

# **An Investigation into the Metacognitive Writing Strategies of Turkish Cypriot University Students**

Özge Razi,  
School of Education,  
Trinity College,  
University of Dublin  
Dublin - Ireland

## **Abstract**

This paper presents findings from a study done in an English preparatory school of a University in North Cyprus. The study focused on the use and awareness of metacognitive learning strategies in relation to writing skills. Data collection was done through the means of quantitative, student-questionnaire, and qualitative, teacher-interview, measures. The findings show that less than half of the participants used and were aware of metacognitive learning strategies. Although teachers mentioned such strategies during the lessons, according to the questionnaire results, less than half of the 250 participants used strategies or had awareness of them. Conclusion would, therefore, be that mentioning strategies to encourage students to use strategies is not enough. A statistically significant correlation between the success rate and metacognitive strategy use and awareness was proved in support of the findings in the literature. The implication of this finding for teachers is that, implementing strategy instruction in our classrooms could increase the success of students and, as the success rate of the students is increased, they will use more strategies with an increased awareness.

**Key words:** Metacognitive learning strategies, success, writing skills, university students, teachers

## **Introduction**

Turkish students who learn English as a foreign language usually find it difficult to write in L2 (refer to appendix 2, lines 36 to 49). This could be due to over dependence on the teachers which prevents them from becoming autonomous students. Autonomy is very important especially for developing writing skills. The term 'learner autonomy' can be derived from research into language learning strategies (LLS). LLS have been defined as "special ways of processing information that enhance comprehension, learning, or retention of information" (O'Malley and Chamot 1990: 1). Research into the role LLS play in language learning showed that they may facilitate positive effects on students' learning, and autonomous learners seem to have learned how to use them in a way that makes their learning easier and faster.

This study aimed, first, to investigate whether students at the School of Foreign Languages Intensive English Division (SFLIED) in a university in North Cyprus use metacognitive learning strategies (MLS) in their writing and whether they were aware of them; second, to explore whether their teachers taught MLS in the classroom. Since these students were getting prepared to attend the university where written assignments were done in English, metacognition in writing is especially important for them in order to be successful in their course work at the university; third, to study the relationship between the use and awareness of MLS use and students' grades.

The next section presents a brief account of a literature review on the LLS, MLS, writing and teachers' role in the teaching of strategies.

## **Background: Language Learning Strategies (LLS)**

Research in LLS was first done by the studies of Rubin (1971 cited in Rubin, 1987: 20). It can be divided into two main periods: 70s starting with Rubin's (1971) work and 80s starting from Wenden and Rubin's (1987) publication. Oxford (1990) developed the Strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL); O'Malley and Chamot (1990) with their book named 'Learning strategies in second language acquisition'; other important publications in the LLS field are: Rubin, 1975& 1981, O'Malley et al. (1985), and Cohen, 1995& 2003. The majority of the earlier researchers in the LLS field used diaries and questionnaires to collect analytical data (Chamot, 1987; Oxford & Ehrman 1995; and Wharton, 2000).

Researchers such as Yuzbasioglu (1991), Diken (1993), conducted research on Turkish Cypriot adult university students to evaluate their learning strategy use. Yuzbasioglu concluded that students had problems in using MLS, they used strategies unsuccessfully even though they knew the strategies were not successful because they had no alternative. Diken (1993) stated that the main factor that differentiated between good and poor readers was not experience in English, but the effective use of MLS.

Vann and Abraham (1990: 191) conducted a study on assessing task demands and concluded that students who lacked the necessary MLS that would help them to assess the task and choose appropriate strategies. Park (1997) used TOFEL mean scores to be able to measure students' grades; she found that higher grade holders used more strategies than middle grade holders, and middle grade holders used more strategies than lower grade holders. She comments that "the more students use language learning strategies, the higher their TOFEL scores". The findings of this study show that grades of the students and the use of MLS have a positive correlation. This finding shows that successful students used more MLS and less successful students used them less. Philips (1991) reported in his research that students who have average success (medium grade holders) use more LLS than successful students (high grade holders) and less successful students (low grade holders). He suggests that this might be because of less successful students' lack of awareness and successful students' lack of need for strategy use. Students can not use strategies if they do not understand anything about the activity and they do not need to use strategies if the activity is very easy for them.

Research has also been done on the impact of strategies on the writing skills. Historically, writing was viewed as a linear and a simplistic activity. However, contemporary models of writing explain it as a process rather than a product. The process of writing involves cognitive, linguistic, affective, behavioural and physical characters. Application of MLS in writing should be viewed as part of 'process writing' research (Manchon et al., 2007), because MLS are used in the process of writing and are only useful when used during the writing activity.

