The Effect of Training Students on the Metacognitive Model for Strategic Learning on Students' Awareness and their Performances in Oral Presentations

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Contents

Acronyms

ESL: English as a Second Language

CEPA: Common English Proficiency Assessment

IELTS: International English Language Testing System

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

MAG: Madares Al-Ghad (Schools of Tomorrow)

MMSL: Metacognitive Model for Strategic Learning

ملخص

أثر تدريب الطالبات على استراتيجيات ما وراء المعرفة لتوعيتهن بمشاكلهن في العروض التقديمية وتحسين آدائهن في هذه المهارة

يهدف البحث الى توعية الطالبات بنقاط الضعف التي يعانين منها فيما يتعلق بعروضهن التقديمية في اللغة الانجليزية و مساعدتهن على اكتساب استراتيجيات لتحسين آدائهن في هذه المهارة. وهو بحث اجرائي يتطرق الى مشكلة ضعف مهارة العروض التقديمية عند طالبات السنة الأخيرة من المرحلة الثانوية. و قد استخدمت الباحثة نموذج استراتيجيات ما وراء المعرفة الذي وضعته آن شامو (1999) لتدريب الطالبات على استراتيجيات التخطيط، حل المشكلة، الادارة الذاتية و التقييم الذاتي. أجري البحث على 10 طالبات تتراوح أعمارهن بين 17او 18 سنة من الصف الثالث الثانوي العلمي. تم اختيارالعينة بعد اجراء اختبار تحديد مستوى في بداية العام الدراسي، و قد اظهرت نتائجه أن هؤلاء الطالبات هن العينة المناسبة لأن مستواهن المتوسط يجعلهن أكثر ملائمة لنوعية هذا الاجراء. تم جمع البيانات الأولية عن مدى وعي الطالبات الاستراتيجي من خلال استبيان صمم اعتمادا على قائمة استراتيجيات تعلم اللغة لراباكا أوكسفورد (1990) مع بعض التعديلات التي يتطلبها هذا البحث. قامت الباحثة بحساب ثبات الاستبانة بأسلوب إعادة التطبيق مستخدمة في ذلك معامل ارتباط بيرسون.

فيما يتعلق بالاجراءات قامت الباحثه بتسجيل عروض الطالبات مستخدمة المسجل الرقمي على مدار 8 أشهر، و بعد كل عرض أجريت لقاءات فردية لمناقشة ايجابيات العروض و التدريب على استخدام الاستراتيجيات السابق ذكرها لتطوير آدائهن في كل مرة.

أبرز تحليل النتائج الذي اعتمد فيه التحليل الاحصائي للاستبيان و التحليل الكيفي لمذكرات الطالبات والمقابلات التي أجريت معهن أنهن اكتسبن وعيا عاليا فيما يتعلق بنقاط ضعفهن في العروض التقديمية. كما أظهر التحليل الاحصائي لنصوص (discourse analysis) للعروض المسجلة انهن تحسنّ في مهارات الطلاقة و النطق لكنهن لازلن يعانين من مشاكل فيما يتعلق بقواعد اللغة، ويعزى هذا النجاح النسبي الى أن الطالبات استخدمن استراتيجيتي التخطيط والتقييم الذاتي استخداما فعالا بينما أهملن استراتيجيتي حل المشكلة والادارة الذاتية. توصي الباحثة باستخدام نموذج استراتيجيات ما وراء المعرفة لشامو لتوعية متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية بضعفهن في العروض التقديمية. من ناحية أخرى توصى الباحثة باجراء بحوث أخرى للتطرق الى أسباب اهمال الطالبات لاستراتيجيات حل المشكلات والادارة الذاتية.

Introduction

"The first step towards change is awareness"

Nathaniel Brandon

The incorporation of strategy training in the English language curriculum is growing as a new trend after strong claims made about the usefulness of learner training in foreign and second language learning (Cohen, 1998). Sometimes the difference between the 'good' language learner and the less successful learner is only a matter of knowing how to go about one's learning, and very often learners come to their learning environment with no prior knowledge about how to learn (Nunan, 1997). Learners often go through their learning experience unaware of their learning problems and having hardly any clues to solve them. Brown (2004) views these problems as inherently unavoidable in any second or foreign language learning process, and Nunan (1997, p. 201) relates this lack of awareness to the fact that learners usually have no natural endowment to "determine the learning processes which will enable them to reach their objectives". On the other hand, Grenfell and Harris (1999) ascribe this situation to inadequate classroom pedagogy and inappropriate language curricular that do not attend to learning strategy training. Strategy training researchers such as Wenden (2000), Rubin (2003), Oxford (1996; 2004), Goh (1997) and Cohen (2003) have argued for the feasibility of transferring learning strategies to learners to help them become more effective learners. This desire to transfer strategies to students' learning repertoire came in a plethora of applied linguists' calls to shift the language teaching focus from the product-approach to the process-approach (Nunan, 1996). Process-approach advocators established a new stance for language learning that has come to be known the procedural approach (ibid), and maintain that if the learner masters the process of learning then language product automatically ensues.

Strategy instruction came with this procedural approach paradigm

shift and is conceived by its proponents to optimise the process of language learning (Chamot, 2005). For years, researchers have tried to identify and describe learning strategies that accelerate the pace of learning and investigate their correlation with other variables related to second language acquisition (Chamot & El-Dinary, 1999; El-Dib, 2004). Chamot et al. (1999) report that researchers have experimented with these learning strategies and explored their practicality to different classrooms. This made the teachability of these strategies feasible and gave rise to the development of models of learning strategies that could be used
by teachers to scaffold learners on these strategies. For the purpose of this research the metacognitive Model for Strategic Learning (MMSL) was selected to train students on.

Problem

The problem of this study stems from a number of issues related to the context of the study and the participants themselves. These problems involve the curriculum, current methodology, method of instruction and assessment.

The national curriculum for public schools in the UAE emphasises the mastery of language items, and measures language learning according to how accurately a learner can apply grammar rules and recall vocabulary word lists. An example of this is the CEPA (Common English Proficiency Assessment) exam which is a requirement to enter higher education institutions. This is why teachers and students put high premium on memorisation because it pays off in high stake exams like the CEPA.

On the other hand, speaking skills are played down and students get little chance to practice extended oral discourse such as oral presentations. The only amount of spoken language output that teachers initiated is in the form of single sentences generated in whole-class discussions, which are traditionally led by the teacher who only encourage the outspoken students to participate. This problem is exacerbated by the inadequate grading system, which often confuses the learners. Jendli (2007) explains that students' oral skills are

not systematically assessed and teachers give students grades that only reflect their written work. Teachers often overrate or underrate students' proficiency which does not give them a clear idea about their progress in oral skills.

In the-fifteen year experience that the researcher has spent in UAE secondary schools she has observed that while teachers are aware of their students' learning problems and ways to improve them, they have little chance to communicate these problems to them because of two main reasons. First, the English language curriculum is laden with language vocabulary and grammar materials which makes classroom instruction highly-structured and gives teachers little or no chance to incorporate strategy instruction into regular classes because their primary concern is to teach these materials. Second, many teachers are not comfortable with the approach of strategy training because they are not trained to train students on those strategies.

Consequences of such pedagogy had negative effects on students who might well master language items but lack the basic skills to go about their language tasks and go over their learning difficulties.

Students in the UAE who usually reach the university demonstrate poor language strategy use (Khoury and Berger, 2005) and an unawareness of their language learning needs (Coombe and Al-Hamly, 2003). Some of them might spend up to two years at the university receiving foundation in basic English language skills that were not attended to at secondary school level.

Some university English language teachers pointed to this gap that pertains between university requirements and secondary school standards regarding these learning skills (White and Al-Shammari, 2010). Calls to bridge this gap and prepare students for university requirements were often outwardly suggested by academics and university teachers at local conferences and workshops that the researcher had attended. This research addresses these calls and aims at investigating the effect of training a group of intermediate learners on the Metacognitive Model for Strategic Learning (MMSL) to

- raise their awareness of their learning problems and language needs regarding the task of oral presentation

• equip them with optimum strategies that assist them in overcoming their learning problems and improve their performances with the task at stake

Research questions

The research seeks to address the following questions:

1. What effect has the use of the MMSL on students' awareness of their learning needs regarding the task of oral presentation?
2. What effect has the use of the MMSL on students' strategy deployment?
3. What effect has the use of the MMSL on students' performances in the task at stake?

Importance of the research

This study is in alignment with the innovative reform programs implemented by the ministry of education that seek to develop students' language proficiency. It reinforces the student-centered approach that the ministry is working towards its realisation in schools by offering individualised instruction to students, focusing on their learning problems and raising students' performance in the English language oral skills. By probing into learner training, this study creates conditions whereby students explore the utility of learning strategies in their learning processes and acquire the ability of self-learning which is deemed as a central learning goal (Benson and Voller, 1997).

Strategy training is seen as an approach of teaching that assists the learner in taking on more responsibilities for his learning and gradually delegates the decision of learning to the students (Rubin, 2003). Perhaps this is a timely approach now that the teacher ceased to be the sole source of learning as language materials are ubiquitously found on the web and in the market (Breen, 2006), and if the learner is given instruction on how to learn, he can wean himself off the teacher and successfully construct his own pathway through his learning process (Grenfell and Harris 1999, p. 3). Dickenson argues that the classroom can only deal with a fraction of the language, and hence such a proj-

ect can equip the leaner with the necessary skills that would enable him to continue his learning beyond formal classroom contexts.

