Teachers’ Perceived Use and Importance of Metacognitive Instruction Techniques in Japanese EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate how frequently English teachers conduct metacognitive instruction techniques in Japanese university EFL classrooms and to reveal how important they consider them. The study was composed of two studies: The preliminary study explored metacognitive instruction techniques for the construction of the questionnaire used in the current study. The participants in the preliminary study and the present study were 20 and 37 English teachers who teach/have taught oral communication in Japanese universities, respectively. Results of the questionnaire indicate that the metacognitive instruction techniques are not considered to be very important and are rather underutilised. Explanations for the results are drawn from interview data and are discussed by describing key issues. Some suggestions for further studies and pedagogical implications for metacognitive instruction are provided.

1. Introduction

Amid ongoing globalisation, English communication skills are important and are expected to be improved in university education (The Central Council for Education, 2008). However, according to the survey by the Educational Testing Service (2009), university graduates in Japan do not feel that they have obtained English communication skills that the society expects or that allow them to communicate confidently with others. This seems problematic. However, in an EFL context such as Japan, it would be a challenging task for students to improve such skills because there are few opportunities to use English outside the classroom. Besides, inside the classroom, time for English communication is limited. Accordingly, students are expected to work with othersstudy by themselves outside the classroom. Outside the classroom, learners need to take control of their learning: They need to set goals, act to achieve their goals, monitor their learning, organise their learning, motivate themselves, and reflect on their learning processes. If they achieve their goals, they need to create new or modified personal goals. Knowledge of their own learning and these self-regulatory skills such as goal-setting and reflecting on one’s own learning
are called metacognition and those self-regulatory skills are said to be characteristics of learner autonomy or self-regulators (e.g., Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006; Dickenson, 1992; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Victori & Lockhart, 1995; Wenden, 1998, 2002). Thus, metacognition plays a key role for enhancing learner autonomy.

Although there has been growing interest in application of metacognition, there is little research investigating metacognitive instruction (MI) itself in university contexts and we know very little as to how frequently MI techniques have been/have not been conducted and how they are considered in Japanese EFL classrooms. Such research has not appeared in either international journals or major Japanese language teaching and learning journals (ARELE, Language Education & Technology, JACET Journal, JALT Journal 2000-2010), which is problematic, considering the fact that promoting learner autonomy is a national university educational goal (The Central Council for Education, 2008). Therefore, this paper aims to investigate how frequently MI techniques have been conducted and how they are perceived by university English language teachers in Japan. It focuses on MI in the English communication class (OC) because as mentioned earlier, in Japan there are few opportunities to encounter English and in such a learning environment, learners’ metacognition plays a key role for their learning: If MI is successfully conducted in the OC class, students are more likely to be able to improve their English communication skills because the development of learners’ metacognition can improve the outcome of their learning (e.g., Goh, 2008; Wenden, 1998). Thus, conducting MI in the OC class is crucially important and there is, therefore, a definite need for investigating MI in the OC class for teachers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Metacognition in Language Learning

The term, metacognition was originally coined by Flavell (1976). He defines metacognition as

...one’s knowledge concerning one’s own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them...Metacognition refers, among other things, to the active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration of these processes in relation to the cognitive objects or data on which they bear, usually in the service of some concrete goal or objective. (p. 232)

In the original definition of metacognition coined by Flavell (1976, 1979), there are three dimensions of metacognitive knowledge, which are Person Knowledge (PK), Task Knowledge (TK), and Strategy Knowledge (SK). In a language learning field, PK consists of how factors such as learning style, self-efficacy, and motivation can influence language learning and it also includes beliefs about oneself as a learner. TK is knowledge about the purposes, the demands, and the
nature of learning tasks. It also includes knowledge and skills of the procedures involved in accomplishing these tasks. SK is knowledge about strategies that are likely to be effective in achieving learning goals (e.g., Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, & Tafaghodtari, 2006). It also includes knowledge about when, why, and how to use strategies in learning processes in order to achieve goals (Ozeki, 2006; Wenden, 1998).