Research on LLS has the potential to impact various fields, but it is specifically done to inform classroom practice. Researchers such as Smith et al. (2007), Conner (2007), show that students who used MLS wrote good quality essays. Smith et al. (2007) used three groups of

9<sup>th</sup> grade students, only one of the groups received metacognitive questions in relation to the structured journal-writing activity. One of the groups received no questions at all and the other group received cognitive and text related questions. After a 12-week period, students' responses, to journal writing questions were compared to their grades. The results showed that grades of the first group were higher than the other groups, because they received metacognitive questions. So, use of metacognitive questions increased students' achievement in writing. The researchers pointed to the importance of teacher modelling on a consistent basis. Similarly, Conner (2007) conducted a study on final year high school students. Semi-structured interviews with sixteen students were done and their essays were used to investigate the relationship between strategy use and sophistication of their essays. The results showed that students who produced quality essays used MLS to plan and monitor their work more than students whose essays were of poor quality. Also, students who achieved better in essay writing had a higher level of self-awareness. Conner (2007) highlights the importance of teacher cuing in the classroom.

Berthold et al. (2007) and Nückles et al. (2009) showed in their papers that appropriate prompts in the classroom encourage students to use LLS, which has an important implication for classroom practice. Berthold et al. conducted a study on 84 undergraduate students. In this study, prompts in the form of questions were used to investigate whether application of sophisticated LLS use could be fostered through journal writing. The results showed that prompts had a very large effect on cognitive and MLS (ibid: 573). The implication of this study for classroom practice is that prompting is useful to encourage student use of LS. As suggested by the researchers, if students are convinced about the usefulness of LS, the impact of prompting is likely to be bigger. Nückles et al. (2009) conducted a follow up study after Berthold et al. (2007). This study involved 103 undergraduate students and was done in a pre- and post-test experimental design. Similar to the previous study, prompts were used to encourage strategy use. The findings showed that explicit prompts were useful in activating LLS. Although explicit prompts can activate strategies, it may not ensure successful application of them and may foster only a limited use. Nevertheless, prompts in the form of questions could be less time consuming for teachers than an explicit strategy instruction.

The following section presents the methodological part of the study.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Questions and Hypothesis**

The study considered the following research questions:

1. Do teachers at SFLIED teach MLS?
2. How often do SFLIED students use MLS?
3. Is there a correlation between proficiency level (students' grades) and frequencies of use and awareness of MLS?

Owing to Philip's (1991) research on LLS and students' grades, the following research hypothesis was adopted in relation to the third research question:

Among grade groups, medium grade holders were assumed to use more MLS than successful and less successful students.

### **Participants and context**

250 Turkish and Turkish Cypriot students studying at the SFLIED and 6 of their teachers participated in the study. Out of 250 students, 185 were from Turkey and 62 were from Cyprus. There were 94 students between 16-18 years of age and 156 students between 19-24.

89 Participants were female and 161 were male. The study involved students from various English proficiency levels. There were 67 elementary, 68 intermediate, 68 pre-intermediate and 47 upper-intermediate level students. The students were required to complete portfolios during the course of study. The portfolios consisted of essays written in English. Their portfolio grades, which were out of 7.5, were used to indicate their success rate in writing in English. In this study, there were 18 weak (between 1-3.5), 61 medium (between 4-5.5), and 97 good (between 6-7.5) students; 74 students preferred not to share their portfolio grades.

The students' aim was to improve their English to be able to successfully study at the university where the medium of instruction was English, and where most of the assignments and exams were written. In order to be successful, they had to improve themselves in written English rapidly. Students studying at SFLIED, regardless of the level they were studying at, had to complete an eight-week module. After each eight-week module they had to take an exam, if they passed the exam successfully they moved to a higher level, if they failed they had to repeat the same module. Within this intensive one-year course, teachers' aim was to get students prepared for the up-coming English proficiency exams. The aim of this study is to

show that MLS played an important role in the success of these students and, that it is necessary to add MLS in such an intensive English course.

### **Data Collection**

Quantitative data in the form of student questionnaires and qualitative data in the form of structured interviews were obtained. The questionnaire (see app. 1) consisted of 2 sections: the first section was on the student's background, and the second section had questions in a Likert-type scale. There were 32 questions involving 11 planning, 14 evaluation, 2 monitoring strategies and 5 self-awareness, in relation to writing skills. The questions were mixed up in the final form of the questionnaire in order to prevent student guesses. It was adapted from Hong's (2005) unpublished MEd dissertation and some of the questions were rewritten. Students' portfolio grades were used as an indication for success in writing. Also, a structured interview (see app. 2) was done with teachers, the interview consisted of eight questions and was done with six teachers of the students participated in the study. The main aim of the interview was to investigate whether teachers thought strategies were important, whether they did anything in terms of strategy instruction, what they thought about their students' strategy use when writing.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data was analysed in the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). The following statistical tests were used on the quantitative data.

1. Frequency and Percentage distributions of each question in the questionnaire were taken.
2. The overall mean of the sub-topics of MLS was taken.
3. Mean of the success variable was taken together with each sub-topic of MLS. The means were compared by using one-way ANOVA.