A further value of this research is that it targets grade twelve students who are about to join the university to pursue their studies. It provides a good practice for oral communication skills that are central goals for students in academic settings (Jendli, 2007). One of the requirements to enter major studies in higher educational institutions, in the UAE, is obtaining band 5.5 in the IELTS (International English Language Testing System). This project could serve as a good preparation for students' speaking skills that constitute a major component in this exam. If students recognise their weaknesses areas in speaking at this point of their academic life then there is a likelihood that they become clear about their learning goals and work towards overcoming them in the future.

From a methodological standpoint, by shifting the focus of teaching from language per se to language tools or strategies that enhance language learning, this research contributes to a better understanding of UAE learners' needs and calls for the consideration of these needs that are not always met by the ministry current curricula (Jendli, 2007). What might be revealed by this study can potentially inform decisions makers, in the ministry of education, on the importance of looking at the English language curricula with more depth and considering revising them.

In line with the perspective of learner training, some earlier researchers in the Arab Gulf area applied strategy training to aid students (Barlaw, 2008; Malcolm, 2002) in their learning. This paper continues with the same approach of strategy training and its application in English language learning. However, it focuses on using strategies to assist students in gaining awareness into their learning problems and overcoming them to prepare for an important skill as oral presentation is. This study also advances awareness as an important parameter that shapes language learning. This could lead to a genuine contribution to research on learner training in the Arab Gulf because such an investigation could add to this knowledge field and inform teachers and educators on how an effective learner train-

ing program could be implemented in the Arab Gulf ESL contexts. The novelty of this research is that it is the first of its kind in the UAE to use strategies imbedded in the curriculum to work on a specific language task.

Research hypotheses

The research is trying to prove the following hypotheses:
1. Training students on the MMSL would lead them to gain awareness of their weaknesses regarding the task of oral presentations.
2. Compared to their early poor strategy use students would deploy the strategies brought up to their awareness effectively.
3. Analysing students' oral presentations, it would be found that their mistakes in fluency, grammar and pronunciation decreased towards the end of the research.

Scope of the research

This research project was conducted in a secondary government school that belongs to the ministry of education in Abu Dhabi, over the academic year 2008-2009. It took eight months with an interval of a two-week holiday in the middle. For the last years, there has been a strong thrust from the ministry officials to improve students' English language skills. This gave rise to innovative language programmes being implemented at schools for the purpose of raising students' English learning standards. The English department at this school was under the management of Madares Al-Ghad MAG (MAG: the Arabic translation of Schools of Tomorrow), which is one of these reform programmes.

MAG envisaged a series of actions to be undertaken to improve the English language curriculum. Centrally, the focus of this curriculum was to improve students' English language skills. This led to a few changes at the school level. Students spend eight of their thirty school contact hours in the English class after they used to take only four hours. Emphasised by MAG programme is the need to cater for mixed-abilities, therefore, the head of the English department mandated that teachers devise challenging tasks from the genre of initial

classroom chat (ICC) to group discussions and oral presentations to foster the speaking skills of the highest achievers in each class. So, the researcher seized this opportunity to carry out this project whose scope is limited to the application of the MMSL to oral presentations. The researcher assigned a group of ten students from the science section to do oral presentations as a warming-up activity.

Defining key terms

The working definitions in this paper are: "strategy", "metacognition", "metacognitive awareness" and "self-direction".

Chamot (2005, p. 25) claims that "strategies" are "procedures that facilitate a learning task". Oxford (1990, p. 1) says that they are "steps or actions taken by the students to enhance their learning". Earlier Tarone (1983, p. 12) gives a more specific definition stating that learning strategies are ways to develop the learner's "linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language".

"Metacognition" is the ability to understand and regulate one's own thinking and learning (Chamot, 2005; Rubin, 2001; Wenden, 2000). The term "metacognitive awareness" was first defined by Flavell (1979) as consisting of "person knowledge", "task knowledge" and "strategy knowledge". Wenden (1991) uses the same typology in language learning and defines "person knowledge" as awareness about what contributes to personal success in language learning, "task knowledge" as the awareness of the nature and demands of the task and, finally, "strategy knowledge" as being aware of the strategies that are likely more effective than others in performing well in a language task.

Dickinson (1987, p.10) defines "self-direction" as the "learner's responsibility for making the decisions about his learning". She uses this term to describe an attitude that refers to the learner when he accepts responsibility pertinent to his learning in performing a language task. For Hoffman (1999, p. 127) self-directed learners should be "able, if they choose so, to diagnose their learning needs, formulate their learning objectives, take the initiative in using the necessary resources to achieve these objectives, and assess their progress towards their goals".

Theoretical framework

Finding the right methodology that enhances language learning has been the concern of scholars particularly with the growing need for acquiring the English language that has become the lingua franca of many disciplines (Brunfit, 2004). Towards the end of the twentieth century there has been a concern why learners have not progressed in language learning as much as it was anticipated, and linguists started feeling uneasiness about the position of traditional approaches that involve overt teaching of grammatical items (Lock, 1996). This has led to a new version of language teaching that focuses on developing the ability to communicate in social contexts. This has come to be known as communicative competence and has since been established as the goal of the language classroom (Grenfell and Harris, 1999).

Communicative competence

Hymes (1972) was the first one to use the term communicative competence. The notion of communicative competence refers to the dimensions involved in performing a speech act -such as a dialogue, a sermon, a speech and an oral presentation- and views the use of language within its social environment. The major contribution of this view in linguistics is that learning a language involves not only the traditional Chomskyian grammatical accuracy that has long shaped classroom pedagogy and second language materials for decades but also the sociolinguistic and paralinguistic features a learner needs to master when performing a linguistic act in an appropriate manner (Hymes, 1972).

This view of communicative competence resonated well among applied linguists, namely Canale and Swain (1980) and Bashman (1990) who all agree that communicative competence involves more than learner's control over the grammar of the language. The following table is a summary of the various delineations that these authors stated as part of communicative competence.

Table .1 Communicative competence

Adapted from Bachman (1990); Canale and Swain (1980); Canale (1983) and Hymes (1972).

Linguistic competence	The knowledge of the necessary syntactical, phonetic, phonological, morphological and semantic rules in a language
Sociolinguistic competence	Knowing how to use language appropriately, given the topic, the setting and the relationships with the participants
Paralinguistic Competence	The gestural communication facial expressions (non-verbal behaviours) meant to complement linguistic utterances
Psychological competence	Adapting one's behaviour to the situation

Once communicative competence was taken on board, curriculum designers and methodologists rushed to shape their publications according to the new mode of teaching that has come to be known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). However, some time after its application to the ESL classroom CLT has not attained the outcomes it promised to bring about. Richards and Rogers (1986) point out that CLT did not really prepare the learner how to operate in a communicative setting because many teachers and material designers went on presenting the learner with language items drills of behaviourism hallowed time. From the same standpoint, Grenfell and Harris (1999) argue that the communicative approach has been simplistically understood by ESL practitioners and what actually gets to be taught in the classroom is prescriptive in nature and does not serve the development of communicative competence. They add

that CLT has been pedagogically reduced to interviewing people that students will probably never meet and ordering foods that they do not eat (Grenfell and Harris, 1999). This has left out much of students' choices and obscured individual learning variations (Palfreyman, 2003).

But despite these pitfalls, the communicative competence remained the established goal of every ESL classroom with a preoccupation on the part of applied linguists with how to implement it more effectively. Some of these linguists envisaged that there need to be a methodology that recognises learners' different personalities, explores their individual learning needs and makes it explicit to them how to learn (Grenfell and Harris, 1999) to repair this pedagogical gap, and it was from this concern that the field of strategy training has emerged.

Language learning strategies (LLS)

Research on strategy instruction shows that when trained adequately learners benefit largely. Chamot et al. (1999) report on a number of studies where strategy training led to effective learning outcomes. Most researchers strongly argue for explicit strategy instruction (Anderson, 2002; Chamot et al., 1999; Cohen, 1998; Nunan, 1997; 1996; Shen, 2003). This approach of explicit strategy instruction is concerned essentially with modelling of strategies to develop students' strategic knowledge and assist them in transferring these strategies to new tasks (Chamot et al., 1999; Grenfell & Harris, 1999; Harris, 2003). Given this current state about explicit strategy instruction researchers suggest that teachers should probably opt for explicit instruction and integrate strategies into their regular course work rather than providing a separate learning strategies course (Chamot, 2005)

Researchers have reported on a number of studies where curriculum-imbedded strategy instruction led to positive outcomes in language learning (Chamot et al., 1999; Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 1990). The important findings of these studies gave impetus for teachers to try strategy instruction in the classroom, however, the main problem,

was how to make these strategies teachable in the language classroom and find a pedagogical framework to make students use them for themselves. This led researchers to develop strategic learning models that teachers can use to scaffold learners on these strategies (Chamot, 2004).

