Developing Aural and Oral Skills of Beginner Learners of English as a Foreign Language Through Explicit Metacognitive Strategies Training

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Abstract

Learners of foreign languages from different levels of education need to be active agents of their learning process. They need to develop strategic competence to become proficient learners and users of the foreign language. One way to foster this active and strategic role is to instruct learners in the use of Metacognitive Strategies. This work of research studied the effect of Metacognitive Strategies training on students' aural and oral skills. Forty-two seventh graders from a public institution participated in a six-workshop training cycle on strategies for planning, monitoring and evaluating learning tasks, following the model of the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach- CALLA (preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation and expansion). The findings showed that Metacognitive Strategies positively impacted students' aural and oral skills, favored their vocabulary repertoire, produced a favorable change in their attitudes towards listening and speaking, and raised their feeling of success and self-efficacy. This implies that Metacognitive Strategies should be incorporated into the regular language class to help students become more self-regulated learners.

Key words: Aural skills, effective instruction, Metacognitive awareness, Metacognitive Strategies, self-directed learning, self-regulated learning, oral skills.

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Desarrollo de las habilidades de escucha y habla en aprendices principiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera mediante el entrenamiento explícito de Estrategias Metacognitivas

Resumen

Los estudiantes de lenguas extranjeras de cualquier nivel de escolaridad deben ser agentes activos en su aprendizaje y desarrollar su competencia estratégica para ser aprendices y hablantes competentes del idioma que aprenden, en este caso, inglés. Éste estudio investigó el efecto del entrenamiento de Estrategias Metacognitivas para planear, monitorear y evaluar en la habilidad oral y auditiva de un grupo de 42 estudiantes de nivel principiante de un colegio público quienes recibieron un ciclo de seis talleres de entrenamiento explícito de dichas estrategias, siguiendo las fases del enfoque CALLA (preparación, presentación, práctica, evaluación y expansión). Los resultados evidenciaron que dichas estrategias impactaron positivamente las habilidades de escucha y producción oral, favoreciendo el aprendizaje de nuevo vocabulario, mejorando las actitudes hacia las habilidades de habla y escucha, así como los sentimientos de éxito en el aprendizaje. Lo anterior implica que la instrucción directa de Estrategias Metacognitivas debe ser incorporada a las clases regulares de inglés para ayudar a los estudiantes a ser más auto-regulados.

Palabras claves: Aprendizaje auto-regulado, Conciencia Metacognitiva, Estrategias Metacognitivas, Habilidad auditiva, Habilidad oral, Instrucción efectiva.

Introduction

Certainly, a main concern for teachers and learners of foreign languages is to become independent proficient users of the language being learnt. Therefore, this independent proficiency level demands from learners the ability to understand the incoming idea from an aural message and the ability to react by producing an understandable oral message. In this regard, O'Malley and Valdez (1996) state that "part of being a proficient speaker is listening to oral language and understanding what is said" (p. 58). Additionally, Murphy (1991, cited in O'Malley & Valdez 1996) claims that listening and speaking are interdependent oral language processes that need to be taught and assessed in an integrated manner. Furthermore, listening

exercises provide teachers with the means for drawing learners' attention to new forms (vocabulary, grammar, and new interaction patterns) in the language (Bozorgian, 2012). Accordingly, teachers and instructors make use of many and diverse approaches for developing and fostering these "closely intertwined" skills (Brown, 1994). Some of these approaches address the learner as a passive actor in his or her learning process while others claim for a more active, conscious and autonomous role of the learner.

From a historical perspective, the close relationship between these two skills has been neglected by some approaches and highly estimated by others. For instance, the grammar translation method demanded from learners their ability to translate written texts from their mother tongue to the foreign language; the main focus was the explanation of grammar rules (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). As a reaction, the direct method highly emphasized oral communication where accuracy in pronunciation played an essential role from the beginning of the instruction. Another oral-based approach followed the timeline, the audio-lingual method, which demanded from students "to learn to answer automatically without stopping to think" (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011, p. 43). Therefore, its main aim was accuracy rather than fluency (Ur, 2013) and learners had to acquire the structural patterns of the language since vocabulary would be learned afterwards.

