Ciencias de la educación
Artículo de revisión

Constructivist and socio-cognitive applications in second and foreign language teaching and learning

Aplicaciones constructivistas y socio cognitivas en el aprendizaje de segunda lengua y de lengua extranjera

Aplicações construtivistas e sociocognitivas no ensino e aprendizagem de línguas estrangeiras

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Abstract

This article covers practical applications of two of the most outstanding learning theories that have contributed to foreign language teaching and learning. This paper deems Constructivism and Socio-cognitive theories as alternative approaches to traditional objectivist practices that have been deeply rooted in English as foreign language classrooms for decades. Vygotsky's constructivist principles of scaffolding in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and Bandura's socio-cognitive notions of self-regulation are discussed as concepts teachers should examine when contemplating alternatives to enhance and broaden their teaching perspectives. A significant portion of this paper deals with educational applications and foreign language research from Constructivism and Socio-cognitive theories. Likewise, the several influences on foreign language learners' learning and performance are discussed regarding the ZPD and self-regulation. This analysis reckons that although the switch to constructivist and socio-cognitive practices in foreign language teaching may imply some teachers' challenges, the benefits exceed the possible difficulties they may encounter. The paper calls for more detailed research on applications of constructivism and socio-cognitive theories in the English as a foreign language classroom.

Keywords: Constructivism; Socio-cognitive theory; Zone of Proximal Development; Self-Regulation.

Resumen

Este artículo expone las aplicaciones prácticas de dos de las más sobresalientes teorías que han contribuido al ámbito de la enseñanza-aprendizaje de un idioma extranjero. Este documento considera que el constructivismo y la teoría socio cognitiva son enfoques alternativos a prácticas tradicionales objetivistas que han estado profundamente enraizadas en el aula de enseñanza de lengua extranjera. Los principios constructivistas de Vigotsky en relación a la zona de desarrollo proximal (ZDP) y las nociones sociocognitivas de Bandura de autorregulación se discuten como conceptos que los maestros deberían examinar al considerar alternativas que refuercen y amplíen sus perspectivas de enseñanza. Una parte significativa de este documento se relaciona con las aplicaciones educativas y de investigación en el área de lengua extranjera desde la perspectiva del constructivismo y las teorías sociocognitivas. Del mismo modo, las múltiples influencias en el aprendizaje y desempeño de los estudiantes se discuten en relación con la zona de desarrollo

proximal y autorregulación. Este análisis considera que, aunque dar un cambio hacia practicas basadas en el constructivismo y socio cognitivismo en la enseñanza de lengua extranjera puede implicar algunos desafíos para los profesores, los beneficios exceden las posibles dificultades que puedan encontrar. Este documento exhorta a que se realice investigación más detallada sobre las aplicaciones de las teorías constructivistas y sociocognitivas en el aula de lengua extranjera.

Palabras Clave: Constructivismo; Teoría Socio-cognitiva; Zona de Desarrollo Proximal; Auto regulación.

Resumo

Este artigo apresenta as aplicações práticas de duas das teorias mais destacadas que têm contribuído para o campo do ensino-aprendizagem de uma língua estrangeira. Este artigo considera que o construtivismo e a teoria sócio-cognitiva são abordagens alternativas às práticas objetivistas tradicionais que estão profundamente enraizadas na sala de aula de ensino de línguas estrangeiras. Os princípios construtivistas de Vygotsky sobre a zona de desenvolvimento proximal (ZDP) e as noções sociocognitivas de autorregulação de Bandura são discutidas como conceitos que os professores devem examinar ao considerar alternativas que reforcem e expandam suas perspectivas de ensino. Parte significativa deste documento está relacionada às aplicações educacionais e de pesquisa na área de línguas estrangeiras na perspectiva do construtivismo e das teorias sociocognitivas. Da mesma forma, as múltiplas influências na aprendizagem e no desempenho do aluno são discutidas em relação à zona de desenvolvimento proximal e autorregulação. Esta análise considera que, embora a mudança para práticas baseadas no construtivismo e sociocognitivismo no ensino de línguas estrangeiras possa implicar alguns desafios para os professores, os benefícios excedem as possíveis dificuldades que possam encontrar. Este documento pede uma pesquisa mais detalhada sobre as aplicações das teorias construtivistas e sociocognitivas na sala de aula de línguas estrangeiras.