Regulation of cognition is another important component of metacognition (Brown, 1978; Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, & Campione, 1983). This regulation includes planning, monitoring, and checking (i.e., self-regulation [SR] or metacognitive strategies [MSs]). Metacognitive Knowledge (MK) and MSs are distinct components (Wenden, 1998); however, they are “...incestuously related” (see Brown, et al., 1983, p. 107). In short, metacognition consists of MK (self-appraisal) and MSs (SR).

2.1 Rationales for Metacognition and Metacognitive Instruction

Metacognition was introduced in psychology for more than three decades ago (e.g., Flavell, 1976). Since then, there has been growing interest in application in school subjects such as mathematics and science. Metacognition has been found to be one of the most reliable predictors of learning (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1990) and found to be important to improve communication skills (Sannomiya, 2004).

Metacognition can be acquired through implicit socialization with experts such as parents, teachers, and peers; however, students need guidance through intervention so that they can evaluate themselves objectively and effectively (Flavell, 1979, 1987; Uebuchi, 2007; Umino, 2004; Veenman, Van Hout-Wolters, & Afflerbach, 2006).

In English language teaching, Wenden (1987) first paid attention to its potential for language learning. The importance of metacognition has also been emphasised in English language teaching because it provides a basis for acquiring learning strategies (e.g., Cohen, 1998; Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Ozeki, 2006; Wenden, 1987, 1998). Acquiring metacognitive strategies has been considered to promote learner autonomy (Ozeki, 2006). MI is an educational intervention to promote metacognition to enhance learner autonomy (e.g., Goh, 2008; Veenman, et al. [2006]). MI aims to develop both self-appraisal and self-regulation (Goh, 2008) and it is composed of MI techniques. For example, providing learners with opportunities to practise their metacognition is one of MI techniques.

3. Method

The objectives of the study are to investigate how frequently English teachers conduct metacognitive instruction techniques in Japanese university EFL classrooms and to reveal how important they consider them. The following section describes the preliminary study and the current study. The current study aims to answer these two research questions particularly: In the
Japanese university English communication class (OC),
1. How frequently do English teachers use metacognitive instruction techniques?
2. How important do English teachers consider metacognitive instruction techniques?

3.1 The Preliminary Study

The purpose of the preliminary study is to explore metacognitive instruction techniques from English teachers in Japan for the construction of the questionnaire of the current study.

3.1.1 Participants

Through the convenience sampling procedure, only those teachers who teach/have taught OC (i.e., where the four skills may be involved but listening and speaking activities are mainly involved) at universities in Japan were chosen for the purpose of the study. They were also chosen to achieve a certain diversity of characteristics of university teachers (e.g., their educational background, age, and students’ majors) so that they would represent the larger population (see Dömyei, 2010, pp. 59-63). In order to gather various techniques, not only Japanese teachers of English but also English language teachers who were native speakers of English were selected. Most of them (i.e., except for three teachers) were known to the researcher. Twenty English language teachers, who all hold master’s degrees in ELT, TESOL, TEFL, Second Language Acquisition, English Communication, or Applied Linguistics, contributed to the study. There were 10 native speakers and 10 Japanese teachers, teaching in a variety of universities, and many of them were teaching in a couple of universities at the same time. They also showed wide differences in their teaching experience at university level: 40% had less than 3 years’ experience (although many of them had been teaching more than 10 years in other contexts), 25% had been teaching over three years and less than 10 years, 25% had been teaching over 10 years, 10% had been teaching over 25 years. Their majority of students are: both the first and the second year students (six out of 20); mainly the first year (six out of 20); mainly the second year (five out of 20). Taken together, most of the teachers (i.e., 17 out of 20) had been teaching English to the first or the second year students mainly. Their students’ majors were: not English, that is, Arts (eight out of 20); Arts and English (six); others, for example, Arts and Science (six).