The Metacognitive Model for Strategic Learning

For the purpose of this research, the Metacognitive Model for Strategic Learning (MMSL) was chosen to train students. This model was selected because it lends itself to the procedures a learner would go through to prepare for an oral presentation. It was developed by Chamot et al. (1999) after extensive research on learning strategies in which data was collected on the use of strategies with EFL language learners (Chamot et al., 1999). The model consists of four metacognitive processes that learners can use to prepare for any language task, as shown in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The Metacognitive Model of Strategic Learning (Chamot et al. 1999, p. 13)
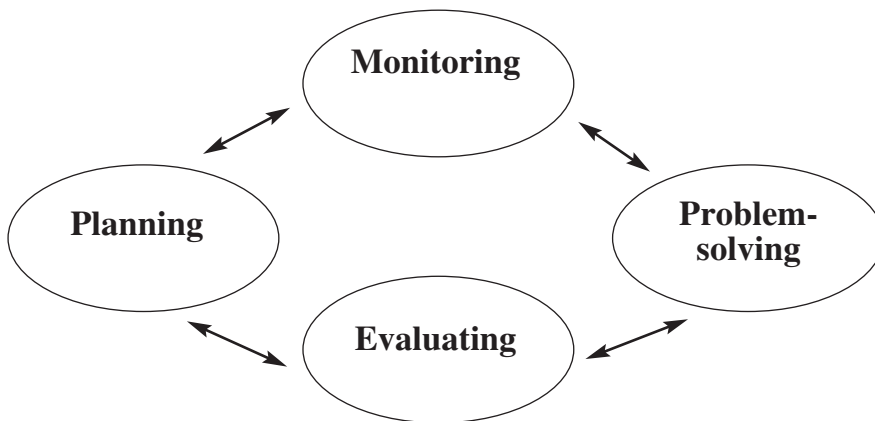
In using this model, learners should work through four processes that are recursive but not necessarily sequential: planning, monitoring, problem-solving and evaluating. Chamot et al. (ibid) explicate the use of these metacognitive strategies as the following:

Planning: this process consists of planning for their task and using strategies to overcome their learning problems.

Monitoring: while working on the task students monitor their performance by measuring the effectiveness of their strategies having used and making adjustments to achieve their desired goals.

Problem-solving: if students face difficulties they ask for clarification and work them out.

Evaluating: once they finish the task, students evaluate their performances and reflect on their overall progress by stating what went well and what might need improvement.

Language awareness

Nunan (1997) puts awareness as a major goal for ESL learners to be able to take action to progress in their learning. Lee and Oxford (2008) argue that teachers are to raise students' awareness if they want them to learn more effectively. Chamot (2005) maintains that learners can possibly become aware of their mental processes and acquire strategic awareness. Grenfell and Harris (1999) assert that awareness occurs through sensitising learners to their weaknesses and strengths and their role in working on a task according to recommended procedures. This usually involves preparing for a language task while applying acquired strategies (Grenfell and Harris, 1999). They further argue that awareness appears to be significantly useful in urging learners to assume their responsibility in taking the right actions towards their language tasks.

One way of raising learner awareness is the use of introspective methods such as diaries, interviews and other verbal report tools because when learners are asked to verbalise perceptions and make a self-revelation of their thoughts (Anderson, 2002) they grow more aware of the learning options available to them and understand themselves better as individual learners.

Previous studies on strategy instruction in ESL speaking

Previous research on the application of language learning strategies to ESL speaking has been concerned with verifying the effectiveness of strategy training to perform language tasks.

Dadour (1996) conducted an action research aiming at investigating the effectiveness of strategy training on improving university-level students' oral communicative abilities. This study was purely quantitative and used an experimental group and a matched control group. Students were introduced to a set of skills that they had to master, then, over a course of fifteen weekly sessions, were given specific learning strategies that they had to use to improve their oral communicative skills. Dadour reports that the study stressed students' initiative and self-learning, for example starting with session eleven the participants were assigned to select learning strategies of their choosing to prepare speaking activities; such as role-plays and drama. Results of this study show that the course had a considerable impact on the experimental group which demonstrated greater strategy use and outperformed the control group in fluency, syntax and vocabulary usage; nonetheless, there was no difference in pronunciation.

In another action research on 50 students from two universities, in Japan, Robbins (1996) provides evidence into the usefulness of the Problem-Solving Process Model as a framework for strategy instruction over a research course of three months. Students were instructed to use this model to increase their listening intake and speaking skills, and during each lesson they were instructed on a set of strategies that they were to use to prepare for a language task that requires listening and speaking. Students received explanation about the model and were assigned to use strategies to attend to a language task. Then, they were asked to plan, monitor and evaluate the set of strategies employed. Robbins used a qualitative approach to make claims about her findings in asking the participants to use a log where they recorded the usefulness of the strategies they were trained on. Students' answers indicated that the training was advantageous and voiced their need to learn more strategies.

Although these two studies were conducted in two different cultural settings and used different data tools, their findings show that language teaching strategies are teachable, indeed, and can yield positive effects in the strand of oral communication.

Learner training research in the Arab Gulf area

The concept of learner training and the issues related to it, such as autonomy and self-direction, are new to Arab students. The need to develop learner independence was raised by Western teachers who pointed to the gap between secondary school and college regarding the language study skills that learners must demonstrate to meet university requirements (Coombe and Al-Hamly, 2003).

In a study conducted by Barlaw (2008), a number of students were assigned a questionnaire to assess themselves on how they had used a set of Independent Learning Centre materials (ILC) for an eight-week period. Barlaw's goal was to make students aware of what good work means, reflect on their

experience in using the ILC and develop an autonomous attitude to learning. However, students did not grasp the purpose of the self-assessment task, because instead of making a "judgment as to what kind of effort they put into their studies" (ibid, p.13), they tended either to inflate their assessment or underestimate their efforts. Barlaw notes that the participants did not learn to be as autonomous as she had hoped, and concluded that more effort is needed on her part to lead them towards that direction.

Malcolm (2002) reports on a project whereby first year university students were assigned language tasks to be completed in a self-access centre. He claims that although the ultimate goal of the project was not to make students fully autonomous learners, it aimed to take a "step on that path by encouraging students' awareness of ways other than teacher-directed instruction in developing English language proficiency" (Malcolm, 2002 p. 109). Malcolm adds that although the students completed the assigned activities independently from the teacher, the vast majority of them did not take responsibility for their own learning, nor did they work towards self-direc-

tion. What could be concluded is that although the focuses of these two studies differ, their findings are alike in that they point to the lack of students' responsibility in their language learning and their need to develop autonomy, which the researcher sees as a good reason for approaching learner training with Arab students.

Although there are differences between these two studies, their findings are similar in three aspects; first, they point to the lack of students' responsibility in their language learning and their need to develop autonomy, and second, their character is mainly ex-curricular rather than imbedded within the language course. Third, they approached learner training without the bare minimum attendance to strategies training, and this might be the reason why their outcomes were negligible.

This research attempts to go beyond these two studies, although its ultimate goal is similar to theirs' in that they all aim at gearing students towards self-learning. What makes this study more engaging for students is that it focuses on training them to know their learning problems and use strategies for their advantage to go over these problems.

Methodology

This research takes the form of an action-research that seeks solutions for students' problems with oral presentations. It uses both quantitative and qualitative data tools and therefore falls under the mixed approach research method (Cressel, 2003). Nunan (2003) argues that recently the field of ESL has witnessed an increase in the mixed approach body of research, which might elucidate hidden aspects about language learning that current research has not yet revealed. The research could have been

limited to the use of quantitative data tools particularly with this research that is categorised as quasi-experimental, but its aims and character of the problem make it necessary to adopt qualitative data tools, among others, to answer the research questions. The approach of blending these two research paradigms also stems from the researcher's awareness that using different descriptive research tools can contribute to a better understanding of classroom behaviours (Brumfit, 2001) and the different variables affecting language learning. Furthermore, the use of different types of data collection tools related to the same research questions can lead to more salient findings and increase the reliability of the research claims (Cressel, 2003).

Participants

The subjects of this research project are female students aged between 16 and 17 from an Arab monolingual background. They have been taking English as a foreign language for eleven years. They are in their final year of secondary education, and they belong to a class of twenty four students. Following a diagnostic test that was carried out by MAG at the beginning of the academic year, it was found that 9 out of the 24 students were categorised as beginners, while the attainment levels of the rest ranged between low-intermediate and high-intermediate. Research on metacognitive strategies usually require an intermediate level population (Chamot, 2005), therefore the 15 intermediate students were selected to partic-

ipate. However, out of 15 students only 10 committed themselves to the project, while the rest dropped off. Lee (1994) claims that wherever students are forced into a self-directed learning project, the outcomes are not significant, thus, from this perspective and from an ethical standpoint, the researcher limited the participation in this project which required voluntariness, in the true sense, to the 10 remaining students.

Students were asked if they would accept to be videotaped when doing their presentations, but with the exception of one, all refused without giving a clear explanation. From her experience in this country, the researcher knows that videotaping is not welcomed by the local culture and goes against the core values of conservative families. Thus, the only choice left was to use a voice recorder. Yet, even with this option some students imposed conditions the researcher had to abide by. Three students demanded that their voices could only be broadcast in an academic setting, and two others asked not to allow any male to hear their voices, even for academic purposes. The conditions were agreed upon, and pledged to be respected on the part of the researcher. An additional ethical point that had to be taken into account was maintaining the anonymity of the participants by not mentioning their names in this paper. James and Busher (2007, p. 102) argue that research has to be "carried out within an ethic of respect" requiring a

conduct code that action-researchers have to take into consideration. James and Busher put privacy, confidentiality and anonymity at the core of this code.

Data collection instruments

Data was derived from different sources at different stages of the research. Table .2 below illustrates each data collection tool and the research question it served to answer.