Palavras-chave: Construtivismo; Teoria sócio-cognitiva; Zona de Desenvolvimento Proximal; Auto-regulação.

Introduction

Learning theories have significantly contributed to explanations of the acquisition of people's first language. Linguists and psychologists have described the fascinating aspects of human development that result in communication through language. However, learning a foreign language is a substantially different process from acquiring the first language. First and most important, foreign language learners' learning occurs in a pre-arranged unnatural environment that cannot be compared to the home atmosphere where they acquired their first language (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Another critical difference is that first language acquisition occurs as an automatic response to the environment that triggers language development.

On the contrary, foreign language and second language learning is a matter of a personal choice that requires high doses of motivation to happen. Moreover, first language acquisition is complete encompassing a wide range of information and skills, while foreign language learning cannot be considered as full though good competence can be achieved. Finally, first language acquisition takes place in a shorter time frame, while foreign language learning may vary but is never as quick as first language acquisition.

Several language learning theories have supported significant advancements that provide teachers with theoretical models they can apply in the classroom to facilitate, conduct, and assist students as they learn a foreign language. Although any of these theories can be acknowledged as the panacea to the myriad of questions raised in foreign language teaching and learning, they have supplied major guidelines that pave the path for teachers and learners.

As a foreign language learner myself, I learned English through behavioral principles that involve achieving observable and measurable learning outcomes (Schunk, 2012). Behavioral principles also apply a heavy component of external stimuli and reinforce accomplishments to increase learners' responses. I must admit that Behaviorism generated some learning, although I would describe it as a painful and tiresome process. As a foreign language learner, I also went through all the methods aligned with this approach, such as Grammar Translation, Audio Lingual Method, and Total Physical Response. I excelled as a learner in terms of grades, but not regarding actual language performance. As a result, after several years of instruction, I was able to recite long lists of vocabulary and memorized phrases, read and write with evident difficulties. Still, I was unable to apply this knowledge to real-life situations.

I jumped into teaching with the Behaviorist framework deeply rooted in my teaching style. After a couple of years of disappointment, I realized that my Behaviorist stance was an obstacle to my teaching goals and my students' learning. With unlimited access to information on the internet, I learned that my students' interests demanded an immediate adjustment of my teaching method. I started to explore approaches I could apply in the classroom to support and ease my students' learning in an environment saturated by Behaviorist models. I have understood that teachers and specifically foreign language teachers need to stay open to change throughout the years. We need to explore new venues that allow us to teach in a world of constant movement. I firmly believe that teachers must be flexible to evolve and introduce variety in their classrooms to make their practice more responsive to students' needs.

This brief introduction to my experience as a learner and teacher frames the purpose of this paper. This paper discusses the contributions of two important learning trends that have informed most of the current methodologies and approaches to teaching a foreign language. I hope that foreign language teachers find in this paper solid arguments to justify the use of constructivism and socio-cognitive theories in their classrooms.

The last 30 years have produced several methodologies in second/foreign language teaching, derived from theories that emerged as a reaction to the gaps left by Behaviorism. From communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching to the latest versions of cooperative learning, community language learning and technology in second language instruction, these approaches have a solid foundation in the principles of constructivism and socio-cognitive theories. The first consideration to be mindful of is that both constructivist and socio-cognitive theories challenge the teacher's role as the sole provider of stimuli that generate a passive response from the learner, whose only merit is to rehearse tirelessly until obtaining the desired response. Premises associated with constructivist and socio-cognitive learning theories do not conform with traditional models of language teaching and urge teachers to become facilitators of learning by tackling their practice from a more dynamic, purposeful, and responsive perspective.

I firmly believe that committed teachers are eager to embrace innovative approaches. However, for a dependable and accurate application of any strategy, teachers must be well informed of the theories underlying them since this awareness becomes the underpinning of their practice. As a teacher of English as a foreign language, I am interested in delving into the benefits of applying

Vygotsky's constructivist principles of scaffolding in the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and Bandura's socio-cognitive notions of self-regulation to enhance language acquisition in foreign language learners. This interest is justified because much of language teaching, especially in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language, is still based on Behaviorist models that are limited in responding to learners' demands. In developing this research analysis on second and foreign language learning, I chose constructivist and socio-cognitive theories because both acknowledge that people, behaviors, and environment interact in unity when learning occurs. This concept of unity is aligned with language as a holistic tool that relates individuals with their contexts.

