books, and course handouts. The teachers were claimed to provide clues to achieve task goals at a very small percentage (11 %). Few students claimed that the teachers encouraged the students to ask assistance from peers by very few students (4 %) and few students stated that their teachers provide the answers directly without giving clues or giving

opportunities to make inferences (11%). Regarding task value activation, it is interesting that while 39 % of the students claim that their teachers describe the value of the learning goals, other 39 % of the students' state that their teachers do not describe the learning goals for their course. Lastly, the students stated relatively less frequently than their teachers describe the value of learning goals towards future life (21 %). For time management, all of the students claimed that their teachers explain the importance of the time management (100 %). Similarly, most of the students are of the same opinion about their teachers' assigning the tasks to be completed in a specific period (89 %). However, few students mentioned that the teachers do not assign their tasks to be completed in a specific period.

Table 5. Student responses for activities and tasks for SRL

Strategy Subscale	Method/Task/Activity	%
Goal Setting	Explain the goal and the context of the task	96
	Provide examples of goals/plans/models	35
	Explain the importance of improving our writing skills and how we can activate them in our lives	14
	Gives strategies/tactics to write tasks	4
	Shows how to start the tasks	4
Metacognitive Knowledge Activation	Encourage us to learn by giving examples/asking questions	25
	Encourage us to use other sources (e.g. internet, reference books, etc.)	21
	Provide us clues/ leads us to achieve task goals	11
	Provide us the direct answers	11
	Encourage us to ask assistance from our peers	4
Task Value Activation	Describe the value of our learning goals for our course towards classroom practice	39
	Do not describe the value of our learning goals	39
	Describe the value of our learning goals for our course towards our business life and other contexts	21
Time Management	Assign the tasks to be completed in a specific time period	89
	Explain the importance of time management	100
	Do not assign the tasks to be completed in a specific time period	11

Conclusion

The findings of the study reveal that language teachers' level of self-regulation implementation is at low to moderate levels at planning and metacognitive levels. The

findings also show that teachers include relatively few varieties of activities and tasks to encourage their learners to improve self-regulation skills. However, it is well reported that SRL instruction can yield in higher achievement levels among higher education students and enable them to sustain life-long learning in their professional life after formal education (Andrade & Bunker, 2009; Andrade & Evans, 2013; Schunk & Ertmer, 2000).

The findings regarding the students' opinions on SRL in their classroom contexts indicate that most of the students think that the teachers describe the goals of the tasks; their teachers assign writing tasks to be completed in a specific period. However, while the students are claiming that the teachers explain the goals of the tasks, they also state that their teachers do not provide examples of goals much. This contradiction may due to the students' inability to synthesize the goals and the tasks. Another interesting result is the difference between the teachers' and the students' ideas about task value activation. While all the teachers stated that they do not use any tasks or activities directed toward encouraging students to use strategies, some of the students claimed that teachers explain the value of learning goals for their course towards classroom practice. Furthermore, some of the students added that teachers describe the value of learning goals towards their future lives.

Recent research has been increasingly revealing the importance of developing self-regulated language strategies in foreign language learning (Andrade & Bunker, 2009; Andrade & Evans, 2013; Nam & Leavell, 2011; Oxford, 2011; Randi & Corno, 2000, Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008, etc.). However, the integration of SRL in Turkish foreign language teaching context has yet to be accomplished. The findings, in this respect, are meant to emphasize the need for higher levels of self-regulation instruction in second language writing classes to promote self-regulated autonomous language learners. In fact, self-regulated learning skills should not only be incorporated into syllabuses but need to be given a place in pre-service and in-service teaching programs to maximize the efficiency of teaching and learning foreign languages.

Notes on the contributor

Ayça Dinçer (Ph.D.) is an English Language Instructor at School of Foreign Languages, Cukurova university

Meral Şeker (Ph.D.) is an English Language Instructor at Faculty of Education, Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University

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