Table .2 Research questions and their corresponding data collection instruments

Research question	Data tool
4. What effect has the use of the MMSL on students' awareness of their learning needs regarding the task of oral presentation?	Questionnaire, diary, interview.
5. What effect has the use of the MMSL on studentsí strategy deployment?	Questionnaire, diary, interview.
6. What effect has the use of the MMSL on studentsí performances in the task at stake?	Observation, discourse analysis of oral presentations.

Self-learning skills questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix A) was based on Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (1990), but its components were adapted to suit the aim of this research which tackles specific areas of learner training -metacognitive awareness and strategy use-. The questionnaire had two main parts. The first part (statements 1-6) was meant to measure students' degree of awareness of their weaknesses and strengths in presentational speaking. The second part (statements 7-21) gropes towards gauging students' strategy use and self-learning abilities. Each statement in the questionnaire was

scored on a 5-point scale starting from 1 'always true', through 2 'usually true', then 3 'somewhat true', 4 'usually not true' to 5 'never true' (Oxford 1990, p. 283).

To become psychometrically valid the questionnaire went through a process of reliability and validation and was trialled on a sample of

10 students in conditions similar to those of the current research participants. The results show that the first part had a test-retest reliability that rates 0.958. The second part had a test-retest reliability of 0.991, while the whole questionnaire reliability rated 0.981. These results are considered as high and give the questionnaire an internal consistency and reliability.

Evidence for validity of the questionnaire came from 13 experts from the field of education and ESL who were asked to rate their approval of the statements that the questionnaire comprises. The results show that 82% of them showed strong agreement with the statements in part one and 87% showed strong agreement with the statements in part two. These figures indicate that the questionnaire has quite reasonable validity and hence could be adopted as a data collection instrument for this research.

The questionnaire was conducted before the research and administered in the English classroom under the supervision of the teacher. The first part's answers yielded important information about students' level of awareness and their prior learning strategies. The results in figure.2 (the numbers appearing in the five left columns indicate the number of students who ticked that option) show that their awareness level is low as only 10% of them are aware of their weaknesses and strengths in speaking. Alarmingly, none of them feels confidence and self-esteem about her oral abilities (see statements 3 and 4). It became evident that some students need to gain awareness of their learning problems in their presentational skills.

The analysis of the second part of the questionnaire (questions 7-21) shows that the majority of students had very poor strategy use and barely any speaking study skills (see statements 7, 8, 9 and 10). Additionally, they had no history of any self-directed learning, and they all conceive learning as a matter derived from the teacher and occurring only within the school context (statements 19, 20 and 21).

Figure .2 Results of the self-learning skills questionnaire

Statements	1 always true	2 usually true	3 some-what true	4 usually not true	5 never true

Part 1

	Statements	1 always true	2 usually true	3 some-what true	4 usually not true	5 never true
1.	I have done an oral presentation in front of the class before					10
2.	Maintaining speech for more than half a minute is a real problem for me	6	3	1		
3.	I am able, willing and have the courage to present a particular topic in front of others.		2	2	3	3
4.	I am confident about myself when I speak in the classroom or in public?		1	1	4	4
5.	When I speak I can use the right gestures that help me convey my meaning.	2	2	2	3	1
6.	I can easily tell about my strengths and weaknesses in speaking.	1	2	3	4	

Part 2

	Statements	1 always true	2 usually true	3 some-what true	4 usually not true	5 never true
7.	I can use a variety of strategies to help me improve my speaking in English.			1	3	6
8.	I am aware of different methods that help me progress in speaking.		1	1	3	5

No.	Statement					
9.	I use these methods to develop my speaking skills.				3	7
10.	When I have a learning problem I can figure out a way to solve it		1	1	4	4
11.	I can work well on my own.	1	0	0	4	5
12.	I take initiatives in learning the language outside the school.		1	1		8
13.	If I need information, I know how and where to search for it.	1	3	3	3	
14.	I devise a plan for my language tasks.				1	9
15.	I can tell whether I am progressing or not.	1	1	1	3	4
16.	I assess my performance after working on the English language tasks.			1		9
17.	I think about my problems in learning the English language and look for solutions.	1	1	1	4	3
18.	Use some strategies that help me perform well in the English language tasks.			2	3	5
19.	I am willing to work on tasks that are not demanded by the English teacher.				1	9
20.	I don't need a teacher to learn the English language.					10
20.	I can help myself progress in English without depending on the textbook.			1	1	8

Most researchers set up questionnaires as pre-research and post-research data collection instruments, but with this peculiar study that falls between the qualitative and the quantitative research approaches, the questionnaire will not be used as such because when they are newly-acquired awareness and strategies are best depicted through self-report and introspective methods such as diary writing and interviewing (Cohen, 1998).

Diary

Learner's awareness is a mental process that is not directly observable (Goh, 1997) and is consequently hard to quantify, however we can access it through getting students to write about it. This nature of the investigated variable led the researcher to use a data collection instrument that helps in answering the first research question whose subject is awareness. Most researchers in the field of awareness advance qualitative data tools as the most appropriate tools to investigate non-observable aspects of language (Bailey, 1996). Hence students were asked to keep a diary throughout the course of the research. Matsumoto (1996) says that keeping reflective journals helps students gain insights into their roles and impacts their own learning. Bailey (ibid) postulates diaries as a learning tool that engages students in a process of uncovering affective and hidden aspects of their language learning. While the researcher was aiming at leading students towards this direction, she was equally curious to know the ways students worked up solutions and deployed new strategies to solve their language problems (Oxford 1996, p. 19).

Moreover, part of the rationale behind this practice reflects one of the concerns that the researcher argued for earlier; getting students engaged in a process of assuming partial responsibility for their roles as learners, and instilling in them a new habit of self-evaluation and reflection.

As the researcher was aiming at specific data, the diary writing process was assisted and students were directed on the content of their entries by being asked to answer three main questions:

1. How well did I do in the presentation?
2. Did I achieve the learning goal I set up for this presentation?

3. What helped me do well in the presentation and why?
The diary logs were usually kept on a shelf in the English classroom for fear not to be lost, and every time a student gives an oral presentation she is hers to write her diary entry at home.

Post-research interview
The post-intervention interview (appendix F) was meant to reveal any awareness signs that students had gained thought the course of the research. It was also meant to get them to vocalise their awareness and thoughts about what strategies they had deployed in directing their presentations. The choice of a semi-structured interview was made for the purpose of asking the participants questions that would arise spontaneously from their answers. As a retrospective method of data collection, interviews have proved to be useful in assisting participants in revealing aspects about their learning that might enlighten the research findings (Cohen and Scott, 1996).

Observation
Selinger and Shohamy (1989) state that second language research data could be drawn from the "behaviours" (1989, p. 143) involved in the language event being investigated. So, observation notes were taken from the beginning of the research until the end to capture problems noticed with students' presentations. This practice was also meant to compile detailed information about students' behaviours (Genesee and Upshur, 1996) during their presentations and trace any improvement in their overall performances. Garton and Edge (2009) suggest the use of a checklist for classroom observation, while van Lier (1988) and Brown (2004) state that as long as the goal of classroom observation is descriptive the observation protocol can take any form. The observation protocol that the researcher used was an A4 page divided into two sections (Appendix B). The first section was devoted to the strengths and the weaknesses of the presentation, while the second part was left to free note taking. The researcher used this simple protocol because it guarantees the principle of reliability (van Lier, 1988) and allows detailed description of the presentations.

A number of serious problems were observed with students during their early presentations. Hesitation and absence of self-confidence were mainly the most obvious observed problems, and they often caused disruption in the flow of the students' speeches. This problem was observed in all the presentations and is evident in the extracts below. Some students seemed tongue-tied and demonstrated high anxiety that was obviously reflected in their behaviours during their presentations. Coombe and Al-Hamly (2003) ascribe this problem of high-anxiety among Arab Gulf students to the high stake testing that students go through in their school life. The observation notes below capture behaviours caused by students' anxiety.

Extract 1

> She looks so nervous. She asks me if I could allow her to sit down instead of standing up while giving the presentation and I said 'yes'. Her voice trembles. The topic is interesting... She has a good English accent.... She still looks nervous ... Her voice is still trembling. She pauses, the pause gets long ... she resumes her talk. She stumbles then repeats the word 'high-fibre' with a strong stress ... she spooners with the word 'nutrition' saying 'nurtition'... she stops again, her face goes red....she does not look comfortable at all.

Extract 2

> She looks nervous. She's fudging with her hand. She shows the girls the pictures … fixing her hair cover …still fudging with her hands'

Extract 3

> She was stumbling and repeating the same word 'how to how to' then she says 'males have have to have to'… she stumbles again and hesitates… she stops then there was silence I prompted her with the word wedding. She takes it up … She goes on, still hesitating ...She pauses, silence and a gap.

Other problems were noticed in the students' early presentations; for instance, it was observed that some students memorised a text from a book or from an internet website and seemed to perceive an oral presentation as a rehearsal of that text, as shown in the following extract:

Extract 4

> ... She is speaking quickly without any pause. It looks a rehearsal to me. Now she pauses but I think because she forgot a word. Yes she forgot a word. She remembers the word but she pronounces it unclearly. I can't even tell what the word is. She goes on giving the speech with a plain pitch as if she was reading from a paper.