3.1.2 Instrument and procedure

In order to investigate metacognitive instruction techniques, a questionnaire was designed. The components of metacognition (i.e., MK [self-appraisal] and MSs [self-regulation]) were primarily focused on for the purpose of the survey. The selection of components of metacognition was based on the categorizations of Flavell (1979), and Brown, Bransford, Ferrara, and Campione (1983) as described in the previous section, adding the notion of Learning Context Knowledge (LCK) suggested by Sinclair (2008). The questionnaire items were reviewed by a group of English language teaching researchers first, and then the questionnaire’s format and some
wordings were changed several times so that participants could complete it more easily and the questions could become much clearer to them. Because half of the participants were native speakers of English and the other half of the participants were native speakers of Japanese, both English and Japanese versions of the questionnaires were created; it was assumed that it is less stressful for the participants to write their responses in their mother tongues. After final piloting, some changes were added and the final version of the questionnaire was e-mailed to all the participants in May and June in 2009.

The questionnaire was consisted of two sections. One section consisted of 15 Yes/No questions about the metacognitive instruction techniques in English communication classes. Sample items were “Do you teach students to be aware of what learning resources (e.g., the Internet, libraries, self-access learning centres, English language radio programs) are available and not available and why it is important to use them?” and “Do you teach students to be reflective of their own learning processes?”. If the participants chose yes to each question, they were asked to describe how they teach and why. The other section focused on demographic information: their mother tongue; educational background; teaching experiences; and major students’ year and majors. Follow-up questions were asked to the participants either through e-mails or casual interviews to clarify their answers.

3.1.3 Data analysis

In order to find out metacognitive instruction techniques, the method of analysis called template organizing style (Crabtree & Miller, 1999) was employed. In this approach, we can analyse the data with a template of codes (Dörnyei, 2007, pp. 253-4). This method therefore seems to require preparing a template first, which can be done if there is sufficient background information of the topic; however, the template can be prepared as a result of preliminary scanning of the data (i.e., finding codes in the data). The responses of the questionnaires were read over and over again and at the same time, a prepared template of codes that were relevant to this research such as goal-setting, and reflection was applied to the actual data. Some of the answers did not fit into these codes. Accordingly, new codes were added. They then were colour coded. The identified codes (open codes) were compared in order to examine any links among the codes as well. Some codes were combined consequently. For example, “using riddles and songs”, “using games”, and “having student answer from pair work to individual” became as “reducing anxiety/creating opportunities for success”. Eventually, they were categorised into 11 codes. To ensure reliability of the categorizations, one researcher who holds a PhD in TEFL, not involved in the study was asked to determine to which category each technique belonged’. Finally, the mean frequency of the codes (techniques) was quantified in order to see trends of the participants’ metacognitive instruction techniques.
3.1.4 Findings

The major explicit techniques identified in this study such as goal-setting, reflection, and discussing learning strategies/styles/experiences were similar to the techniques in the previous studies (see Chamot, 2008, pp. 269-273), although discussing learning environments was not frequently mentioned. Many of the implicit techniques revealed in this study such as creating opportunities for success and increasing the attractiveness of the task overlap with motivational strategies (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). In other words, this finding indicates that many teachers have been trying to motivate students rather than to teach them how to motivate themselves (i.e., self-motivational strategies). Some techniques revealed in Japanese context particularly (e.g., assigning small quizzes to have students regulate their learning) were added for the construction of the questionnaire for the current study. The following section describes the current study.