Qualitative data was analyzed in NVivo. Each teacher was given a code according to the level they were teaching: Elementary teacher was coded as 'E', Pre-intermediate teacher as 'P', Intermediate teacher as 'I', and Upper-intermediate teacher as 'U'.

## **General Findings**

This section focuses on the analysis of the research findings. The findings include the results of the student questionnaire, and teacher interviews.

### **Findings I: Frequency of Metacognitive Learning Strategy Use**

The frequency and percentage distribution (see app. 3) of each question was taken in SPSS to clearly see how often each strategy was used by the students. Only the strategies that were used by more than 50 per cent of the students will be presented here.

Among 11 planning strategies, only three were used by more than half of the students. According to this, more than half of the students, 'selected the topic which they knew the most about' (question 6), 'brainstormed before they chose the essay topic to write about' (question 12) and 'thought whether they could actually relate the essay topic to their own experiences' (question 25). Among 14 evaluation strategies, only one: 'using words that they were sure of the meaning'(question 7) was used by more than half of the students. Non of the monitoring strategies were used by half of the students and only few students had awareness of MLS.

The overall mean of each subgroup of MLS was taken to clearly see the frequency of use by the strategy category: planning, monitoring, evaluation and self-awareness. According to the results, the means are as follows: Planning is 3.86; Evaluation is 3.59; Self Awareness is 3.66; and Monitoring is 3.70. The results show that, although planning was the most used strategy among others, even it was used narrowly.

### **Findings II: The Teacher Interviews**

In this section, findings from the teachers' interviews are presented. There are line numbers in parenthesis where relevant; they refer to extracts taken from the teachers' interviews which are in appendix 2. The interview extracts are organised under the interview questions for clarity. The line numbers in the parenthesis below refer to extracts of the teacher interviews.

According to teachers' interview results (see app. 2) teachers focused mainly on planning strategies such as organizing ideas (Lines: 1,32-33), brainstorming (Lines:

5,6,15,31,75,79,81,87,89,92,97,100), planning (Line: 15), formatting (Lines: 13,15-16-17,21,24,29,100), outlining (Lines: 19,31,97), reading instructions (Line: 37) and essay topics carefully in an exam (Lines: 12,35,36,44), and giving clear examples (Lines: 12,45,97,105). The teachers also asked students to evaluate themselves after they finished writing (Lines: 76,94). However, they stated that there was no time to do proof reading and editing (Lines: 76,77,85,90,95) which are part of evaluation strategies.

Teachers were concerned about relevance (Lines: 24-25,26,29,35), vocabulary use (Lines: 24-25,26-27,34,41,57,58,64,72), and fluency of the composition/essay (Line: 29) which are evaluation related; and grammar use (Lines: 24,26,32,34,36,41,64,74), spelling (Lines: 25,32), punctuation (Lines: 32,34) and accuracy (Line: 29) which are monitoring related.

According to the teachers students had difficulties in the following areas: reading instructions carefully (Line: 37), writing topic sentences and thesis statements (Line: 44), and using good examples (Lines: 12,45,97,105), that are planning related.

The teachers also stated that students were weak at grammar (Lines: 24,26,32,34,36,41,64,74) and the use of linkers (Lines: 20,21,42,60,70), that are monitoring related. Lastly, a teacher stated that the students were irrelevant (Line: 36): that is evaluation related.

They recommended students to watch DVDs (Line: 58), read books (Line: 58), use new vocabulary in sentences (Lines: 57-58), use the internet (Line: 67) use more resources, simplify their ideas (Line: 70), use more linkers (Line: 70) and English expressions (Line: 71), work on grammar more (Line: 74), and they asked students to find their own mistakes (Lines: 9,77,79,91) in their compositions/ essays.

Finally, each teacher had different style of teaching strategies, some preferred lecturing at the beginning of the semester (Lines: 99,100), some preferred introducing them at the beginning of the writing class (Lines: 96-98,106,107), and other preferred doing both (Lines: 101-105,108-110).

### **Findings III: Success Variable**

The portfolio grades of the students were used as success rate indication. The grades were grouped under four categories according to teachers' comments on the success rate of the



	Weak (N=18)		Medium (N=61)		Good (N=97)		No answer (N=74)		F	p
	X	SD	X	SD	X	SD	X	SD		
<b>Planning</b>	3.74	0.36	3.84	0.56	4.03	0.41	3.68	0.45	8.27	<b>0.00*</b>
<b>Evaluation</b>	3.45	0.40	3.57	0.54	3.71	0.42	3.48	0.48	4.09	<b>0.00*</b>
<b>Self-Awareness</b>	3.43	0.58	3.71	0.56	3.83	0.54	3.55	0.59	4.85	<b>0.00*</b>
<b>Self-Monitoring</b>	3.75	0.69	3.79	0.70	3.71	0.85	3.47	0.84	2.02	0.11**

grades: from 1 to 3.5 was weak, 4 to 5.5 was medium, and 6 to 7.5 was good; the fourth group preferred not to share their grades.