Erroneous pronunciation was a further problem that sometimes gravely distorted the meaning of what students wanted to say, as evident in the notes below. Munro and Derwing (1999) draw on this problem of intelligibility with non-native speakers of English, and suggest that ESL instructors should focus on accent reduction. A serious problem that was observed with most of the students was confusing the sound 'p' with 'b'.

Extract 6

> …she speaks English with a heavy Arabic accent … She says a word that sounded 'bunched' to me but I am sure she means something different because this word does not match the rest of the context.... She says the word 'bassin' twice... meaning unclear. She means passion'

Discourse analysis of the presentations

Students' oral presentations were recorded and subjected to discourse analysis to serve as a source of quantitative data and trace students' progress throughout the research. In the analysis of the presentations recordings the researcher is going to look into fluency, pronunciation and grammatical correctness. Fillmore (1979) defines fluency as the ability to produce language content and maintain speech smoothly without stops, stammering or hesitation.

Procedures

The research took eight months with an interval of a two-week holiday and each student produced between eight to nine presentations. Researchers' views about the right strategy models that promote learning differ, but common to all these views is that strategy instruction should go through a number of phases to enter students' Zone of Proximal Development (Chamot, 2004). From this theoretical perspective, the action plan of this project was carried out in three cycles. The approach of cyclic interventions was intended to lead students incrementally into a stage where they can use the MMSL for themselves to improve their oral presentations independently of the teacher.

Cycle 1: raising awareness and modelling

This cycle lasted only three weeks as it focused only on explanation and modelling. The first task that was incumbent on the researcher as a learner trainer was to convince the participants of the potential of strategy training. This was done in a whole class discussion whereby she explained that the low performance observed in students' early presentations was due to lack of strategy use more than lack of language abilities. Grenfell and Harris (1999) and El-Dinary (1993) argue that part of the process of constructing the self-directed learner is to make strategy instruction explicit to the learners, hence, from this standpoint, the strategy model to be used was presented to the students, and examples on how each strategy could be applied were given, in the first session of the project.

In the second session, the participants were presented with the criteria against which the English department teachers assess oral presentations, and the benchmarks that they should be hitting when they plan for this task (Nunan, 1997). In the third session, to ensure a full understanding of the criteria stated in the rubric chart, the students were given a copy to read, in groups, and then asked to translate its content into Arabic. This activity helped students recreate the criteria themselves and gain a deeper understanding of the required standards.

Cycle 2: guided practice using the MMSL

In this cycle, the researcher gave a list of topics to the students and assigned each one of them to choose one to prepare for a presentation. It was further noted that it would be appreciated if students would come up with their own topics of interest (ibid). Giving students the freedom of choosing the content of their presentations was meant to increase their intrinsic motivation to the task they are working on (Chamot et al., 1999) and orient them towards the new learning mode of making decisions about what matches their learning preferences.

Each time a student gave a presentation it was recorded by means of a digital recorder. By using the method of recording, the researcher was looking for a means that allows students to listen to their own speeches with a degree of "detachment" (van Lier 1988, p. 37) and be able to assess their performances objectively. Each recording was input into a Real Player file, copied to a CD, and then handed to the student presenter who was supposed to compile all the presentations in a folder referred to as the "speech portfolio" in the classroom metalanguage. At this stage, students were also assigned to listen to their presentations at home and point out the weaknesses and strengths.

Initially, students needed allocated classroom time to be familiarised with the new strategies. A day after the presentation, a post-presentation conference was held with the student to discuss the comments prepared beforehand. The researcher envisaged that meeting students individually in an out-of-class time was an effective way to give them differentiated feedback and focus on their individual needs (Brookhart, 2008). Therefore, permission was asked from the school principal to exempt the students, who had a post-presentation conference, from the morning assembly to meet with the researcher in the English classroom. This helped schedule these conference sessions effectively and without affecting the English contact hours. During those meetings the presentations were discussed and students were trained on the new strategies.

The strategy of evaluation

Following Hyland and Hyland's (2006) suggestion about providing balanced feedback, which includes positive and negative comments along with suggestions, the conferencing sessions focused on two major points: first, comparing students' performance against the benchmarks discussed during the first cycle of the project, and second, suggesting strategies that would help the students achieve their learning goals.

With the first point she researcher started by "positive feedback" (Brookhart 2008, p. 26), which was mainly about pointing out the strengths of the presentation, and then she moved to "negative feedback" and pointed out the mismatches between the student's presentation and the required standards. By showing students how their performance matched the required criteria, the researcher played the role of leading students to celebrate their strengths and attributing the good performance in certain areas not only to their abilities (Hyland and Hyland, 2006) but also to their efforts to give them a sense of achievement in what they had done.

Negative feedback covered a variety of areas that students needed to improve. Grammatical and pronunciation mistakes were not the only points mentioned, there was also feedback about students' presentation skills and the contents and the organisation of the presentations. It was delivered in an anxiety-free atmosphere and given in privacy.

Scaffolding students on planning and problem-solving

It was essential to make it explicit to the students which strategies to use to improve their presentations. This explicitness was equally intended to guide them towards their learning goals (Butler and Winnie, 1995) by empowering them in their self-regulation process and increasing their "range of strategies" (Grenfell and Harris 1999, p. 73). Grenfell postulates the use of a development plan to instil these strategic habits in learners. Chamot et al. (1999) maintain that having students plan for personal language goals increases their involvement in the learning process.

To direct students into this planning process, the researcher used a

goal-setting form (Appendix C) and specified details to be completed at the end of each conferencing session. Each student was asked to write her weaknesses, strengths and set a goal for the following presentation. Some students set more than one goal; however, the researcher envisaged that working on more than one goal could be overwhelming for these students who had no prior experience with self-directed learning. Presumably, setting one goal at a time should give them a sense of self-efficacy in what they could achieve (Brown, 2004) and teach them to set learning priorities. Some students started with lofty unrealistic goals such as being fluent; therefore, the researcher had to convince them that the goal had to be attainable within the limit of time between each two presentations. The researcher was concerned that they would lose motivation and become discouraged when evaluating their progress in cases where the goal was not achievable (Chamot et al,. 1999; Oxford, 1990).

Students were instructed on a variety of strategies that would help them achieve their goals; for instance, they were shown how they could use software such as Audacity and Moodle or even their cell phones, if available, to record their voices. They were also instructed on how to use Dictionary.com and the Oxford Electronic Dictionary to check correct pronunciation. Nonetheless, with intonation problems, the researcher found it hard to suggest any particular technique to help students, because it is not easy to state any rules for such an area as Edge and Garton point to (2009).

Working with the MMSL is a "recursive process" (Chamot et al. 1999, p. 13), as mentioned earlier, in that as the research unfolds students devise a new plan, and the cycle recommences with either a new presentation and a new goal or working towards those goals that have not yet been achieved.

Cycle 3: free practice and fading out of teacher's reminders

A tenet in strategy training is that when the teacher has evidence proving that the students had fully assimilated the strategies he can draw up a new plan, whereby he delegates strategy use for students (Grenfell and Harris, 1999). Likewise, when the teacher sees that the learners had

readily internalised the strategies, he has to withdraw scaffolding gradually and transfer to them the responsibility of regulating their own learning (Dickinson, 1987). From this perspective, after the first five presentations the researcher wanted the participants to make a move towards independent learning, and give them space to experiment what it looks like to self-manage their 'speech portfolios'. Therefore, oral feedback was withdrawn and replaced by peer-feedback and self-assessment; nonetheless, the researcher continued monitoring students in using the MMSL to direct the remaining oral presentations.

Five months into the academic year, the researcher felt that students had mastered the strategy of evaluation and were capable of depending on themselves and their peers to manage their oral presentations without the teachers' prompts. Hence students were informed that they were going to decide about their learning goals, plan for the four remaining presentations and solve their learning problems on their own and with the help of their peers. Sadler and Good (2006) suggest that self-

assessment is more powerful in self-regulated learning than peer-assessment; on the other hand, Underhill (1987, p. 23) argues that "self-assessment is unlikely to be an adequate measure of oral ability on its own". He adds that if several students are involved in doing the same oral task, they can assess one another, and when the learner compares his assessment to other students' he is likely to make a more accurate judgment about himself.

Each time a student gave a presentation, peer-assessment checklist sheets (Appendix D) were distributed among students to rate the presenter's performance. The students were given some time to complete the checklists individually and asked to leave the papers anonymous to encourage them to render an objective assessment and avoid sensitivity and face shame in front of the presenter.

The checklists were collected and handed to the presenter. In reading her peers' evaluation and listening to her recording, each presenter had to complete a self-assessment checklist (Appendix E) whereby she ticked off the abilities that she had already mastered. This activity was done with the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth presentations.

Findings

The first research question: What effect has the use of the MMSL on students' awareness of their learning needs regarding the task of oral presentation?

Diary analysis

In analysing the students' entries the researcher tried to abide by Bailey's principal of looking for any "recurring patterns or salient events" (Bailey 1996, p. 215) in relation to the variable of awareness that students reported on. It was found that students reported on three main areas of learning needs that could be subcategorised as linguistic, psychological and paralinguistic.

Linguistic needs

The major problem that students reported on in the diaries was the lack of fluency and hesitation. It was mentioned by all the students in different terms as shown below.