3.2 The Current Study

3.2.1 Participants

Thirty seven English teachers who teach/have taught (within a few years) OC at universities in Japan were recruited for the purpose of the study to ensure validity of research findings. Although in the previous study, native speakers of English were also recruited for the study in order to find out various MI techniques, for the current study, only Japanese teachers were chosen because it was assumed that their teaching styles might be different. They were carefully chosen to achieve a certain diversity of university teachers’ characteristics (e.g., their teaching contexts, age, and teaching experience) so that they would be similar to the target population (see Dörnyei, 2010, pp. 59-63). All of them hold master’s degrees and at least five participants hold PhDs. Many of them (62.2%) hold their master’s in ELT, teaching in a variety of universities, and many of them (more than 54.0%) were teaching in a couple of universities at the same time. They also showed wide differences in their teaching experience at university level: 40% had less than 3 years’ experience (although many of them had been teaching more than 10 years in other contexts), 40% had been teaching over three years and less than 10 years, 25% had been teaching over 10 years. Their majority of students are both the first and second year students (51.4%); mainly the first year (18.9%); mainly the second year (16.2%). Their students’ majors were: not English, that is, Arts (37.8%); English (13.5%); and others, for instance, Arts and Science (48.6%). Their students’ English communication level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages were: mainly A1-A2 (70.3%); A1-B1 (5.4%); B1 (8.1%); B2 (8.1%) according to the participants (8.1% unknown).

3.2.2 Instrument and procedure

The questionnaire  In order to reveal how frequently metacognitive instruction techniques were actually perceived to be used and to find out how important they were considered by the teachers, the questionnaire was constructed. The questionnaire was chosen because it is a way to
collect a huge amount of information at once (Dörnyei, 2010). Besides, it was assumed that the questionnaire was a better option than actually observing classrooms: It allows researchers to collect participants’ mental processes (e.g., the reasons why they do in a certain way). Observational data, on the contrary, does not lead to understanding participants’ minds (see Dörnyei, 2007, p. 185). Moreover, observing each single teacher for a long period of time (which is rather required because of the nature of MI) was not feasible. Furthermore, small case studies’ results can be misleading when the research context is heterogeneous: Depending on schools, goals of course coordinators (e.g., the way of teaching, use of English, use of fixed coursebooks), characteristics of teachers, and students’ needs/wants are different. Therefore, the questionnaire was chosen. After final piloting, some changes (e.g., wordings and orders) were added and the final version of the questionnaire was e-mailed or handed in to the participants in May and June in 2010. Because the participants were only Japanese university teachers, the questionnaire was written in Japanese.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section contained a several questions to elicit background information about the participants. The last two sections included the same set of metacognitive instruction techniques, and respondents were asked to rate each strategy on a five-point scale in terms of its frequency use (1: hardly ever [0%-20%] → 5: very often [80%-100%]) and its perceived importance (1: not important [0%-20%] → 5: very important [80%-100%]) during one semester. They were asked to answer all the questions in order (i.e., not to go back to the previous pages) when they filled out the questionnaire to make sure that two types of rating would not influence their answers.

The selection of the questionnaire items to be included in the questionnaire was based on the findings of the preliminary study and the literature of self-regulation (e.g., Zimmerman, 2008), learner autonomy (e.g., Dickinson, 1992, Sinclair, 2008), motivation (e.g., Dörnyei, 2009, Dörnyei and Csizér, 1998), metacognition (e.g., Flavell, 1979, Sannomiya, 2004), and strategy instruction focusing on speaking and listening (e.g., Cohen, 1998; Goh, 2008; Oxford, 1990; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010). The final version of the questionnaire contained 43 items (MK: 20; MSs: 23).

**The interviews** The semi-structured interviews were conducted in July in 2010 to explore whether the participants understand metacognitive instruction, whether they carry it out in English communication classes consciously, why they do/do not conduct metacognitive instruction, and why they do/do not think it is important, looking at their filled out questionnaires (i.e., stimulated recall). Many types of teachers (six out of 37 [not just a few] to understand situations) were chosen for the purpose of the current study (see Dörnyei, 2007, p. 153), which means not only those teachers who hardly conduct metacognitive instruction and do not consider it important but also those teachers who often conduct it were chosen. Those teachers who do not conduct but consider very important were also selected to understand situations. Three of them participated in both the preliminary study and the current study: The other three teachers participated in the current study. The interviews took approximately 20-40 minutes (27 minutes on average), were
recorded, and transcribed for analysis. The extracts presented in this paper were translated into English by the researcher. All the data in this study are presented with teachers’ identification number.