The Social Constructivist Perspective

Behaviorism assumes that the mind of the learner is a blank slate ready to be filled by information. Behaviorism also argues that instructors are, to some extent, the only knowledgeable in the classroom. Behaviorist stance believes that by providing students with stimuli, they will modify their behavior until they achieve desired outcomes. Behaviorism also conceives learning as prescribed in a top-down hierarchical fashion. However, for constructivists, learning and human behavior are much more complex and cannot be described in simple associations among stimuli and response (Schunk, 2012). Schunk asserts that constructivism's fundamental contention is that "individuals form or construct much of what they learn and understand" (Schunk, 2012, p. 229). Lev Vygotsky emphasized the "importance of social interaction to explain the development of human cognition" (Vygotsky, 1997). Vygotsky assumed that cognition development varies across cultures because of the influence of particular characteristics and traits of culture on learning. To better explain human knowledge, Vygotsky noted that "learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human psychological function" (Vygotsky, 1997). Learning is the result of the bonds established between individuals and the context around them that produce meaning. Vygotsky (1997) asserted that learning is constantly shaped and reshaped by the relationships individuals develop with the environment, and in this synergy, culture acts as a mediator.

In line with the constructivist theory, Vygotsky's contributions align with the idea that individuals construct much of what they learn and understand. Still, he also highlights the importance of the

social environment that facilitates learning (Schunk, 2012). These thoughts are particular and specific for all individuals since they compare the information coming from the environment with their system of beliefs, values, and experiences. This fundamental concept impacts education, not only in the way curriculum is organized but also, and most importantly, in the way instruction is delivered. As Schunk (2012) acknowledges, a constructivist teacher structures information to spark students' learning involvement. Also, a constructivist teacher fosters and facilitates understanding so that new information can be incorporated into the learner's mindset. That is to say; the traditional top-down, one-lesson-fits-all approach is replaced by a more stimulating bottom-up approach where the teacher is responsible for providing the necessary conditions that trigger learning and where students are directly involved in their construction of learning.

Constructivist applications in education are multiple, comprising learners, teachers, content, strategies, skills, evaluation, and the way curriculum and instruction are conceived. Vygotsky's stressed the importance of human interaction and collaboration and the influence of the environment as essential factors that foster cognitive growth. This congruence ultimately produces the corresponding transformations of experience in the learner's self, which once again are intimate, personal, and exclusive (Schunk, 2012). Considering the concept of unity (individual-environment), Vygotsky also contends that learning becomes a salient aspect of developing culturally organized knowledge.

Social Constructivist Educational Applications: The Zone of Proximal Development

One of the hands-on applications of Vygotsky's ideas is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The zone of proximal development is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky L., 1978. p. 86). From this perspective, the ZPD is a flexible "space" of learning.

The principles of the ZPD can be extrapolated to any instructional level in any discipline. For instance, in foreign language teaching, ZPD can be exemplified as follows: The teacher requires a group of college students to write a two-page reflection on one of the topics discussed in class. Although the students have identified the ideas they want to examine in the paper and know the basics of writing mechanics, such as grammar, punctuation, and spelling, they struggle to

cohesively and coherently put all the parts together. The constructivist teacher knows what the actual developmental level of students is. In other words, the teacher recognizes what the students can do without help. By observing the students' performance, the teacher also identifies the specific issues that need to be addressed, like developing a thesis statement, writing topic sentences, and organizing the text and paragraphs. To support the students' endeavor, the teacher provides a series of "scaffolds." For instance, the teacher may ask questions to the students to figure their previous knowledge. The teacher may also organize discussions relevant to the topic, so students have more elements to include in their writing. The teacher would outline frames or give extra information to support students' writing. In providing this scaffolding, students perform a series of activities to get insights from the teacher and their peers' interactions. Once the students get to the desired level and can work independently, the teacher removes the scaffolds gradually. As Vygotsky indicates in his theory, the teacher started from students' actual developmental level and intervened in their prospective ZPD to take students one step further in their development. However, Schunck (2012) suggests teachers using scaffolding should not be regarded as extra opportunities given to using students to achieve a goal but as "allowing them to develop greater awareness of themselves, their language, and their role in the world order" (p. 244).