**Table 1.** One-Way ANOVA Test

One-Way ANOVA test in SPSS (see Table 1) was done to compare the grade groups to each MLS category. The (p) probability scores on Table 1 show the statistical significance of the findings. The scores of planning, evaluation strategies and self-awareness are smaller than 0.05 which means that the findings are statistically significant. This Table shows that good students used more strategies, with a mean score of 4.03 for planning, 3.71 for evaluation and 3.83 for self-awareness, than medium and weak students.

Statistics showed that ‘good students’ used MLS the most and were more aware of them compared to the rest of the students. The second most frequent users of the MLS were ‘medium students’. This finding proved the hypothesis, which was presented in the methodology, wrong. According to the hypothesis, ‘medium students’ would have used more strategies than the others. However ‘good students’, in this study, used more MLS than the others. This finding supports the findings of Park (1997) and contradicted to the findings of Philip (1991).

Furthermore, a Pearson Correlation Coefficient Test was run to determine relationship between students’ grades and MLS use together with their awareness (see Table 2).

<b>Grades and Metacognitive Learning Strategy use and Awareness Correlations</b>			
		<b>Grade</b>	<b>Total mean</b>
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	1	.157*
	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>		.013
	<b>N</b>	250	250
<b>Total mean</b>	<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	.157*	1
	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	.013	
	<b>N</b>	250	250

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Table 2.** Grades and Metacognitive Learning Strategy Use and Awareness Correlations

According to Pearson Correlation Coefficient Test (see Table 2), there is a strong, positive correlation between students' grades and MLS use and awareness, which is statistically significant ( $r = .157$ ,  $n = 250$ ,  $P < .05$ ). The two tailed significance (p value) is 0.013, smaller than 0.05, which shows that the result is statistically significant. The value of the Pearson Correlation shows the direction of correlation. The Pearson Correlation is 0.157, falls between 0 and 1, which shows that the correlation is positive. These numbers show that, the higher the students' grade the more MLS are used, the lower their grades the less MLS are used. In other words, as students' grades increased they used more MLS with more awareness, and vice versa.

The next section includes discussions on the students' questionnaire and the teachers' interview.

**Discussion I: Frequency of Students' Strategy Use and Teachers' Interviews**

This section brings together the findings of frequency and percentage of students' MLS use and self-awareness, and the teachers' interviews in a discussion. These two findings complement each other. Thereby, both the teachers' and the students' side of the issue is shown.

The findings on the frequency of strategy use showed that half or more than half of the students used only three planning strategies among 11, one evaluation strategy among 14, none of the monitoring strategies and they did not have any self-awareness about MLS. These findings point at the weakness of students and lack of training in terms of strategy use. Frequency of strategy use does not mean much on its own; however narrow range of strategies known by students and lack of self-awareness could have a negative impact on success in writing. Yuzbasioglu (1991) showed that Turkish Cypriot university students used strategies unsuccessfully because they had no alternative and this impacted on their success. Therefore, it is useful for students if a range of strategies are brought to their attention. The students, in this study, were weak at applying MLS to writing despite that their teachers mentioned such strategies in the classroom. Writing, in the past, was viewed as a linear activity, but the contemporary view sees it as a 'process of writing' (Manchon et al., 2007) which involves various characters, use of strategies is one of them. Teacher-participants, in

this study, were aware that writing was a process rather than a product. The teacher interviews showed that they mentioned some of the strategies involved in this study. They mainly focused on planning strategies, but they also focused on evaluation and asked students to monitor themselves during exams. Despite this, only a few students used some of them, and less than half of the students had self-awareness in relation to MLS. The reason, as the teachers stated, could be that there was not enough time in the classroom to focus on strategies. Teacher I3 (Lines: 89-91) stated that they do peer-evaluation when they have time, most of the teachers asked students to do brainstorming, as a planning activity, before they started writing, but they only reminded students that they needed to monitor themselves as they wrote. Makhtari & Sheorey (2002) suggested that good readers are able to reflect on and monitor their own cognitive processes while reading. Casanave (1988), in her study on comprehension monitoring in ESL reading, stated that successful reading “depends on their (students’) ability to monitor what they understand and to take appropriate strategic action”, which, I think, applies to writing too. Some allocation of time to strategy teaching could increase students’ self-awareness. According to learner strategies studies (Chamot & Kupper, 1989 and O’Malley & Chamot 1990), successful language learners are aware of which strategies they use and they select the most suitable ones for themselves. They can also explain why they use certain kind of strategies. Makhtari & Sheorey’s (2002) study on reading suggested that good readers are aware of strategies they use and they are good at regulating the use of strategies while reading. If the learners are aware of the strategies they use they can regulate themselves and they can perform well during the task ‘process’ which leads to successful product (Biggs, 1993).