3.2.3 Data analysis

The data were analysed based on Flavell’s (1979) and Brown’s (1978) theoretical frameworks of metacognition as it has been accepted by educational researchers investigating the construct of metacognition (e.g., Goh, 2008; Vandergrift, et al., 2006). In this theoretical framework, metacognition is composed of MK (PK, TK, and SK are subcomponents of MK) and MSs (Goh, 2008). Descriptive statistics were then used to summarise sets of numerical data (see Dörnyei, 2007, pp.209, 233-6). It was assumed that simply taking the mean values of all the items is misleading as it seems that some of the items such as a long-term goal-setting strategy and emphasising its importance are not necessary to be taught over and over again; however some of the items are necessary to be taught more than once in order to develop students’ metacognition (i.e., knowledge and their self-regulating skills such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating). Therefore, to ensure reliability of categorisations, two teachers who have conducted metacognitive instruction consciously (and also understand what metacognition is) were asked to indicate which items would not be necessary to be taught over and over again. In other words, they were asked to indicate which items would be necessary to be conducted more than once. Teacher 1 and 2 had 83.7% and 88.3% of agreement of these two categories (i.e., once is enough or once is not enough), respectively. These items were omitted: items which were considered unimportant in terms of their frequency and items in which researchers did not agree. Eleven items in total (i.e., MK1-6, MS21-25) were omitted. MK1-6 are related to PK and MS21-25 are related to goal-setting techniques. It was assumed that producing statistics results of their frequency would be misleading. Therefore, the only mean score of perceived importance of each strategy of those omitted 11 items (mkp1-6, msp21-25) was calculated (in this paper, mkp and msp stand for metacognitive knowledge perceived importance and metacognitive strategies perceived importance, respectively for brevity). Thirty two items were then considered important to look at their perceived frequency as well as importance. To investigate the extent to which metacognitive instruction techniques were actually perceived to be used in English communication classrooms, the mean frequency of each strategy was calculated. The difference between the mean frequency of a strategy and the mean frequency of all the strategies (32 items) were examined so that the underutilised ones can be highlighted for teachers. Then, the importance and frequency of 32 items were compared using the average frequency of all the strategies. The following section describes the results of the omitted 11 items first and then looks at the results of the 32 items.

3.2.4 Results of the questionnaire

The omitted 11 techniques that the teachers considered somewhat important were: (a) to
mention the importance of knowing oneself as a language learner (mkp1-6); and (b) to have students make plans for their language learning and make schedules for, to set goals, and to adjust their approaches in order to achieve their goals (msp21-25).

Mean scores (with standard deviations in parentheses) of perceived importance and frequency of 32 items were 3.45(1.15), and 2.86(1.23), respectively. These results indicate that the participants considered that those 32 techniques were somewhat important and they were not frequently conducted (i.e., below 3.0). Tables 1a, 1b, and 1c show both mean frequency and mean perceived importance of the below average frequency techniques (items). Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the items on Tables 1a, 1b, and 1c were: .81, .87, .85, respectively, all indicating an acceptable level of item homogeneity. Table 1a shows that it was perceived somewhat important (i.e., 4.0 means important and 3 means more or less important) to tell students that it is useful to know learning processes and learning strategies (SK); however, they were underutilised (MK14-17, MK19).

Table 1a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Perceived Importance</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MK14</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MK15</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MK16</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MK17</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MK19</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1b shows that it was perceived more or less important to have students notice how to learn English, and to reflect on their own learning; however, they were also underutilised.