The plethora of approaches aiming at developing language skills continued with Total Physical Response, which maintained that meaning in the target language could be conveyed through actions. Based on James Asher's research in the 1960s, this approach allocated a great importance to listening comprehension inasmuch as "after the learner internalizes an extensive map of how the target language works, speaking will appear spontaneously" (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011, p. 103). Finally, a more learner-centered approach, which not only favored the close relationship between listening and speaking but among the four skills, appeared: the Communicative Language Approach. It "was based on the assumption that language is for communication and that we learn it best through naturalistic acquisition processes" (Ur, 2013, p. 8). Aural and oral skills are at the basis of human communication and as such they have been addressed by many language teaching and learning approaches throughout history.

Studies in the field of foreign languages in Colombia have approached in different manners these essential skills. Few have researched these skills in their interdependent

nature, and even fewer have claimed for the conscious strategic training and a subsequent strategic investment of learners in their learning process of both skills. Therefore, there is a need for a deeper understanding of how students' conscious and active role as well as their strategic investment fosters their aural and oral skills.

A line of research and action regarding the active learner's role aims attention at Metacognitive Strategies (MS) and their decisive impact on students' aural comprehension and oral production, enhancing the efficiency and efficacy of foreign language instruction (Chamot et al, 1993; Cohen, 1996; Rashtchi and Khani, 2010; Coşkun 2010; Bozorgian, 2012; Rahimirad 2014, Colaric, 2017.) Particularly, studies have shown that MS instruction has a decisive impact in students' vocabulary repertoire (Díaz, 2015, Trujillo, et al, 2015), reading comprehension (Albazi and Shukri, 2016), writing ability (Nemat and Rajaee, 2016), listening performance (Rahimirad, 2014), and oral performance (Lam, 2010, Handayani and Aisah, 2013).

Metacognitive Strategies are, according to Chamot (2005), executive processes used in planning for learning, monitoring one's own comprehension, production, and evaluating how well one has achieved a learning objective. These processes help learners to control their thinking and learning. They involve observable judgments, analyses and/ or regulations operated by learners in their own performance. Besides, these processes take place before, during and after learners' performance including three essential skills:

Planning refers to the selection of appropriate strategies and the allocation of resources that affect performance while coordinating a cognitive means to a cognitive goal. Using prior knowledge, setting realistic listening goals, drawing a mental or written map of the main ideas to say are instances of planning.

Monitoring comprises the individual's ability to self-testing while performing a task. It is the on-line awareness of comprehension that allows the individual to evaluate and control his or her learning. Constantly checking understanding of incoming information along with the revision of the effectiveness of the message delivered account for this strategy.

Evaluation refers to appraising the products and regulatory processes of one's own learning. According to Stanchina and Holec (cited in Wenden, 1998), evaluation is a form of self-assessment whereby learners judge their achievement against their own criteria, in accordance to their own learning objectives and learning expectations.

More successful language learners use these skills almost in an unconscious way. They make part of their learning repertoire. However, less successful language learners do not dispose of these MS, and they deprive from their benefits. Consequently, these less successful learners need to be trained in the understanding and correct use of these strategies. Exposing students to explicit training in the execution of MS allocating sufficient time for training enhances students' understanding of how to implement MS effectively. According to students' language level, this instruction can be made using the learners' first language. In order to gain consciousness about the strategies, students need to be given the names of each strategy and the specific procedures each strategy demand.

Explicitly describing, discussing, and reinforcing MS in the classroom, raising the level of students' conscious awareness have a positive effect on their language learning process and outcomes. Learners learn, not only the name of the strategies, but also how and when to use them and how and when to abandon certain strategy.

Being metacognitive active in the process of learning in general and language learning in particular demands time and effort investment from both teachers and learners. Therefore, Mahdavi's (2014) assertion "learning how to be mindful and manager of one's own learning is not inherited, nor does it happen naturally and overnight, yet it necessitates specific instruction of basic metacognitive skills and strategies" (p. 530) highly supports the need for metacognitive instruction as an indispensable approach to language education as long as more proficient language learners are more metacognitive than less proficient language learners. Preserving the explicit and overt nature of the strategy training better enables students to consciously transfer specific strategies to new contexts. Through the constant and conscious use of the cycle of planning, monitoring and evaluation, students take responsibility of their own learning process achieving better learning outcomes.

