

## Self-Awareness Levels of English Language Teacher Trainees

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### Abstract

Learning ability develops naturally through time. However, to do so, we need to change and adapt ourselves to changing conditions which lead to lifelong learning. Most students do not change because they do not recognize that a problem exists or they do not realize the significance of learning strategies. They are unaware that their learning activities can cause problems for them or they do not have any clues as to which learning skills are necessary for them to perform better. To foster achievement, increase enjoyment, and to utilize the learning time better, most students need to change for better. The factors ranging from motivation, to time management, memory skills, text learning, representations-graphic organizers, and lecture learning constitute the key elements of this study which aims at investigating the study skill awareness levels of teacher trainees. In order to see how cognizant English language teacher trainees are, a self-awareness scale developed by Kiewra & Dubois (1998) was administered to 240 sophomores and junior students at the English Language Teaching Department. Then they were compared with each other to investigate whether time might enhance the self-awareness level or not. The third aspect of the study is to tackle whether there is a correlation between the teacher trainees' general academic proficiency scores and their self-awareness levels.

**Keywords:** Awareness, Teacher trainees, Study skills, Proficiency, Time.

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### Introduction

When we think of our own education we should think whether somebody has taught us how to motivate ourselves, manage time, mark a text, study for various types of texts. Teachers do not dwell upon imposing and transmitting such skills to their students. Only a few of learners know how to acquire skills and how to survive in lifelong learning, which is defined as the act of acquiring new, or modifying and reinforcing, existing knowledge, behaviours, skills, values, or preferences and may involve synthesizing different types of information. As time goes by, most of us develop into better learners.

Being aware of one's shortcomings and strengths is crucial to be better. Kiewra & Dubois (1998) come up with some subheadings to enable learners to be more cognizant of themselves: motivation, time management, memory, representations, text learning, lecture learning, review, real-world applications.

### Motivation

Believing that you lack ability is dangerous, because it can rule out how you use strategies and spend time. Attributing low performance to low ability is not helpful for the learners as this precludes people from trying harder. In the same way, equating success with high ability is wrong because such people do not try hard and they resist achieving more and harder. People perform better not because of their ability but skill and will.

Motivated students do not let anything get in the way of performing their tasks. According to Ellis (2008, p. 708) earlier studies on motivated language learners showed five major aspects of successful language learning:

- (1) a concern for language form,
- (2) a concern for communication (functional practice),
- (3) an active task approach,
- (4) an awareness of the learning process, and
- (5) a capacity to use strategies flexibly in accordance with task requirements. To some scholars (Naiman, 1978; 1996; Ur, 2005) the characteristics of successful and motivated learners are listed as below:

- Positive task orientation
- Ego involvement
- Need for achievement
- High aspirations
- Goal orientation
- Perseverance
- Tolerance of ambiguity

### **Text learning and memory**

Oakley's list (2014) highlights some tips for studying effectively and fruitfully:

1. Using recall. After you read a page, look away and recall the main ideas. Highlight very little, and never highlight anything you haven't put in your mind first by recalling. Try recalling main ideas when you are walking to class or in a different room from where you originally learned it. An ability to recall—to generate the ideas from inside yourself—is one of the key indicators of good learning.
2. Testing yourself.
3. Chunking problems. Chunking is understanding and practicing with a problem solution so that it can all come to mind in a flash. After you solve a problem, rehearse it. Make sure you can solve it cold—every step. Pretend it's a song and learn to play it over and over again in your mind, so the information combines into one smooth chunk you can pull up whenever you want.
4. Spacing repetition. Spread out your learning in any subject a little every day, just like an athlete. Your brain is like a muscle—it can handle only a limited amount of exercise on one subject at a time.
5. Alternating different problem-solving techniques during practice. Never practice too long at any one session using only one problem-solving technique—after a while, you are just mimicking what you did on the previous problem. Mix it up and work on different types of problems. This teaches you both how and when to use a technique. (Books generally are not set up this way, so you'll need to do this on your own.) After every assignment and test, go over your errors, make sure you understand why you made them, and then rework your solutions. To study most effectively, handwrite (don't type) a problem on one side of a flash card and the solution on the other. (Handwriting builds stronger neural structures in memory than typing.) You might also photograph the card if you want to load it into a study app on your smartphone. Quiz yourself randomly on different types of problems. Another way to

do this is to randomly flip through your book, pick out a problem, and see whether you can solve it cold.

6. Taking breaks. It is common to be unable to solve problems or figure out concepts in math or science the first time you encounter them. This is why a little study every day is much better than a lot of studying all at once. When you get frustrated with a math or science problem, take a break so that another part of your mind can take over and work in the background.

7. Using explanatory questioning and simple analogies. Whenever you are struggling with a concept, think to yourself, How can I explain this so that a ten-year-old could understand it? Using an analogy really helps, like saying that the flow of electricity is like the flow of water. Don't just think your explanation—say it out loud or put it in writing. The additional effort of speaking and writing allows you to more deeply encode (that is, convert into neural memory structures) what you are learning.

8. Focusing. Turn off all interrupting beeps and alarms on your phone and computer, and then turn on a timer for twenty-five minutes. Focus intently for those twenty-five minutes and try to work as diligently as you can. After the timer goes off, give yourself a small, fun reward. A few of these sessions in a day can really move your studies forward. Try to set up times and places where studying—not glancing at your computer or phone—is just something you naturally do.