Social Constructivist Research in Second and Foreign Language Teaching
Sociocultural constructivism favors learning environments where collaboration and discussion are encouraged. Guerrero and Villamil (2000) studied the effect of peer collaboration in the English as a Second Language ESL classroom by observing learners interacting in their Zones of Proximal Development when writing. The study's focus was to understand the nature of interactions that take place while revising a peer's written work. Students first narrated an experience that made them reflect on their own life. Students then had two revision sessions where they looked at content and organization as well as language use and mechanics. Once their drafts were ready, pairs were assigned to work together. One of the students assumed the role of the reader, while the other was the writer. The students' interactions were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis (Guerrero & Villamil, 2010). The researchers analyzed the tapes to see how students changed their behavior and determined the scaffolding mechanisms they used to support each other. The authors assessed 18 revision sessions and concluded that students used several means to scaffold one another

(Guerrero & Villamil, 2010). The authors assessed the reader's role to moderate the task and the supportive behaviors he adopted to support the writer to fulfill the task. The readers also helped the writers achieve goals and showed empathy for them.

Interestingly, the dialogues seemed relaxed with high levels of confidence and familiarity. Intersubjectivity emerged between the participants, and the writers appeared open to accept the readers' suggestions, which ultimately helped them improve their writing. The writers also developed self-regulation and became more independent while writing the final version of their narratives. The readers, in turn, gained in aspects of social behavior such as control and affectivity. In sum, Guerrero and Villamil (2010) concluded that by working within their ZPD, both readers and writers mutually benefited from mediated learning activity through collaboration.

In the same vein, Ohta (1995) analyzed students' collaboration to improve language acquisition within the ZPD. This study used pair work to determine how students interacted in the tasks assigned by the teacher. While students were immersed in the pair work activity, the teacher examined the nature of scaffolding work. The teacher provided support while pairs were working on the task. The teacher collected video and audio recordings for further transcription of information. In this study, teams were not assigned at random as in the previous research, but according to students' abilities in language use. The authors paired students so that a novice student worked with an expert or more skillful peer. Scaffolding was assessed in the form of its impact on teacher-student, student-student interactions, use of first language, occurrence and functions of scaffolding, use of target language, construction of novice-expert roles, and participants learning gains. Results indicated that during scaffolding, the stronger student took an active role in supporting her classmate by assisting him when required. Interactions also showed that the novice students developed within their ZPD. Error correction was explicit and occurred from expert to weaker student and vice versa. Concerning peer task regulation, the expert could experiment more with the language to support her peer. Still, the peer also used more resources in the target language to ask and answer questions and keep the conversation going (Otha, 1995. p. 111). During the exercise, there was limited use of the mother language when unfamiliar tasks were required. Overall, the study revealed that collaboration supported learning and provided more flexibility in the use of language. Besides, students could express themselves freely in the target language, and meaning-making was more natural and flexible, which gave them a feeling of confidence and

comfort. Not only were they more involved in the activity, but there was also space for humor, talk, negotiation, regulation, and exploration with the target language that did not occur in student-teacher interactions. Evidence from this study supports the idea of collaboration as a helpful instrument that favors language acquisition.

Although the studies discussed above were different in several aspects, such as settings, skills, languages, implementation, and the way students were paired (randomly and teacher assigned); results showed benefits of using Vygotsky's sociocultural principles and the ZPD as frames for scaffolding second/foreign language learning. Despite the approaches followed by the authors, they concluded that working collaboratively in the classroom enhances skills providing learners with a more relaxed, supportive, and confident environment.