Hence, this study attempted to answer the following research questions: To what extent do Metacognitive Strategies for planning, monitoring, and evaluating favor the aural and oral skills of seventh grade students? How does Metacognitive Strategies instruction impact students' vocabulary repertoire? What is the effect of Metacognitive Strategies on students' attitudes towards listening and speaking?

This paper exposes the materials used during the action research followed by the methodology section that includes the type of study, describes the participants and

the procedure adopted to develop said research. Results followed by the discussion are also presented. Finally, conclusions and pedagogical implications end the paper.

Materials

Five different instruments and techniques were used to collect data. These instruments were piloted before the formal intervention started.

The researcher's diary contained the observations about the class moves, the students´ overall performance regarding attitudes, learning strategies, and language skills used in the English class. This diary was constantly fed throughout the three stages of the research, namely diagnostic, action, and evaluation.

Survey: two different surveys were completed by the participants. The first was students' survey where they reported their perceptions towards learning English, the English class, and their performance in the class (see appendix A). The second was a survey for English teachers where they noted down their impressions about the English teaching and learning process, as well as the school and students' needs and interests (see appendix B).

Interview: two coordinators from the school answered an interview which inquired their views about the school's needs regarding the English language learning process. The two interviews were transcribed verbatim (see appendix C)

Rubrics: there were two different rubrics. Students completed a self-evaluation rubric where they recorded their views and perceptions about their progress and effectiveness regarding their aural and oral skills, as well as their metacognitive awareness (see appendix D). A peer observer rubric, where a teacher documented her views towards the teaching and learning process inside the class under the instruction of MS (see appendix E). Furthermore, an oral performance rubric to assess students' oral performance was completed (see appendix F)

Language test: students completed the Cambridge English Young Learners Tests (YLE) in the diagnostic stage to evidence their actual language proficiency level. At the end of the intervention, they completed a second version of the test to measure their language level regarding aural and oral skills after the instruction of MS.

These instruments offered a wide view about the dynamics held in the classes before, during and after the development of the study.

Method

Type of Study

This qualitative study was framed under the principles of action research defined by Nunan (1992) as being first and foremost situational, concerned with the identification and solution of problems in a specific context whose aim is to improve the current state of affairs within the educational context in which the research is being carried out. I was interested in finding a solution oriented to helping students to effectively process aural language and produce understandable oral language. The need for developing effective learning strategies was also an objective of the study. In order to improve the current state of affairs, this research was conducted following the phases of the educational Action Research proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (as cited in Burns, 2001). These authors highlight a dynamic and complementary process that consists of four fundamental moments: planning, action, observation and reflection.

Participants

A sample of 42 seventh-grade students of a public institution in Jamundí- Valle, Colombia participated in this research. Their ages ranged from 11 to 15. The total sample consisted of 13 female and 29 male students. At the end of the implementation a student dropped out the school. Eight students were repeating seventh grade and ten of the remaining students had repeated the previous school year. Students from this class displayed discipline and academic difficulties in many school subjects. Students did not receive English classes in elementary school. In sixth grade they received two periods of class of 55 minutes each. In seventh grade, they received three periods of class. With some minor differences, the participants of this study presented a homogenous language level. According to a language elicitation measure carried out in the diagnostic stage, they were ranked in beginner level according to the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001).

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Procedure

This action research was developed in three stages. The first one related to the diagnosis where six instruments were employed to collect data: students' and a teachers' survey, a coordinator's interview, a journal, a language proficiency tests, and an observation rubric from a teacher observer. In order to analyze the findings from the data collection instruments, I scanned them in a general way, taking notes during the initial examination. Then, I started coding data, trying to identify more specific patterns in each one of the instruments, and some codes and categories were developed. After that, the data were compared in order to see which patterns or codes developed or emerged across the different gathering techniques. The categories were established grounded in the data analysis.