9. Eating frogs first. Do the hardest thing earliest in the day, when you are fresh.

10. Making a mental contrast. Imagine where you come from and contrast that with the dream of where your studies will take you. Post a picture or words in your workspace to remind you of your dream. Look at that when you find your motivation lagging.

### **Study skills during lectures**

To get the full profit from the lectures, it is possible to divide the lecture session into three: Before, during and after the lecture. Before the lecture, preparing emotionally, physically and mentally is crucial. Physical preparation requires being on time, being up front, sitting on the edge, keeping the materials ready. During the lecture, note-taking, recording main ideas, details, examples, asking questions to the instructor are essential activities for students to fulfill.

If you simply put your notes away and don't look at them again, it is likely you will forget about 80% of the lecture within as little as a week.

So what can students do after a lecture to help them remember?

- Soon after the lecture, spending a little time thinking about and writing what they have learnt without consulting notes. This gets your brain to process the information and makes a good basis for revision notes later.
- Talking with friends - check what they understood and compare what they found out...
- Skimming over notes - identify any gaps you need to fill, then do some extra reading to fill them!
- Doing a coversheet or spider diagram summarising the key points of the lecture as a trigger when it comes to revising.
- Having a simple and easy to use filing system so they can find everything again e.g. a box file for each module. <http://www.palgrave.com/studentstudyskills/page/learning-strategies/>

### **Method**

#### *Participants*

In order to see how cognizant English language teacher trainees are, a self-awareness scale developed by Kiewra & Dubois (1998) was administered to 240 sophomores and junior students at

the English Language Teaching Department. 120 of them were in the second year of their study at the university, the other 120 in their third year.

#### *Instrument*

The scale of self-awareness was developed from the ideas of Kiewra & Dubois (1998) and tested for reliability with the fourth year students at the Faculty of Education. The reliability is found, 93.

### **Results and Discussion**

When the items are analysed closely, it is easy to see that language teachers' awareness in terms of learning styles, committing the new items to memory (1,8 to 2,2), revision (ranging from 1,9 to 2,5) and relating to real life score very poorly (1,9 to 2,4). However, on the other hand, their time management skills (3,5) outscore the others and their overall motivation is considered not as high (varying between 2,2 and 2,5).

Table 1 shows the relationship between gender and the awareness levels. There is a significant difference in the awareness levels in terms of gender. Girls are more cognizant of the importance of time management and listening to the lectures.

Table 1. *Paired Samples Statistics between gender and awareness*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	gender	1,2883	240	,47458	,04505		
	total	133,9910	240	22,21199	2,10827	,287	,002

In terms of the relationship between ages and awareness levels of the pre-service teachers, since there is no huge gap between their ages, the results show there is no significant difference of the awareness levels in terms of age (.086)

Table 2 shows that GPA is closely affiliated with the awareness levels of the pre-service teachers. The higher their grades are, the more aware they are in terms of motivation, study skills, real life adaptations, revisions, time management and representations.

Table 2. *Paired Samples Statistics between GPA and awareness*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	GPA	2,2432	240	,71626	,06798	n	
	total	133,9910	240	22,21199	2,10827	,273	,004

In terms of class, there is no significant difference between the classes and the awareness levels of pre-service teachers. (.372)

### **Conclusion**

The results of the scale show that the pre-service English language teachers:

- are not highly motivated
- are certain that poor teachers, unfair tests and personal problems cause bad grades.
- are not good at using memory and rehearsal strategies to retain the new items of knowledge in their minds
- are not successful in grouping the ideas, finding out key words and the crucial structures
- do not know how to survey the table of contents, highlight the material, generate representations and summarize the passage, in short, they are not capable of using the reading strategies successfully

--do not revise the class

--cannot relate what they have learned to the real life situations, cannot monitor their thoughts in real life settings.

Such dynamic assessment of students' learning strategies and awareness serves a number of pedagogical purposes. First, it reflects back to the learner what they say about themselves in relation to their awareness of themselves and the learning process. Second, it reflects back to the teacher data about individuals, and groups, which can be used for diagnosing what is needed to move forward in the development of self-awareness, ownership and responsibility for learning. Third, the dimensions of learning power provide scaffolding for the ways in which students encounter the formal content of the curriculum and adjust themselves for the more fruitful learning process.

A sense of identity and ownership is crucial if students are to become intentional learners, taking responsibility for their own learning journey and making sense of the 'public funds of knowledge' which are their entitlement. Often knowledge is introduced to learners from the 'top down', acquired from a central fund. The dynamic assessment of learning power facilitates a 'bottom-up' learning journey which begins with the experience and choice of the learner. Identity is a troublesome concept, but being able to complete statements such as 'I am the sort of learner who usually . . . ' or 'I am the sort of learner who likes to . . . ' can be affirmations that build the self-knowledge and self-confidence necessary for a healthy identity (Crick, 2007, p.151).

The learning journey is scaffolded towards a more personally owned construction of knowledge through dialogue, using learning power dimensions, in which attention moves between the person and the 'knowledge' to be acquired, in the context of experience. When learners are cognizant of their strengths and the ways to amend themselves, they can be successful towards the learning process (Hattie, 1996, Jaros & Crick, 2006). To put it simply, metacognitive awareness, study skills and strategies are necessary for the learning journey.

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