Schwieter and Laurier (2010) and Bodrova and Leong (1998) contended that working in the ZPD and scaffolding students' learning are adequate for both first and second-language acquisition. However, the procedures to provide support were treated differently when the authors worked with adult advanced and young emergent writers. In the first case, advanced adult writing students worked in groups on a macro project to produce magazines for an authentic audience. Textual reconstruction and feedback debriefing were used as pedagogical mechanisms to scaffold students' writing development. The instructor's level of assistance was invariable from the beginning to the end of the process. Because of the study's length (one semester), the authors determined significant developments in the essays' quality, both in the use of language and mechanics. Despite the improvement achieved by students, the authors noted that students' that students did not do any more progress. The authors think that this plateau effect deserves more scrutiny. The authors also emphasized the importance of providing adult advanced students with sustained and consistent assistance (scaffolding) within the ZPD before performing independently. The interesting element in this study that motivated students' interest in producing language was the fact that they produced texts for a specific audience that gave them a real purpose to write.

In the second case, Bodrova and Leong (1998) worked with a group of young emergent writers. In this study, writing was also supported by applying the principles of ZPD. Bodrova and Leong's study used materialization (providing students with objects and tangible actions) and private speech (self-directed regulatory speech) as pedagogical techniques to provide temporary support to writers. In this study, the presence of the teacher along the process was not uniform. On the

contrary, it was maximized at the beginning of the process to elevate learners' performance, decreased gradually, and ultimately removed once until they demonstrated independence. Interestingly, researchers identified slight regression in learners after removing the teacher's presence. This finding might mean that once students achieve the desired goal and can function independently, it is improbable that they forget what they have already learned.

From the analysis of these studies, it is clear that despite the different types of assistance and strategies instructors used to scaffold learners, both advanced and emergent learners improved due to the interventions. This improvement means that although scaffolding can have different facets, it will benefit learners no matter their age or performance level.

The plateau effect identified in Bodrova and Leong (1998) is analyzed in Lantolf and Aljaafreh (1995). The authors contend that learning is not linear but involves simultaneous steps forward and backward. The authors call this phenomenon regression. Regression is an event teachers must be aware of when working within the ZPD. Lantolf and Aljaafreh (1995) emphasize Vygotsky's assertion that once students achieve the desired level of performance and because this achievement results from learners working in their ZPD, a backsliding (regression) can manifest. This uneven expansion with steps forward and backward in the learner's progress demonstrates that "development is not uniform and linear, but dynamic and irregular" (Lantolf & Aljaafreh 1995). Three advanced second language learners taking a reading and writing class participated in the study. Students were required to produce seven pieces of writing during the semester. The researchers assessed students' performance on selected language features, such as articles, tense, prepositions, modal verbs, and third-person singular. The teacher's support was constant by providing explicit help with students' difficulties in using language. Regression was evident in the process because although students performed efficiently with those parts of speech with the teacher's help, in following classes, they hesitated or needed help on the same elements that already improved with the scaffolds provided by the teacher. Lantolf and Aljaafreh (1995) concluded that regression is an expected circumstance that can be present regardless of students' level of expertise or support given by the teacher.

The Socio-cognitive Theory

Are human beings organisms that blindly react to external stimuli, or do they reflect, organize, judge, and regulate input to produce specific results? To what extent do environmental and social settings influence people's performance? How do human beings react to new unpredictable situations? These were the foremost concerns of psychologists identifying the pitfalls of behaviorism as they started to acknowledge the importance of the social setting in determining much of what an individual can learn (Schunk, 2012).

Socio-cognitive theory gives importance to the social context where the individual performs her/his activities and learns. In exploring the complexities of the relationships between individuals and their environment while learning, Albert Bandura created an array of principles that can apply to the acquisition of cognitive, motor, social, self-regulation skills, and other central issues related to human activity (Schunk, 2012). Bandura suggested that the context is not the exclusive condition that explains learning. Learning is the consequence of individuals' active and mutual relationship with their past experiences, environment, social context, and behavior in the form of the responses to stimuli towards achieving a goal. The three elements constitute what Bandura called the triadic reciprocality framework.

Another key concept of the socio-cognitive theory is observational learning. According to Schunk (2012), the acquisition of knowledge, rules, skills, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes are mediated by observing others performing them in a given environment (p. 118). Learning by observation is what Bandura defined as vicarious learning. Vicarious learning occurs when individuals observe and reproduce behaviors, especially if those actions are successful. Consequently, learning results from looking at "models" from which human beings conclude about certain behaviors' appropriateness and the possible consequences. Finally, a salient principle of Bandura's theory is the idea that humans are interested in "taking control" of the events that directly affect their lives. Due to this need for control, they employ mechanisms that let them self-regulate their thoughts and actions.