At this point, a triangulation was carried out by assigning colors (pawing according to Ryan & Russell, 2003) to the categories presented in all the instruments used. Data was described in terms of frequencies and percentages that were manually systematized and displayed in charts where the occurrences were more easily compared. After carrying out the triangulation of these instruments, data analysis revealed that the main concern among the views was students' need to understand aural input and to produce oral output, hindered by students' lack of vocabulary. Another relevant category reported students' urgent need to develop strategies that enabled them to be effective and efficient language learners.

The second stage connected to the action or intervention. The treatment for the problems found in the diagnostic stage consisted of applying six workshops over a period of three months. The workshops followed the five-phase model of the CALLA approach (Chamot and O'Malley, 1990) for metacognitive training where students received direct instruction in MS for planning, monitoring, and evaluating aural and oral tasks along with listening and oral strategies. In the **preparation** phase, I reviewed the students' previous knowledge, if any, of the cognitive competence (lexis, grammar, phonetics) and strategies used to approach these two abilities. In the **presentation,** I modeled and explained the new MS for planning, monitoring and evaluation to use when facing an aural or oral endeavor. I told the students the name of the strategy, its usefulness and the specific behaviors or actions they were supposed to perform to apply the strategy. This corresponded to the explicit training of the strategy. In the third phase, students had to **practice** what I had modeled and explained. They rehearsed the new strategy in authentic aural and oral tasks.

The fourth phase, **evaluation,** was also learner-centered. Students checked the level of their performance in order to revise what they had learned and what they needed to review in terms of identifying and using the lexis, grammar, pronunciation corresponding to each workshop, as well as their accurate and fluent use of those aspects in an oral speech. In this phase students completed a self-evaluation rubric including language and metacognitive knowledge. The fifth phase, called **expansion** students articulated and integrated the aural and oral skills and applied the newly gained metacognitive strategic and language knowledge for producing an oral message.

Each workshop involved three components matching three different competences, namely *cognitive competence* in which students received content explanation and interacted with different linguistic aspects such as grammar and vocabulary exercises as well as reading and writing activities related to the language functions developed in each workshop; *metacognitive competence* in which I presented the MS for listening and speaking following the five phases previously described; and *communicative competence* in which students expanded the new metacognitive and language knowledge gained in the training cycle applying it in the production of oral messages. It was in this moment when students applied the MS of planning, monitoring and evaluating previously learnt to cope with an oral output talking about the topics of each workshop (see appendix G).

Finally, the third phase consisted of analyzing and contrasting the data collected in the workshops and I followed up during the six workshops each category resulting in the diagnostic and action stages in order to document, on the one hand, the progressive improvement in the areas identified as difficult and, on the other hand, the reduction of negative aspects. Furthermore, I used a final language test to confirm students' progress regarding their aural and oral skills.

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Results

In order to yield results from this research, Figure 1 contrasts the evolution of each category throughout the six workshops.

Categories in the evaluation stage

Categories	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Totals
Workshop 1	14	18	17	29	26	0	41	84	90	36	68	423
Workshop 2	49	34	59	88	48	36	75	90	95	47	53	674
Workshop 3	77	53	65	78	52	50	81	85	86	44	46	717
Workshop 4	80	67	77	75	59	44	65	69	72	41	43	692
Workshop 5	110	94	94	84	83	54	58	51	54	43	40	765
Workshop 6	131	124	103	94	92	70	56	41	40	36	36	823
	462	392	418	452	365	260	383	428	446	257	297	4160

Figure 1. Categories in the evaluation stage
Note: Bars display the progression of each category among the six workshops. The chart below the bars indicates the frequencies of each category in each workshop.
Source: author's own creation.