Table 1b

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Perceived Importance</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MS27</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MS28. To have students notice a repertoire of their own learning strategies and notice that they can make use of a variety of learning strategies

MS30. To have students reflect on their own learning environment in order to make use of it

MS31. To have students think and alter their approaches (or goals) when they fail to achieve their goals

MS32. To have students reflect on their own learning processes

Table 1c below shows that during the activity in the English language communication class, to have learners monitor (e.g., noticing, checking, revising, and evaluating) was underutilised (i.e., below 2.86) and to have learners reflect on their learning and to transfer their strategy to new tasks were rarely done (MS35, 36, MS41-43).

Table 1c
Mean Frequency and Perceived Importance (below average frequency items) $\alpha = .85$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Perceived Importance</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MS35. To have students monitor their own cognition during doing the task (e.g., to have students notice or evaluate what is going well and what is not)</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS36. To have students check whether their predication is right so that they can achieve the task (goal)</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS41. To have students evaluate how knowledge worked well (e.g., knowing liaison is useful for listening)</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS42. To have students evaluate their own learning strategies</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS43. To have students transfer their learning strategies into new tasks</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the findings show that most metacognitive instruction techniques were not considered important and were rather underutilised. Table 2 below illustrates then the techniques that the participants considered the most important (i.e., above 4.0 mean score).

Table 2
Three Items That Teachers Considered The Most Important (above 4.0)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mkp12. To tell students that it is useful to set goals or to plan learning schedules</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>msp26. To have students study regularly by giving out small quizzes</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>msp39. To have students check what they could not understand</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In summary, to teach learners how to learn English was not considered very important. Both to tell students the importance of metacognition (see Table 1a) and to provide students with opportunities to activate their metacognition, such as goal-setting, monitoring, and reflecting were underutilised (see Tables 1b and 1c). In other words, the 32 items were not considered very important and were rather underutilised. The items considered important were only three (see Table 2).

4. Discussion

This section draws five possible explanations for the results of the current study from the interview data. There is not enough space in this paper to illustrate all the data for the explanations and therefore, some of them are shown.

First, as one of the interviewees expressed his concern about whether MI should be conducted in an English language only (or in other subjects as well), our major issue would be that to date there has been no systematic study in terms of MI despite its increased interest, as stated earlier.

Second, as discussed in Veenman, et al. (2006), interview data indicate that teachers cannot conduct metacognitive instruction because of the intention of course coordinators. Examples are drawn from the interviews:

Well, it’s a little difficult for me to integrate (metacognitive instruction) into the actual classes I have at the moment, well, time is limited [...] a problem with the curriculum (T2)

And from the school, I’m encouraged to have my students just have fun, so the program is not suited for (metacognitive instruction) (T3)

(Translation mine)

Third, as also discussed in Veenman, et al. (2006), it can be argued that some teachers do not know how to conduct MI. As stated earlier, this may be partly because of lack of information about MI, however. Some interviewees commented looking at their questionnaires:

Ah, why I don’t conduct (metacognitive instruction), is because I do not have any experience of being taught, maybe that’s the main reason. If you ask me why not, I think that’s because I don’t see the necessity (of metacognitive instruction) and I don’t know how (to conduct) (T1)

Well, first of all, I don’t know about metacognition well (T3)
was a teacher who had indicated on her questionnaire that all the MI techniques had been hardly done (i.e., 0%~20% during a semester). It should be noted, however, that knowing what MI is does not necessarily lead to utilising MI techniques, and vice versa.

Fourth, teachers' beliefs/assumptions seem to keep the teachers from conducting MI: Many teachers commented that they do not conduct MI because of their students' needs/wants or readiness (i.e., their students' needs/wants, level of English or majors may not be suited for MI, or their students may not be ready for MI). These can be seen in the following examples:

My students are not good at English, you know and they have failed in English for six years, since junior high school and high school, and if I hustle them to English, English, English, they get allergic to it, I think. I don't hustle them intentionally... (T3)

Hmm, to tell metacognitive stuff to those students who don't summarize their own learning strategies seems, er, well, I think I come to think of, "Is it really meaningful?" (T6)