The findings of this study show that, mentioning the strategies in the classroom was not enough for the students to start using them successfully. Grenfell (2007: 18), specified that “teaching strategies is no easier than teaching grammar, in that both rely on a metalanguage which learners may, or may not, be able to assimilate”. Nyikos (1996: 115) in her study aimed to introduce teachers to strategy training through teacher modelling; and she suggested that teachers should try to put themselves in their students’ place when teaching strategies, because not everything that is self-evident to teachers is self-evident to their learners. She also proposed that, teachers and learners should become aware that not everybody learns in the same way or uses the same strategies. Berthold et al. (2007) and Nückles et al. (2009) used prompting in the form of questions to foster strategy use and the findings showed that explicit prompting was useful to help students start using LLS. Most researchers suggest that explicit

strategy instruction in second language contexts is important. (Chamot, 2004; Grenfell and Harris, 1999). Moreover, providing strategy instruction may also help to increase learners' motivation, because they feel that they have the control over learning (Grenfell & Harris, 1999).

Teachers, in this study, only reminded student of useful strategies. However, they did not take any further action similar to strategy instruction to help learners try and employ these useful strategies when writing. The implication of this finding is enormous; it shows that teachers did not teach significant strategies that would help language improvement for a life time. Teachers stated that they mention strategies, but they did not have the time and perhaps the training to teach students strategies (see app. 2). It could also be that they did not believe in the role that strategy use plays in successful language learning. If this was the case, it would point at the lack in teacher training programmes offered at SFLIED.

### **Discussion II: Success variable**

This section focuses on the impact of success on strategy use.

According to the statistical results, students who have the highest grades in English, use MLS and are aware of them more compared to the rest of the students. Chamot and Kupper's (1989), and O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) indicated that successful language learners are aware of the LLS they use, which is consistent with the current study. Success in writing in English, indicate a positive correlation to MLS use with awareness. However, we can not ascertain from these findings whether success in writing causes successful and conscious use of MLS or successful and conscious use of MLS causes success in writing. Therefore, we cannot say which part of the correlation comes first. However, we can conclude that success, and use and awareness of MLS, fed each other to improve students' skills. Recent studies done by Smith et al. (2007) and Conner (2007) showed that students who used MLS increased their grades in writing which means that MLS use increases achievement. This finding is crucial, because it shows that the key to success in writing is using appropriate MLS. Use of appropriate MLS can lead to success.

Philips (1991) reported in his research that students who had average success (medium grade holders) used more LLS than successful students (high grade holders) and less successful learners (low grade holders). In the current study, the results show that successful learners

(higher grade holders) use more MLS than medium and weak students. Philips' findings are in line with the hypothesis but contradictory to the findings. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Philips' study included a wider range of LLS whereas the current study focused only on MLS. Park (1997), on the other hand, discovered that higher grade holders used more strategies than middle grade holders, and middle grade holders used more strategies than lower grade holders, which supports the findings of the current study. The higher the students' portfolio grades were, the more MLS they used or the more MLS they used the higher their portfolio grades were.

Finally, the following section concludes the findings and presents methodological implications and suggestions for further study.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated students' frequency and percentage of MLS use and awareness, the relationship between achievement and MLS use and awareness, and teachers' views on how much they did in relation to teaching MLS in the classroom.

The findings showed that only a few MLS - 'selected the topic which they knew the most about', 'brainstormed before they chose the essay topic to write about', 'thought whether they could actually relate the essay topic to their own experiences', and 'using words that they were sure of the meaning' - were used by more than half of the students. Moreover, less than half of them had awareness of the strategies they used. To Conner (2007), students who achieved more in essay writing had a higher level of self-awareness. According to Conner's (ibid.) study, lack of self-awareness is the problem of the weak students in this study.

The findings also showed that, although teachers mentioned some MLS in the classroom, this was not enough. Research done by Berthold et al. (2007) and Nückles et al. (2009) suggested that, prompting in the form of questions to foster LLS, which could easily be implemented in the classroom, was useful. To teach strategies in a planned manner, strategy instruction cycles (see Grenfell and Harris, 1999) could easily be used in language classrooms.

Lastly, statistically significant findings showed that successful students used more MLS than the medium and the weak students. What is more, a strong, positive correlation was found between student grades and MLS use and awareness.

In conclusion, the study showed: 1) that students attending SFLIED lacked MLS and awareness of them; 2) that what teachers did in their classrooms was not enough to foster MLS use and awareness; 3) that successful students used MLS; and 4) that there was a positive correlation between student grades and MLS use.

### **Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Further Study**

The findings in this study suggest a number of implications for classroom practice. First, students should be made aware of the importance of MLS. Second, they should also be made aware of the range of MLS options available to them. Third, MLS training should be given to learners to improve their strategy repertory, since it is an important part of foreign language learning. Lastly, the findings on the grades of the students suggest an important methodological implication: successful learners used more MLS which leads to the question, ‘were students successful because they used MLS or did they become successful due to the use of MLS?’ Even though this question is not easy to answer, we know that there is a positive correlation between success and MLS use with awareness.