It can be noticed from Figure 1 that positive categories during the implementation stage became better workshop after workshop. For instance, effective oral performance increased in 117 occurrences going from 14, representing 3.3% in workshop one to 131 representing 16.0% in workshop six. Consequently, it was the category that indicated the highest improvement throughout the intervention program. Likewise, the frequencies of the category effective listening performance increased from one workshop to another. Figure 1 exposes that this category grew

from 18 frequencies which represented 4.2% in workshop one to 15.0% in the last workshop. All over the implementation stage students were gaining important input that allowed them to address aural and oral endeavors in a more effective and efficient way. Likewise, feelings of success and self-efficacy was a category that evidenced a progressive growth. This category went from 17 to 103 occurrences facilitating students' participation in a more relaxed and active way during the classes.

Accordingly, findings of this study followed three lines: students' awareness regarding the demands of aural and oral tasks, gains in feelings of success and self-efficacy, and students' vocabulary expansion, all of them mediated by students' metacognitive strategic investment.

Oral performance enhancement

Chart 1. Comparative Oral Performance Assessment
in the Diagnostic and Evaluation Stage.

Oral performance assessment in the Evaluation Stage			
Qualitative scale and scores	Excellent performance 4.0-5.0	Fair performance 3.0-3.9	Poor performance 1.0-2.9
Descriptors	Good oral performance and excellent and skillful use of vocabulary, tenses and expressions applying pronunciation rules studied in class consistently at the segmental and suprasegmental level according to the proficiency level allowing perfect understanding.	Average oral performance and appropriate use of vocabulary, tenses and expressions evidencing average pronunciation with some interference from L1 allowing understanding.	Little oral performance evidencing inappropriate use of vocabulary, tenses, expressions with pronunciation issues and inadequate pauses that impede understanding
Number of students per score in diagnostic stage speaking test out of 42	4 9.5%	3 7.2%	35 83%
Number of students per score in evaluation stage speaking test out of 41	19 46%	17 42%	5 12%

Note: The numbers displayed in the chart describe the percentage of students in each language level comparing the diagnostic stage and the evaluation stage.
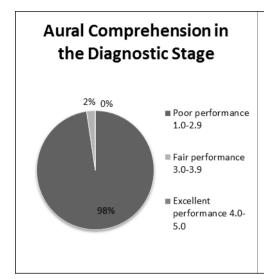Source: author's own creation.

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The implementation of MS along with oral communication strategies reported improvement in students' oral skill. Chart 1 shows that the number of students settled in the poor performance level diminished in a 71% in the evaluation stage compared with the diagnostic stage. In the diagnostic stage 35 students were settled in poor performance, meanwhile in the evaluation stage the number decreased to 5 students. In an inversely proportional relation, the number of students in fair and excellent performance increased after the implementation of MS. In the diagnostic stage 3 students were in the fair performance level, and after the implementation 14 students moved to that level for a total of 17 students. Simmilarly, the number of students in the excellent performance level evidenced a growth since 15 students moved to that level summing up a total of 19. Additionally, students showed more fluent and accurate oral performance. This result is aligned with Ghapanchi's (2012) suggestion that oral proficiency improved as a result of a significant change in the level of strategy awareness and perceived use after metacognitive instruction.
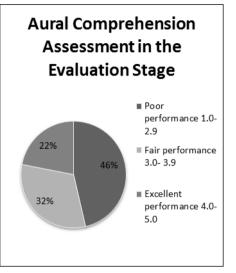
This excerpt from students' self-evaluation in the final workshop testifies this improvement (answers were originally given in Spanish): *The truth is that I didn't like to speak English, because I did not know anything and I forgot everything. I preferred to receive a 1.0 as a grade. Now, I know about planning and I rehearsed better. And, after all those times we have done oral presentations, I do it better, not perfect but better and I do not sound like a robot."*

Nevertheless, as seen in Chart 1, not all the students had an overall improvement regarding the oral skill as five students were still in the Poor performance level.

Aural comprehension improvement

The students who profited from the intervention were able to make and confirm predictions, take notes, identify the general ideal as well as specific details and word patterns. Graph 1 displays students' aural skill results. It contrasts the results in the diagnostic to those obtained after the cycle of intervention in the evaluation stage. Results were grouped into three categories: poor performance which relates to students having grades under 3.0 the minimum passing grade in the school; fair performance, students with grades among 3.0 and 3.9, the medium performance, and excellent performance, students from grade 4.0 and above which indicates a high and superior performance.