* '-Lots of e e e and lots of pauses ... I stopped (gaps) the girls were very bored. I felt bad and am embarrassed '

The student above is aware that she lacks the ability to maintain speech smoothly and fluently. Her comment reveals a high level of discourse awareness in that the she is aware that a gap is worse than a pause in speech and can cause shame and face threat.

Another problem that was brought to the awareness of some students was the inability to communicate their ideas to the audience. More promising, some students became aware of the reasons that hindered them from being able to get their messages through. For instance, the following student reports that she has just come to realise that her choice of vocabulary made her speech dense and hindered the audience from understanding her ideas.

* 'I think that I must use complex vocabulary but the girls didn't understand the ideas'

Seven students reported on their lack of grammatical and syntactic competence, and the data analysis shows three levels of awareness. Some of them contented themselves with only signalling grammar as a weakness point in their presentations; others specified their mistakes, while three of them corrected their mistakes. The diaries also show that grammar is an acute problem for this group of students in that it is mentioned in thirty four out of the thirty nine entries. This preoccupation with grammar is the product of a whole regimen of grammar instruction that these learners had received from primary up to secondary school. Let us take a look at the following comments:

* **'Today I realized that my biggest problem in doing the presentation is grammar.'**
* **I forgot 's' with singular nouns**
* **'everybody goes forget s**
* **'There is bug   There are bugs'**

Pronunciation was a further problem that was overwhelmingly voiced by students. The analysis shows that students' statements focused mainly on three needs: pronouncing the letter 'p' correctly, stressing words correctly and speaking with an English intonation. In the first comment below, the student expresses her weariness of not being able to pronounce the letter 'p' correctly. In the last comment, the diarist is aware that the interference of her mother language accent is the reason of her problem in pronunciation.

* **'I think that the problem of my presentation this time is I can't pronounce the 'p' correctly'**
* **'I speak in Arabic way I must speak in English accent'**

Psychological problems

Many students voiced their ambition to gain self-confidence and overcome anxiety which, in many cases, was the reason behind their low performance and failure to meet their learning goals. The following comments exemplify this need.

- 'sometimes I talk sometimes I feel hesitant because I don't have self-confident'
- 'I was nervous like before'

This "leads us to underline the importance of self-confidence as an affective need for language learners", as Flaitz (1996, p.225) notes. However, towards the end of the project students reported proudly on overcoming their anxiety when giving their oral presentations, which points to a degree of self-efficacy in meeting one of their major learning goals.

Paralinguistic problems

Students reported on their need to work on other factors related to speech than language per se such as eye contact, body language and voice volume. This demonstrates that they are now aware that performing a speech act effectively requires not only high proficiency in language but also mastering these variables.

* 'I didn't let my eyes on girls when I speak'
* 'I used negative body language'

Interview analysis

The interview answers confirmed what was revealed in the diaries in terms of awareness of personal learning needs. Students claimed that the project made them aware of a variety of learning problems that they had to overcome. They provided five main areas that they needed to work towards for the future:

1. Fluency
2. Native-like pronunciation
3. Mastery of the English grammar
4. Answering questions knowledgeably
5. Acquiring the skill of searching a topic

They also noted that while recognising their weaknesses was not an easy matter at the beginning of the research, the teacher's feedback gave them a structured view of how to approach their recordings and assess their performances in a more accurate way. Two students mentioned that recognising their grammatical mistakes remained problematic to them because it was still beyond their capabilities even after the eight-month course of the research. Below is an extract from the students' answers translated from Arabic into English.

* 'I still can't recognise my grammar mistakes even when I listen to the recording, but when you point to them and explain the rule I can understand'.

Students also mentioned that pronunciation mistakes were parasitical in preventing them from achieving their goals, and some of them expressed their weariness with their mistakes. Also, acquiring a native-like accent was an important learning goal for some others as the students' verbatim quotes below suggest.

* 'I checked pronunciation and practiced the new words many times especially when preparing for the seventh and the eight presentations, but when I listened to the recording I was shocked to have pronounced them wrong. This is a big problem I hope that I can pronounce all words correctly'
* 'I have to work on my pronunciation mistakes and I wish to speak like American people'

The second research question: What effect has the use of the MMSL on students' strategy deployment?

Diary analysis
The researcher searched the diaries to find out whether the participants improved their strategy competence compared to the poor strategy use that was revealed through the questionnaire at the

beginning of the research. She looked for evidence that attests that they deployed the strategies they were trained on to improve their performances in their oral presentations, and whether those strategies worked to their satisfaction or not. She found that students reported very little on any significant steps that they have taken outside the classroom to prepare for their language tasks and overcome the learning problems that were brought to their awareness. Similarly, they reported sporadically on the use of the strategies suggested in the conferencing sessions. Altogether, seven strategies were reported on, and as evident in the students' quotes below they look too general and the details on how they were used were left unspecified.

1. Planning
2. Searching the web
3. Monitoring pronunciation
4. Making eye contact
5. Anticipating questions and preparing answers
6. Rehearsing
7. Monitoring pronunciation and rate of speech

Interview analysis

Students were also asked to justify this paradoxical attitude, and explain why they did not use the strategies they were trained on and take the required actions to improve their performance, although they seemed to have gained awareness of their learning problems. The researcher wanted to know whether it was that the MMSL that was not adequate or it is that another factor prevented them from deploying those strategies.

Their answers showed that they "successfully internalised the strategies and could draw on them automatically without prompting from the teacher" (Grenfell and Harris 1999, p. 80). They admitted that although they were instructed to make use of the strategies suggested in the conferencing sessions, to plan for their speeches, they did not do so. They attributed their limited outcomes to the lack of com-

mitment to the project. The interview made a great deal of revelation regarding what these students had been through for the eight-month course of the research. Students' answers covered repeated complaints that reveal the obstacles that prevented them from planning carefully for their presentations and making the fullest use of the strategies brought to their awareness. They ascribed their unpreparedness for their presentations and their infrequent visits to the websites suggested by the teacher to the lack of time and the workload demanded from them in other subjects. These are examples of their answers translated into English.

* 'We were stressed up all the time. We had exams every day and we had to study many lessons every night. Sometimes we had two exams on one day and teachers were not
merciful... we couldn't find enough time to prepare for our presentations the way we wanted to. If we had nothing else, we really would have prepared excellent presentations'
* 'I was not committed a hundred per cent to the project.....the problem is I failed the mid-year chemistry exam and I had to work hard to get marks and obtain a good score.... these are the reasons why I couldn't prepare the presentations well all the time'
* 'Surely, there was not enough time. I was finding difficulties meeting the everyday lessons demands so let alone the demands of this project'.

The third research questions: What effect has the use of the MMSL on students' performances in the task at stake?

Observation notes analysis

Observing the participants doing their presentations over the course of the research, the researcher noticed that students' self-esteem grew higher towards the end of the research, which had bearing on their general performance. The following observation notes capture this change.

'...... she did not ask to sit down today...she looks more self-confident than before....she is wandering around in the room answering the girls' questions.... I like her answers she's doing well... I think she is well-prepared'.

Students seemed more careful about pronouncing the sound 'p' and some of them used the strategy of monitoring as they were saying words that contain this sound. Some others opted for the strategy of repair which means that when she realises her mistake she repeats the same word correctly and repairs her mistake. The following extract from the observation notes evidences this behaviour.

'...she stops a bit then says the word primary in louder voice.........she is trying to be careful with words having the p sound...

There was also improvement regarding the techniques of presentation, for instance, the negative body language that was observed with the early presentations was fading away, and students behaved more
appropriately in delivering their presentations. Let us take a look at the following extract that describes this change.

**'...points to the PPoint slides ...uses her hands to explain the construction of the tower....
good eye contact .....**

Discourse analysis of the oral presentations

In terms of students' overall performance, students made significant progress regarding certain areas. Figure .3 below confirms this relative improvement in terms of linguistic output. The rate of gaps decreased by 85%, and the number hesitations and repairs decreased remarkably by 43% and 54%, respectively. A possible explanation to this improvement could be that these problems were caused by anxiety (Oxford, 1999), and once students had overcome this obsta-

cle and gained self-confidence, their level of fluency improved. The number of mistakes in pronouncing the letter 'p' went dramatically down from 47 to 4 mistakes. But other pronunciation mistakes decreased during the middle of the research course and then went up again towards the end. This could be due to students having no time to prepare for their speeches towards the end of the school year as they shifted their focus to other subjects. One of the other linguistic elements that proved to be seriously problematic for them was grammar, as the number of mistakes increased by almost 70% in the last presentations.

Figure .3 Total number of students' mistakes in their oral presentations.
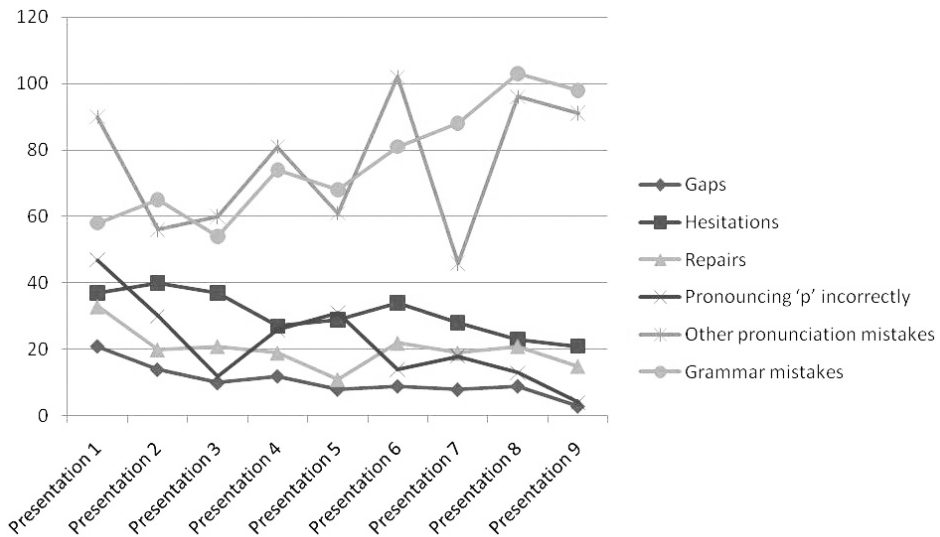
Discussion

The first hypothesis: Training students on the MMSL would lead them to gain awareness of their weaknesses regarding the task of oral presentations.