The implications for further research that arise from this study can be listed as follows: First, the study could be repeated by adding the data collection method of think-aloud protocols. Therefore, the researcher would get students’ reflections on action through the questionnaire and their reflections in action through think-aloud protocols. Student interviews could also be used instead of a questionnaire. Second, according to the results, it was found that the majority of the students do not use or lack awareness of MLS in relation to the writing skills, even though their teachers try to teach them some of the MLS. Therefore, another study which would focus on MLS training could be done following the current study. For such research, an experimental and a control group would be organized. By administering pre-tests, post-tests and daily tests the results taken from each group could be compared, also the experimental group could be asked to keep a diary in which they evaluate their use of strategies after writing each composition/essay throughout the semester. Diaries encourage learners to reflect on and evaluate their learning processes, thereby increasing their metacognitive awareness. Diaries are also a useful source of qualitative information on strategy use by learners. Successful studies were carried out using diaries by Matsumoto (1996) on general classroom learning, and by Goh (1997; 2000) on listening strategies.

There are various data collection methods, both qualitative and quantitative, that can be used in LLS research. LLS researchers used questionnaires widely for decades and findings are promising. However, use of qualitative methods is necessary to understand students' thinking processes when they use the LLS.

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**Questionnaire on  
Metacognitive Learning Strategies Awareness when writing essays**

**A. Background information****Gender (M / F):****Age:****Nationality (TRNC / TC):****Proficiency Level (Elementary / Intermediate):****The last grade of essay:****B. The questionnaire**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly	unsure
1. As I write my essay/composition I often stop to check if my grammar and spelling are correct.					
2. I always read my essay after I finish writing and evaluate if my essay matches with my essay question. If it is not relevant then I rephrase the paragraphs before I hand it in.					
3. I reflect upon the written paragraphs and revise accordingly throughout the writing process.					
4. I will not begin to write until I do brainstorming and figure out the topic sentences of each paragraph.					
5. I know about my strength and weaknesses in writing.					
6. If I am given a list of topics to choose from, I always choose the topic that I know the most about.					
7. I always use words whose meaning I am sure of.					
8. I am careful about the organization of the paragraphs.					
9. I consciously try to make my essay interesting and easier to read for the reader.					
10. I list my ideas and use examples etc. to make the essay more meaningful.					
11. I stop periodically to check if I am diverting from the topic or if I stick to it reasonably.					
12. If I have given a few essay topics to choose from, I always do a quick brainstorming for all to see how much I know about each topic before I start writing the essay.					

13. After I choose my essay topic, I try to divide it into two or more subtopics to include different viewpoints/aspects in the essay.					
14. I often can guess the type of evaluation I would receive from my teacher.					
15. I am good at organizing my ideas.					
16. I create my own examples to make the essay more interesting and my ideas more clear.					
17. I am a good judge of how well I have written the essay.					
18. I am aware of what strategies, like brainstorming, planning, editing etc. I use when I write an essay.					
19. I find myself analyzing the usefulness of strategies I use when I write essays.					
20. I find myself using helpful strategies automatically.					
21. I am aware of the effectiveness of the strategies I use.					
22. I draw diagrams while I am brainstorming.					
23. I ask myself if I have considered each idea/aspect possible after I finish the essay.					
24. If I am in an exam I read the instructions carefully before I start my essay.					
25. If I am given a list of topics to choose from, I ask myself if I can relate them to my own experience.					
26. If I am in an exam I organize my time before I start writing and try to use it carefully.					
27. I usually produce first and subsequent drafts before the final essay.					
28. I usually confer with my classmates and/ or teacher after the first draft.					
29. I usually revise the draft for content and clarity of the meaning.					
30. I usually edit the draft individually.					
31. I usually edit the draft collaboratively.					
I monitor myself throughout the writing process and I am aware of what I am doing.					

### **The transcription of the teacher interviews**

The following questions were used in the interview with teachers. The answers of the teachers were organised in terms of relevance to each question and extracts were presented under each question below:

#### **1. What is the best advice that you have given about teaching students essay writing?**

1 'E': "I advise them to pay attention to the organization of the ideas."

2 'P': "The students do not like writing so I tell them to write a composition each week and

3 bring it to me. I ask them to write about whatever they want to write, so my advice is to

4 write as much as they can, so I believe that I encourage them to like writing."

5 'I1': "I ask them to do brainstorming."

6 'I2': "Brainstorming."

7 'I3': "I recommend them to spend some time on reading the essay question very well and

8 spend some time on planning for the best organization."

9 'U': "They make mistakes with English word order, so I ask them to write correct

10 sentences and then I tell them to write these sentences in a paragraph. I mainly encourage 11 them to write compositions as much as they can."

#### **2. Which three things do you concentrate on most when you teach essay writing in the classroom?**

12 'E': "I think about the topic, planning and giving examples."

13 'P': "The format, which is mainly introduction-body paragraph-conclusion, organization 14 and planning."