Graph 1. Aural skill performance in the diagnostic and evaluation stage.
Note: The numbers display the comparative results obtained by students in
the aural assessment in the diagnostic and evaluation stage.
Source: author's own creation.

Graph 1 shows that 98% of the students had grades under 2.9 so they did not achieve the minimum passing grade. Likewise, only 2% of the students were in Fair performance and any student was in the Excellent Performance. Contrasted to the results of the evaluation stage, although not all the students reached a Fair or Excellent performance, in fact almost half of the population was still in Poor performance, an improvement can be claimed. As 52% of the students could use the strategies they were learning, they were able to leave the Poor Performance level.

Moreover, contrasting the aural comprehension results in the diagnostic stage with those of the evaluation stage, the percentage of students in Poor Level diminished from 98% to 46% supported by an increase in the percentages of Fair Performance Level, which passed from 2% to 32%. There were no students in the Excellent Performance Level, however, in the evaluation stage, 22% of the students could achieve that level. This agrees with Rahimi and Birjandi (2012) who state that strategy instruction has a positive effect on the listening performance of the students. It raises the metacognitive knowledge of students and results in improved performance.

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Notwithstanding these positive effects, regarding the aural skill, good results did not reach the majority of the population as 42% of the students still remained in the Poor Performance level. More research needs to be done in order to clarify the reasons underlying this condition.

Gains in feelings of success and self-efficacy

While students were improving in their ability to understand an aural message and were able to deliver an understandable oral message in English, they were able to recognize their value and success as language learners feeling more motivated and engaged in the aural and oral endeavors. These comments from students testified this gain: "*I know that I do my activities better now. I understand more things when I listen and I can speak in English.*" And "*now I am not as nervous as I was before when I had to make dialogues or presentations.*" This was possible since students were able to plan consciously before the activities; they could predict in advance where or what they had to pay more attention to. Furthermore, as they were actively monitoring their aural understanding and their oral production they felt empowered to self-correct themselves on the ongoing process. They also felt successful when they could ask clarifying questions and actually they were able to answer them. Besides, being able to self-evaluate their understanding and their oral production, they became aware of the aspects they needed to improve or change in future learning experiences.

Listening for acquisition

Findings from this study offered a deeper value for listening as a means for acquiring the foreign language. Listening has been treated as mainly comprehension, but in this research students evidenced their growing ability to notice, and consequently, learning salient information in the aural input such as vocabulary, pronunciation patterns, and cultural information. As students incorporated the newly noticed information into their oral performance, they went beyond understanding and achieved acquisition. This comment from a student proved this finding "I used some words of the video to make my presentation. And when I was doing it, I remembered how the man said a word and I said it too."

Vocabulary expansion

On the one hand, vocabulary expansion occurred when students, unlike their scarce vocabulary before the intervention, where they only heard a chain of sounds, were able to notice salient, vocabulary items within the spoken chain in the aural message. The subsequent, almost immediate use of that vocabulary in their oral performance indicated that students transformed that input into 'intake' (Richards, 2005), as the first step for acquiring the new language, accounting for what Richards (2005) claimed as 'listening for acquisition'. Most students evidenced this way of vocabulary expansion when, due to the expansion phase, they performed their oral task, monitoring the use of the newly learned vocabulary and expressions.

On the other hand, students expanded their vocabulary when they performed a 'delayed imitation' of a pattern they had previously encountered, leading thus to internalization (Meltzoff, as cited in Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). Most students displayed this kind of vocabulary expansion when they were able to later retrieve and monitor the use of words and expressions from early workshops in their oral performance to the last workshops and in the evaluation stage.