Comparing the questionnaire results that show that students lack awareness of their learning needs, the diaries and the interview analyses evidence that the participants are now well aware of their weaknesses and other problems related to their presentational speaking skills. Their awareness covered knowledge of their linguistic, paralinguistic and psychological problems. The linguistic problems brought to their awareness, were wrong pronunciation caused by interference of their mother tongue; namely confusing the letter 'p' with 'b'. This could be considered an important step in their learning processes, as most Arab learners are inherently unable to distinguish the sound 'b' from 'p', which does not exist in the Arab language; realising this problem could thus help these students with intelligibility (Zimmerman, 2004).

The lack of fluency and the inability to communicate effectively are further problems that students have grown aware of. Students also became overtly aware of their grammatical incompetence and their need to combat anxiety. It is obviously clear that students have become well aware of the nature of their problems and of ways to deal with them to meet the required standards of an oral presentation.

The findings of this study are conclusive evidence that training students on the MMSL enables them to grow aware of a number of aspects pertinent to their learning. Students are now conscious of where they are in the scale of communicative competence and can potentially use this knowledge to work up solutions and think up plans to reach this competence.

Looking at a possible reason for this change, one can ascribe this to the strategy of evaluation which was beneficial in making students develop a critical spirit towards their performances and reflect on themselves and their linguistic limitations. When student are led to

evaluate their performances against a set of criteria and are assisted by the teacher to do so their level of awareness increases and their knowledge of the standards of the institution they are studying in rises up.

Te sort of awareness that the participants have acquired could be a first-step in the path of self-learning as Nunan (1997) claims. Potentially, this awareness can be translated into action in future courses and as Chamot (2005) puts it students' metacognitive awareness is a first milestone in the path of successful learning.

The second hypothesis: compared to their early poor strategy use students would deploy the strategies brought up to their awareness effectively.

The diary and the interview analyses illustrate that students were introduced to strategies that they did not fully deploy. They attended to two metacognitive strategies -planning and evaluating-, but ignored the strategies of problem-solving and monitoring, consequently they only partially managed their 'speech portfolios'. Although the researcher gave them the opportunity to use these strategies, they did not take the initiative to do so. They made plans but did not seek to translate them into actions. And when they were left to manage their presentations during the last cycle of the intervention, they were expected to pursue their learning goals independently and "monitor that pursuit" without the researcher as "an external prod" (Brown 2004, p. 270), but that did not happen. Questionably, they did not feel accountable on their responsibility to improve their speeches and they neglected their language needs.

But these limitations should not let us fall prey to the belief that students' strategic competence is still as poor as it had been revealed through the pre-research questionnaire because during the interview students reported on their knowledge of effective strategies that could aid them in improving their performances. This lack of strategy deployment, despite full awareness of these strategies counters the claim that there is correlation between knowing and uptake, in strategy instruction (Grenfell and Harris, 1999).

This lack of stagey deployment is due to the fact that students did not take the initiative to work outside the formal classroom. The old perception of the teacher and the classroom as the sole sources of learning that was diagnosed through the questionnaire, at the beginning of the research, is still proliferating across the thinking of students. They failed to realise that solving their learning problems can only partially be done in the classroom and their responsibility is an integral part of their learning processes. Thus they missed the opportunity to extend their learning repertoire and develop their self-management skills.

This could be attributed to a number of reasons. Knowing it was a volunteering project that would not be graded worked against their commitment. Furthermore, the amount of work demanded from them, starting from the search of the topic up to the evaluation of their performances was too much of a task to be completed for students who were used to the teacher as the do-all-agent in the classroom.

Additionally, the sense of contentment and achievement the students had felt in gaining self-confidence had a paradoxical effect on them. Once they had surmounted the hurdle of anxiety, they felt no need to work towards other goals. This gives an idea about students' pragmatism and the mismatch between what is in the teacher's agenda and what goes in the learners' agenda, which often results in "messiness of real-life teaching when compared to methodological intention" (Grenfell and Harris 1999, p. 146).

Not surprising, these results remind us of findings of similar studies conducted in other Arab contexts (Barlaw, 2008; Malcolm, 2002) and other parts of the world, like China (Benson et al., 2003), where the school culture does not breed the concept of learner independence in students. The findings of those studies point to the failure of learners to move into the direction of self-learning.

The third hypothesis: analysing students' oral presentations, it would be found that their mistakes in fluency, grammar and pronunciation decreased towards the end of the research.

Students only made progress in limited areas of oral presentations.

Grammar did not improve and although the confusion of 'p' with 'b' decreased, pronunciation remained a problematic area. Technically the strategy of 'monitoring' had little payoff in that students made attempts at monitoring their grammar and pronunciation errors, but when performing their presentations the same mistakes unavoidably recurred.

The findings of this study cast doubt on the effectiveness of learner training in a secondary school and the relevance of the MMSL to similar contexts. We have just seen that students became aware of their learning needs and acquired knowledge about the appropriate strategies to meet these needs, but that did not impact their learning significantly.

Referring back to Dadour's interventionist study (1996), we read that fluency, vocabulary and grammar witnessed improvement, but not pronunciation. Comparing these findings to this present study we notice a slight mismatch that is probably due to the age of the participants of this study who are relatively younger which made their pronunciation mistakes likely to be put right.

A further gain of this study is that anxiety ceased to be a major trait of students' presentations as it used to be before the intervention, and students' self-esteem grew higher. This had bearing on fluency which witnessed the biggest improvement. The data analyses show that, for example, hesitation stammering and gaps decreased drastically (see figure .3 above). This shows that the more confident a learner is about his abilities, the more effective he can be (Chamot et al., 1999), and attests that the metacognitive model trialled in this project has been effective in alleviating students' anxiety and inhibition.

A by-product of students' gained self-confidence is that towards the end of the research, students' motivation for performing their oral presentations increased, and they reported on less fear for doing their presentations. This is not strange, knowing that much of low motivation in ESL contexts is the consequence of inhibition and lack of self-esteem (Gardner et al., 2004). From the same theoretical stance this proves that there is an inextricable link between affect and achievement in language learning.

Recommendations

The outcomes of this research serve to highlight the need for further research that investigate the correlation between training and strategy use and call for "a full understanding of possible development orders through which strategies can be acquired" (Grenfell and Harris 1999, p. 146) and enter the practice zone of learners. From a methodological standpoint, this places an urgent need on teacher-researchers to do investigations in metacognitive strategies embedded in language tasks, which is a methodological area that has not been researched in the UAE. And in that way they might offer their fellow teachers insights on how to carry out such projects more effectively in the future.

Because the students attended only to the strategies of planning and evaluation and neglected the other metacgonitive strategies, it becomes necessary to conduct studies that investigate the possible socio-economic and attitudinal factors that impede students in this context from working independently outside the classroom. Such studies might demystify the reasons why Arab learners lack self-initiative

and enlighten the ministry officials to the factors that made the success of their language reform programmes relative.

Students' unwillingness to use the strategies they were trained on, outside the classroom, to solve their learning problems highlights the need to look at what could possibly be done to change their learning character and make them acquire independence which is an important component for effective language learning (Cotterall, 1999). Some writers talk about the "retreat" from learner independence (Palfreyman 2003, p. 1) in contexts where the learners' attitude towards self-learning poses a hindrance to autonomy promotion, but adversely this offers a good reason to seriously consider this problem at school level.

In their commitment to the notion of learner independence teachers might have to struggle against students' inert approach of passive learning and cling to the belief that the independent learner is the

construct of schools, rather than give in to the idea that students in the Arab world are unapt to be independent learners. It is imperative that teachers in this part of the world "make a conceptual shift" (Oxford 1996, p. 249) and believe in their "transformative role" (Magro 2002, p. 34) in students' learning life and promote self-learning during regular lessons to make this change occur.

Decision makers, curriculum designers and language advisors in the ministry of education should be aware that students, in this particular context, are at a disadvantage because they lack the degree of independence needed to be successful language learners. They should recognise that students' lack of initiative puts in jeopardy the ministry projects that aim at improving students' language skills. A lot should be done to gear students towards independent learning: hiring experts to design textbooks that are oriented towards self-learning, including learner independence as a major goal for school graduates and making it a requirement for teachers to assess students on their overall language proficiency, rather than on memorisation of prescribed language items. In this way, students will "understand that the power of learning goes beyond the English classroom" (Porter 1993, p. 42). Besides, the teaching cadre needs to be trained on how to train learners to be self-directed (Little, 1995). In this field, Chamot et al. (1999) suggest ways of training teachers and familiarising them with strategy instruction.