15 'I1': Brainstorming, planning, and the format which is set by the students' pack that our 16 institution

prepares are important for me. There are different kinds of formats used for 17 different essays, for example we use a different format for advantage-disadvantage

18 essays, different one for cause-effect and another one for argumentative essays."

19 'I2': "I concentrate on planning, brain storming and outlining."

20 'I3': "Organization, planning and the use of linkers are important for me."

21 'U': "For me it's the format, context that they use in their essays, and linkers are

22 important."

**3. When you mark students' essays, which four things most determine the mark you give the essay?**

23 'E': "We have got a set criterion for composition writing that every teacher should follow 24 which is mainly about the format, but besides that relevance, grammar, vocabulary and 25 spelling are very important for me."

26 'P': "For me its organization, grammar and sentence structure, relevance, and 27 comprehensible vocabulary use."

28 'I1': "I follow the set criterion that is prepared for the teachers, so according to that 29 format, accuracy, fluency, and content / relevance are important for me."

30 'I2': "I concentrate on the things I teach in the classroom which are planning, 31 organization, brainstorming, and outlining."

32 'I3': "For me it is content, grammar (spelling, punctuation, lexis), the flow of ideas, and 33 organization."

34 'U': "I pay attention to vocabulary use, content, grammar including punctuation, and 35 relevance to the topic."

**4. What do you perceive to be the main weaknesses in the students' essay writing skills?**

36 'E': "They are weak at grammar, they write things which are irrelevant to the topic, and 37 they do not read the instructions carefully."

38 'P': "The do not get a good education in high school, so they do not read and do not like 39 writing either. Essay writing skills should be taught in high school so that they can 40 improve it here."

41 'I1': "They are weak at grammar, but mostly vocabulary."

42 'I2': "They can not construct good grammatical sentences and they do not use linkers."

43 'I3': "Their main problem is that they think in Turkish and they try to translate the 44 sentences into English. They also have difficulty with topic sentences, thesis statement, 45 and they do not support their ideas with examples."

46 'U': "They think in Turkish before they start writing and then they try to translate the 47 sentences into English but because they do direct translation and also because we do not 48 have prepositions in Turkish they ignore them in English as well which is the main 49 problem."

**5. Do your students come to you when they have difficulties with writing essays?**

**(Yes many often ask for help /; About half the class ask for help on a regular basis/ ; No the majority rarely ask for help)**

50 'E': "In the classroom half of the students ask for help, but after the class only some of  
51 them."

52 'P': "The majority rarely ask for help."

53 'I1': "Many of them ask for help."

54 'I2': "About half the class ask for help on a regular basis."

55 'I3': "The majority rarely ask for help."

56 'U': "Less than half ask for help."

**6. What kinds of problems do they face with and ask for help? How do you guide them?**

57 'E': "They usually have problems with vocabulary use. I recommend them to watch  
58 DVDs, read books to learn new words and I also ask them to use new vocabulary in a  
59 sentence to practice them.

60 'P': "They have problems with sentence structure, word order, the use of linkers and  
61 prepositions. I ask them to write more and I correct their sentences and give feedback."

62 'I1': "They think in Turkish and they try to write in English, so they cannot express their 63 ideas in the best  
way. I encourage them to think and write in English. I try to put some  
64 confidence in them by telling them that they have enough grammar and vocabulary to  
65 think in English. I also encourage them to read English books."

66 'I2': "They have difficulty in finding ideas and writing argumentative essays. I advise  
67 them to search through internet to find texts for their own interest and read as much as  
68 they can."

69 'I3': "They have difficulty in expressing their ideas; they do not know how to express  
70 themselves in English. I tell them to simplify their language, but still to use linkers and  
71 expressions like such as, like, or if."

72 'U': "The students think that they do not know enough vocabulary, but I think that they 73 are pretty good at  
that, but they have problems with English word order. I encourage them 74 to work on grammar more to get  
used to the English word order."

**7. Do you encourage your students to use any of the following strategies in their essay writing?**

**(Brainstorming, planning, researching, self-evaluation, self-monitoring, proof reading and editing)**

75 'E': "I encourage them to do brainstorming, to plan well before they start writing,  
76 evaluate themselves after they finish writing. We do proofreading and editing all on the 77 board, so I pick  
the common mistakes and put them on the board to bring them to their  
78 attention."

79 'P': "I encourage them for brainstorming, planning, but they do not realize their mistakes 80 so there is not  
any monitoring, they also do not do peer checking."

81 'I1': "I encourage the students for brainstorming, planning, we do not actually have time 82 to control if  
they do research and read but I encourage them to do so anyways. For  
83 evaluation, I check their compositions, give feedback and ask them to rewrite. They do  
84 not have the habit of monitoring themselves; they expect that from the teacher. I believe 85 that proof  
reading and editing is very beneficial, but there is not actually enough time for 86 that, and I can not always  
check if the students are actually doing it."

87 'I2': "I encourage them for brainstorming, planning and researching; unfortunately we do 88 not have  
enough time to focus on other strategies like monitoring."