Fifth, it can be argued that teachers' awareness towards MI seems low: With respect to an issue of time, T2 expressed her second thought:

I haven't realised yet that this is that important in the oral communication class, I guess. That's why I didn't conduct (these metacognitive instruction techniques) maybe. Even if we have a constraint in terms of time, we do conduct (these metacognitive instruction techniques) if we think this is very important, right? (T2)

5. Conclusion and Implications

The explanations/findings like those above clearly indicate that further research for metacognitive instruction is needed: First, systematic research would be needed so that teachers (course coordinators included) can access to information about MI more easily. Teachers (course
coordinators included) and researchers should tackle this systematically and cooperatively because this is not just an issue of English language teaching (e.g., whether MI should be conducted in an English language course only) as discussed earlier. Second, how to achieve the university educational goal and how to design curriculum must be considered so that teachers can conduct MI more efficiently and effectively. Course coordinators would play a key role for this curriculum development (e.g., Pressley & Gaskins, 2006; Veenman, et al., 2006). Lastly, in order to raise awareness towards MI, teacher training would be needed. The following paragraphs show pedagogical implications for the three techniques that the participants considered the most important for teachers (i.e., mkp12, msp26, and msp39).

Spending time in the English classroom on goal-setting (m kp12) is important because without goals, students cannot evaluate their learning effectively (e.g., Schunk, 2003). Setting goals is one of the most important strategies for students to regulate their learning. Envisioning an ideal self is crucial to motivate oneself; however, it is effective only when it is accompanied by a set of concrete/visualised action plans and a repertoire of appropriate self-regulatory strategies (e.g., Dörnyei, 2009). Thus, teachers can spend a little time (e.g., 10 minutes) on goal-setting with reflection and sharing how to learn English, for example. Also, it can be carried out after teachers have learners check what they cannot understand (msp39).

Giving out quizzes (msp26) seems important because students are more likely to be motivated to study for quizzes to pass the course. Then again, it is important to encourage students to reflect on their learning processes regularly so that they can set a specific goal for the quiz as well as perceive that they can control their own learning: If students perceive that they can regulate their learning, it enhances their self-efficacy. They then become able to take more responsibility for their academic learning (e.g., Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2009). Therefore, this technique should be applied in English language classrooms (OC).

Finally, limitations of this study need to be considered: (a) it included teachers who were native speakers of English in the preliminary study and therefore, the findings of the preliminary study might have represented a certain bias; and (b) it focused on the English communication class (OC), and therefore no implications for metacognitive instruction in the writing or reading class can be drawn from the results.

Despite these limitations, the present study has enhanced our understanding of MI in the OC class and has discussed the issues involved: It has investigated how frequently metacognitive instruction techniques were actually perceived to be used and how important they were perceived by the university English language teachers in the English communication class. The findings have shown that the techniques were not considered very important and were rather underutilised. The present study has drawn the five possible explanations for the results from the interview data: (a) there is no systematic study of metacognitive instruction; (b) teachers cannot conduct metacognitive instruction because of the constrains of course coordinators; (c) teachers do not know how to develop learners’ metacognition; (d) teachers’ beliefs/assumptions seem to keep the
teachers from conducting metacognitive instruction; and (e) teachers’ awareness towards MI seems rather low. It has suggested what would be needed to be considered for further studies for MI: (a) systematic research; (b) curriculum development; and (c) teacher training. It has also provided important educational implications for teachers: In the OC class, for enhancing students’ metacognition, (a) teachers can encourage goal-setting techniques with other self-regulatory strategies such as planning and monitoring; and (b) teachers can also encourage reflection as well as goal-setting after giving out quizzes.

Note

1 Inter-rater reliability for the explicit techniques was not high enough for results to be considered reliable when we individually categorised them for the first time although this must be because we categorised differently one of the techniques, “orientation”, which occurred frequently in the data. Therefore, we discussed items in which there was uncertainty until an agreement was reached.

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