Metacognitive Strategies Awareness

Most students understood that planning is an important stage before approaching an aural text or performing an oral task. Therefore, most students were able to plan effectively previous a listening task or an oral performance, by means of identifying or deciding on linguistic elements likely to use or to encounter during the task, performing advanced organization and preparation, and activating their selective attention. Likewise, most students comprehended that constant questioning the sense of an aural message or the effectiveness of their oral performance was a strategy that helped them become better learners of the foreign language. Thus, they were able to rearrange, online, the strategies they were using when they were not efficient or there were breakdowns in comprehension. Likewise, they appreciated that reflecting upon their actions and judging how well they had performed them offered students the tools to assess what they learnt or what they did not learn. Consequently, participants could make informed decisions for improvement in subsequent tasks.

Nevertheless, there were some students who did not display this MS awareness. Some of them were able to name and overtly talk about the MS of planning,

monitoring and evaluating and the actions they entailed, but they did not proceed to use them accordingly with the learning task at hand. These few students lacked awareness and subsequent orchestration of the person, task and strategy category.

Discussion

This research report aims to evidence how the instruction of MS along with listening and oral communication strategies helped students to enhance their aural and oral skills. Most learners enhanced their levels of understanding and production of aural and oral messages leading to a more effective use of both skills. Besides, most students bettered their levels of feelings of success and self-efficacy mediated by the effective and aware use of MS. Furthermore, most students expanded their vocabulary repertoire.

Within the limitations of students' level, oversized groups and few hours of class, direct MS instruction helped students to evolve in their oral speech from stuttering isolated words with a mother tongue like pronunciation (letter by letter), to delivering more complex and elaborated sentences with a wider range of vocabulary and understandable pronunciation. Furthermore, this instruction leads students to produce more fluent and connected speech accompanied by the use of compensatory strategies like repeating or paraphrasing, asking for clarification, and using formulaic expressions. Likewise, these findings are aligned to Rashtchi and Khani's (2010) research who claimed that teaching MS can provide the needed basis for speaking leading to better levels of oral proficiency. However, I expected some negative results from some students since the participants I addressed in this study faced many personal issues other than academic that affected their school life.

Considering students' language level, MS for planning, monitoring and evaluating helped students to move from simply perceiving a chain of incomprehensible sounds to actually chunk and extract meaning from that chain, identifying not only content but linking words that led them to understand the general idea as well as the specific information in the aural input. Although I expected some negative results, the high number of students who did not display significant progress in their final test surprised me since throughout the intervention students manifested having improved a lot in this skill. However, contrasting each student's individual result to their own previous performance, in spite of not meeting the minimum passing grade, students showed improvement which accounts for their positive perception towards

listening enhancement. This fact mirrors studies revealing that metacognitive strategy instruction has a positive effect on the listening performance of the students. It raises the metacognitive knowledge of students and results in improved performance (Vandergrift, 2003; Coşkun, 2010; Rahimi and Birjandi, 2012; Rahimirad, 2014).

Nevertheless, regarding the close relation among aural and oral skills in this particular study, results contradicted previous studies claiming that the higher the listening score, the better the speaking (James, 1985; Rost, 1994; Bozorgian, 2012) since for this research study, students evidenced better results in their oral production than in their aural/listening skill.

The aware use of MS helps students to develop self-knowledge and self-awareness about their motivation in language learning as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Students acquire the ability to judge and assess their behaviors when coping with aural and oral tasks allocating more effort to obtain better results each time. Students make informed decisions for further improvement. They become success-oriented learners which raises their self-worth lessening their levels of anxiety and frustration confirming Movahed's (2014) ideas who claims that the levels of foreign listening anxiety decreased at the end of the metacognitive strategy instruction. It also ratified Vandergrift's (2003) and Ismael's (2015) findings when stating that training makes learners more confident and motivated listeners.

Metacognitive Strategies also guide students towards a reflective awareness regarding the interrelatedness nature of aural and oral skills. This awareness allows students the possibility to address the aural text not only with the purpose of understanding it, but with the added value of acquiring language use and usage as well as cultural knowledge. It is possible since students become self-regulated learners who reflect upon the new input, incorporate it in their planning, check it for its use in the monitoring, and assess the correctness of its use in the evaluation. This corroborates Richards' (2005) assertion that besides approaching listening as comprehension it can be viewed as a source for language learning, emphasizing the role of listening on promoting foreign language acquisition. Most of the pronunciation improvement students did was due to students' ability to notice this aspect in the aural messages they were exposed rather than from direct explanation of pronunciation traits.