The shortcomings of this study do not invalidate the MMSL's profile in ESL contexts, nonetheless, its applicability in Arab contexts would need to be carefully planned to avoid the danger of making strategy use a class routine that only adds up to the overload of students' work without bringing about significant benefits. Furthermore, to maximise the benefits of this model and avoid the danger of overwhelming students who have no history in independent learning with a number of learning mandates, the MMSL should be introduced incrementally to the learner. This means that teachers should be savvy on which

strategy should be first introduced. Then, once the first strategy is fully internalised and passed on to the learning behaviour of the stu-

dents, the teacher can train students on the next one.

Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) use the metaphor of a "spiral" to refer to the process of an action research, which means that the teacher would have to reflect on his intervention and extend the initial investigation for which he set up. In this case, future research on self-directed learning should be more narrowly focused and, at the very maximum, it would target one aspect of self-direction only as Nunan (1997) suggests.

For fear of not considering the shortcomings of this study as arguments against learner training projects in the Arab Gulf area, the researcher suggests that any learner training project should be adapted to what could be realistically achievable in the context of Arab learners. Furthermore, the shortcomings of this project are not evidence against the possible repetition of this project in other Arab contexts, on the contrary, this project is likely to be renewed for the benefits it has achieved, and its weaknesses could provide the basis for how a learner training research can be better planned and carried out.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Self-learning skills Questionnaire

This questionnaire is to help you and your English teacher assess your self-learning skills and its results will only be used for academic purposes. So, answer as honestly as you can. Answer on a scale of 1 – 5 (where **1 = always true, 2 = usually true, 3 = somewhat true, 4 = usually not true and 5 = never true**) how true about you find these statements.

	Statements	1 always true	2 usually true	3 some-what true	4 usually not true	5 never true

Part 1

		1	2	3	4	5
1.	I have done an oral presentation in front of the class before					
2.	Maintaining speech for more than half a minute is a real problem for me					
3.	I am able, willing and have the courage to present a particular topic in front of others.					
4.	I am confident about myself when I speak in the classroom or in public?					
5.	When I speak I can use the right gestures that help me convey my meaning.					
6.	I can easily tell about my strengths and weaknesses in speaking.					

Part 2

		1	2	3	4	5
7.	I can use a variety of strategies to help me improve my speaking in English.					
8.	I am aware of different methods that help me progress in speaking.					

9.	I use these methods to develop my speaking skills.					
10.	When I have a learning problem I can figure out a way to solve it					
11.	I can work well on my own.					
12.	I take initiatives in learning the language outside the school.					
13.	If I need information, I know how and where to search for it.					
14.	I devise a plan for my language tasks.					
15.	I can tell whether I am progressing or not.					
16.	I assess my performance after working on the English language tasks.					
17.	I think about my problems in learning the English language and look for solutions.					
18.	Use some strategies that help me perform well in the English language tasks.					
19.	I am willing to work on tasks that are not demanded by the English teacher.					
20.	I don't need a teacher to learn the English language.					
20.	I can help myself progress in English without depending on the textbook.					

Appendix B: Observation protocol form

Observation sheet

Presentation N- .... Date: ....

Student: ....

Strengths	Weaknesses
....	....
....	....
....	....

Notes:

....

....

....

....

....

Appendix C: Goal-setting Form

Goal-Setting Form

Name: .... Conference N- ....

A. Listen to the recording and identify the followings:

Weaknesses	Strengths

B. Set one goal for next presentation and make it very specific.

D. Write at least 3 strategies you will use to reach this goal.

1.
2.
3.
4.

Appendix D: Peer-assessment form

Peer-assessment form

Directions to the student: This peer-assessment sheet is designed to help your peer know her weaknesses and strengths. She would appreciate it if you answer as honestly as you can.

		Well done متقن	Good جيد	Satisfactory مقبول	Needs improvement يحتاج الى تحسين بحاجة الى تحسين
1. Overall impression الإنطباع العام	Interest in giving the presentation تبدي رغبة في تقديم العرض				
	Confidence الثقة بالنفس				
	Preparation الاستعداد				
2. Presentation techniques تقنية العرض	Loudness of voice وضوح الصوت				
	Eye contact النظر في الأعين				
	Facial gestures حركات الوجه				
	Pace السرعة				
	Pauses الوقفات				
	Intonation/ Clarity of speech وضوح النطق				
3. Organization التنظيم	Introduction announcing the topic/setting the scene to gain interest اعطاء مقدمة مع جلب الاهتمام للموضوع				
	Conclusion (summary & closure خاتمة وانهاء جيد للعرض				
	Using connectives استعمال الروابط بين الأفكار				

		Well done أحسنت	Good جيد	Satisfactory مرضي	Needs improvement بحاجة إلى تحسين
4. Content المضمون	Details - details & examples **تفاصيل وأمثلة**				
	Clarity of ideas **وضوح الأفكار**				
	Fluency **الطلاقة**				
5. Language اللغة	Correct tense **استعمال الزمن الصحيح**				
	Verb/ Subject agreement **تصريف الأفعال صحيحاً**				
	Accurate sentences **تركيب جمل صحيح**				

Appendix E: Self-assessment form

Self-Assessment form

<div align="right">Presentation N:</div>

Directions to the student: This self-assessment is designed to help you recognize and focus on your strengths and weaknesses as a presenter. Your responses can help you set goals to improve your speaking skills. Consider each question carefully and answer as honestly as you can.

Tick your response to each question

	Yes	No
1. I made eye contact with the audience. عندما اتكلم انظر للجميع في الاعين		
2. I was able to hold everyone's attention. كنت قادرة على يشد اهتمام الحاضرين		
3. I made appropriate pauses between ideas. كانت وقفاتي بعد كل فكرة عادية ولم تحد ث فراغا		
4. I was not hesitant and spoke confidently. لم اكن مترد دة وكنت واثقة من نفسي		
5. I spoke fluently and clearly تكلمت باسترسا ل و بوضوح		
6. I did not use negative body language. لم استعمل لغة الجسم السلبية		
7. I used appropriate connectors to link my ideas. استخدمت الروابط اللازمة بين الافكار		
8. I was able to communicate my ideas to the audience. استطعت تبليغ افكاري للاخرين		
9. I avoided pronunciation mistakes that may have affected comprehension.		
10. I presented to the audience new information. اعطيت الحاضرين معلومات جديدة		
11. I pronounced the letter 'p' correctly. نطقت حرف P صحيحا		
12. I used correct word stress patters in words. لفضت الحروف بطريقة صحيحة		
13. I used comprehensible vocabulary. استعمات مفردات معقدة نسبيا		
14. I used accurate sentences. كان تركيبي الجمل سليما		
15. After the speech I was able to answer the audience's questions knowledgeably. اجبت على الاسئلة بشكل ماهر		

Appendix F: Interview transcript (Translated from Arabic into English)

-Teacher: What are the things that you become aware of after working on this project?

-Student: I learnt how to assess myself and I realised that I have a problem in grammar and pronunciation.

-Teacher: What did learn about the task of an oral presentation?

-Student: First I learnt that I need to give a topic of interest to me and make it easy to understand for the audience. And it needs correct language and especially good pronunciation.

-Teacher: what were the pronunciation problems that you had improved?

-Student: First my voice volume was low and I used to speak in an Arabic tone. I Even improved the in pronouncing some words like the word muscle I used to pronounce it [maskil].

-Teacher: What helped most in improving yourself?

-Student: I practiced at home and there is also the website that you recommended, it helped a lot with correcting my pronunciation. Every time I wanted to check the pronunciation of a word I logged into the website.

-Teacher: What made you realize your mistakes and become aware of your weaknesses and strengths? I mean was it when you listened to your recording or the conferencing sessions or peer-assessment?

-Student: Frankly, all of them.

-Teacher: all of them!?

-Students: All of them yes, listening to my recording made realize some mistakes and also when you sat with me and told me about my mistakes and strengths that was the thing that most helped me improve and know my level. Now I know how to evaluate myself.

-Teacher: Give a percentage about how much you improved compared with the beginning of the academic year?
-Student: 50%.

-Teacher: what is the greatest achievement for you in this project?
-Students: self-confidence (…) heh self-confidence and I think I learned how to plan for a presentation and this will help me in the future.

-Teacher: Which was your best presentation and why you think it was so?
-Student: the seventh I felt that I was so self-confident and there was good vocab.

-Teacher: What are the things you did not improve?
-Student: grammar and a few other things.

-Teacher: and what prevented you from improving those things?
-Student: Frankly, it was time. Time was a real problem. If we had more time, we would have improved more and made complete presentations. If I had enough time I would have practiced more, planned better and worked more to improve myself in this project.
-Teacher: why didn't you have enough time to practice and plan for your presentations?
-Student: the other subjects. Frankly it was a hard year we had tests every day and we needed to prove ourselves and get a good score. Yes, if it weren't the problem of time I would have worked more in this project.

-Teacher: what do you think of Miss. Hayet's role in this project?
-Student: I didn't understand.

-Teacher: I mean in the past the teacher used to do everything for you, she prepares the material then she corrects your mistakes and

does almost everything, but in this project the teacher assigned you to do everything, you prepare the topic plan for the presentation and even assess yourself, so what do you think of this new method of teaching?

-Student: I think it is good, it made us love to learn more and become interested in the English subject