89 'I3': "I encourage them to do brainstorming, and to plan. For evaluation, if we have time I 90 ask them to do  
peer-evaluation. We occasionally do proof reading and editing by just  
91 finding the mistakes in the compositions, because of the time limitation."

92 'U': "I definitely encourage them to do brainstorming, and to plan before the start  
93 writing. I encourage researching when they write reports. For evaluation, I ask the  
94 students to see the check-list in their course pack and try to evaluate their own work. I tell 95 them to  
monitor themselves and to do proof reading and editing in the exam."

**8. How do you encourage the students to use the strategies you focus on?**

**(Lecture or short presentation at beginning of writing class)**

96 'E': "I give a short presentation at the beginning of the writing class. I draw diagrams for 97 brainstorming,  
teach outlining, and I write examples on the board that is very important 98 especially for elementary level."

99 'P': "I prefer lecturing. I allocate a lesson especially at the beginning of the two-months



100 module to teach brainstorming, planning, organization and different writing formats.”

101 ‘I1’: “I try to do both. We write a sample composition on the board, and discuss about

102 the weak and strong points of it in the next class; or sometimes I use a previous

103 composition which was written by a student. I believe that it helps the students. Iranian 104 and Palestinian

students are similar to Turkish students about composition writing, they 105 always ask for examples.”

106 ‘I2’: “I prefer to give a short presentation at the beginning of the writing class.”

107 ‘I3’: “I give a short presentation at the beginning of the writing class.”

108 ‘U’: “I lecture about the strategies at the beginning of the semester, than as time passes 109 and we practice

composition writing I have to remind them anyways, so I give another 110 short presentation before they start

writing.”

<b>Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Metacognitive Strategy Use and Awareness</b>												
<b>Question no.</b> (Refer to the question numbers in the questionnaire)	<b>Strongly agree</b>		<b>Agree</b>		<b>Partly agree</b>		<b>Disagree</b>		<b>Strongly disagree</b>		<b>Sum</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Planning</b>												
4	76	30.4	68	27.2	63	25.2	31	12.4	12	4.8	250	100
6	219	87.6	21	8.4	4	1.6	0	0.0	6	2.4	250	100
10	96	38.4	92	36.8	55	22.0	6	2.4	1	0.4	250	100
12	141	56.4	65	26.0	27	10.8	13	5.2	4	1.6	250	100
13	24	9.6	68	27.2	85	34.0	55	22.0	18	7.2	250	100
15	33	13.2	95	38.0	96	38.4	21	8.4	5	2.0	250	100
16	77	30.8	105	42.0	50	20.0	12	4.8	6	2.4	250	100
22	22	8.8	25	10.0	85	34.0	64	25.6	54	21.6	250	100
24	121	48.4	75	30.0	46	18.4	5	2.0	3	1.2	250	100
25	156	62.4	69	27.6	20	8.0	5	2.0	0	0.0	250	100
26	72	28.8	79	31.6	72	28.8	20	8.0	7	2.8	250	100
<b>Evaluation</b>												
2	103	41.2	80	32.0	44	17.6	17	6.8	6	2.4	250	100
7	141	56.4	76	30.4	24	9.6	6	2.4	3	1.2	250	100
8	66	26.4	102	40.8	65	26.0	17	6.8	0	0.0	250	100
9	96	38.4	84	33.6	54	21.6	15	6.0	1	0.4	250	100
11	54	21.6	91	36.4	79	31.6	17	6.8	9	3.6	250	100
14	39	15.6	86	34.4	90	36.0	26	10	9	3.6	250	100
17	65	26.0	86	34.4	84	33.6	10	4.0	5	2.0	250	100
19	33	13.2	77	30.8	91	36.4	39	15.6	10	4.0	250	100
23	66	26.4	76	30.4	77	30.8	23	9.2	8	3.2	250	100
27	26	10.4	40	16.0	87	34.8	60	24.0	37	14.8	250	100
28	53	21.2	68	27.2	68	27.2	34	13.6	27	10.8	250	100
29	70	28.0	80	32.0	71	28.4	19	7.6	10	4.0	250	100
30	42	16.8	59	23.6	80	32.0	47	18.8	22	8.8	250	100
31	24	9.6	71	28.4	64	25.6	51	20.4	40	16.0	250	100
<b>Monitoring</b>												
1	77	30.8	80	32.0	71	28.4	15	6.0	7	2.8	250	100
3	49	19.6	80	32.0	78	31.2	37	14.8	6	2.4	250	100
<b>Self-Awareness</b>												
5	74	29.6	88	35.2	60	24.0	24	9.6	4	1.6	250	100
18	69	27.6	92	36.8	72	28.8	13	5.2	4	1.6	250	100
20	45	18.0	73	29.2	83	33.2	39	15.6	10	4.0	250	100
21	32	12.8	91	36.4	94	37.6	31	12.4	2	0.8	250	100
32	75	30.0	90	36.0	77	30.8	6	2.4	2	0.8	250	100