Vocabulary repertoire was the most benefited aspect from MS instruction. Although direct instruction for learning vocabulary was not at the basis of this study, this was a subsidiary beneficial result for all the students. They were not only able to acquire declarative knowledge of lexis but they moved to the procedural and conditional knowledge of it. Students in fact listened to, identified and understood the words within the spoken chain. They were also able to enlarge their repertoire going beyond a mediate memorization, stored it in long term memory and retrieved it in later learning tasks even when they were exposed to new different lexical fields in between aligned to previous studies reporting that training in MS played a role in the development and refinement of the participants' lexical learning as the average number of words (Diaz, 2015; Trujillo, Álvarez, Zamudio, and Morales, 2015).

The conscious and deliberate use of MS after explicit instruction allows students the possibility to assess the usefulness of the strategies. This positive assessment leads learners to incorporate and constantly use them in their language learning endeavors. By performing these MS, students are more autonomous and self-regulated learners. This confirms Rahimi and Katal's (2013) findings according to which when students are trained on how to learn, they become effective learners and know how to cope with the learning task; when students become aware of MS, they take on more responsibility for their learning that is necessary for self-regulated learning. Likewise, as Guapacha and Benavidez, (2017) remark when students become aware of language learning strategies, they incorporate strategies that involved their language knowledge and their capacity to organize, select, plan, self-reflect, and self-manage their learning. Thus, students develop strong motivation and positive attitudes towards language learning. Students dispose of a set of tools that allow them to expand their strategies repertoire with a subsequent improvement of their aural and oral skills.

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Positive results in this intervention can be adduced to the explicit instruction of MS. However students' personal factors like eagerness for English language learning as well as strong self-confidence and favorable cognitive factors could have facilitated these results. On the one hand, negative results could be explained based on three main situations. First, inappropriate training since students with higher difficulties need to be addressed individually making explanation even more explicit since they do not profit from general class instruction. Second, the time allocated for this instruction was short. A longer period of training would yield better results. Third, students with many academic issues in different school subjects as well

as personal adverse situations and motivations different from study hinder their acquisition and orchestration of these strategies.

A line for further research in the Colombian public education context can address the explicit and personalized training in MS of students who display continual academic difficulties in many school subjects making evident the significance and usefulness of these strategies for each school subject.

Conclusions and implications

With regard to the research questions, MS training for planning, monitoring and evaluation effectively improve students' listening understanding and oral production since they lead to awareness of the processes involved in understanding an aural message as well as producing an oral output and the close relationship among these two skills. Likewise, students enlarge and meaningfully store their vocabulary repertoire. Therefore, students experiment feelings of success and self-efficacy. Teachers need to invest time in promoting students' MS to encourage more conscious and self-regulated language learning on the part of students regardless their proficiency level.

In a large class with mixed population of skilled and less-skilled learners, metacognitive awareness through the use of MS to improve aural and oral skills, results particularly challenging for those students who seem to demand a more personalized training. It is aggravated when students are not able to identify the usefulness of the strategies, either the specific actions they make to control over their own learning depriving themselves from the benefits of being able to self-regulate their cognitive activities. It is important for less-skilled students to receive direct metacognitive instruction since they find it difficult to extract the strategy from embedded instruction as opposite to their more-skilled partners. As a result, teachers need to pay close attention to these students and invest more time to accompany them in the process of becoming metacognitive strategic, success and autonomy oriented learners.

Teachers need, on the one hand, to develop their own metacognitive awareness and then, to become skilled at using MS for planning, monitoring and evaluating, so that the instruction in metacognitive awareness becomes a must in their regular

classes and students can benefit from their teachers' knowledge and expertise. On the other hand, they need to invest more time and allocate more efforts in providing less-skilled learners with a more prolonged and intensive training that allows them to keep a smooth pace according to their particular requirements. Thus, learners can also enjoy success in their language learning enlarging the opportunities to become experts and long-life learners that constantly search chances to enhance learning outcomes.

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