Socio-cognitive Educational Applications: Self-regulation

Self-regulation is one of the socio-cognitive theory applications that acknowledges individuals the possibility to respond and take agency of their learning. In other words, people take control of

situations altering their activities by activating self-regulatory mechanisms identified as self-monitoring, self-judgment, and affective self-reaction along with other devices such as self-efficacy, all of them influenced by social factors (Bandura, 1991).

Self-regulation is a system of skills that human beings adopt to control, preserve or assist attention. Successful students are those who, bearing their learning goals in mind, can trigger their self-regulatory mechanisms to observe, judge, and intentionally scrutinize their thoughts, behaviors, and emotions to achieve their goals (Schunk, 2012).

Self-regulation principles have practical applications in foreign language studies. Learning a foreign language usually poses a lot of challenges to students as they deal with multiple obstacles associated with language, all of them present at the same time when they are trying to perform a task or learn a new concept. These numerous issues provoke high levels of frustration and distress that ultimately might prevent the student from continuing. However, students can reduce these constraints if they self-regulate. Teachers can intervene in stimulating this inner self-regulatory function. Schunk (2012) recommends teachers guide students in using self-regulating tools so that they can overcome difficulties effortlessly.

For instance, when reading a text in a foreign language, students may have difficulties identifying main and secondary ideas. The teacher can intervene by pointing to or commenting on salient information from the text to guide the student while doing the task. The teacher can provide a series of examples from similar texts where students identify main ideas and then interact with students in developing them. Once students have been exposed to those models, they will be ready to work on their own. In a final phase, both the teacher and the students can participate in debriefing the experience, searching for students' thoughts or questions. The teacher allows students to provide a rationale for their thoughts about the central ideas by asking questions. At the same time, the teacher can reinforce correct answers. In this way, the teacher increases self-efficacy and self-regulation.

Another option for helping students deal with the text is pair work, where a successful peer reader models some of the strategies he or she uses for identifying information. Working with a peer allows students to engage more in the activity and reduces their tension. Peer models, in this case, are valuable sources of learning. Subtly, they also teach their struggling classmates self-regulation

skills. The teacher can also provide extra instruction for doing the task; in this way, students will feel supported while increasing their motivation and willingness to learn.

Schunk (2012) explains that self-regulation theoretically comprises three phases: forethought, performance control, and self-reflection. The first stage is also known as the action stage, involves goal setting and modeling. The second phase is where learning takes place. In this phase, the teacher promotes attention, action, feedback, and learning strategies. Finally, during self-reflection, students evaluate their work towards their goal and make adjustments according to their progress.

Socio-cognitive Research in Second and Foreign Language Teaching

Students' ability to direct and, to some extent, manage facets of their learning is generally associated with learning success. An analysis of self-regulation research is part of this paper. The first two articles present different approaches supporting the acquisition of reading skills through self-regulation strategies.

The teacher's intervention to explicitly train EFL students in using a self-regulated learning model was the mechanism followed by Morshedian, Hemmati, and Sotoudehnama (2017). The authors studied Bandura's assumptions that learners are eager to manage situations occurring in their lives and regulate them intentionally. However, students might need overt guidance to identify specific issues that prevent their learning and consequently select appropriate strategies to help them overcome those difficulties. The authors used the improved version of Zimmerman's model for self-regulation. This model has three phases: forethought, performance, and self-reflection with the corresponding subprocesses. Morshedian et al. (2017) worked with reading because it is a crucial skill for learners in language proficiency and related content learning. To evaluate reading skills, the authors employed the think-aloud protocol useful in reading comprehension research because it assesses several aspects of students' self-regulation.

During 15 sessions, the teacher taught students self-regulation strategies and assisted them in putting them into practice. The appropriate use of the strategies was assessed while students were performing the reading tasks assigned. Students made significant gains in each phase (forethought, performance, and self-reflection) and during the control groups' subprocess. Along with the improvement in the above stages, the researchers noted that students became more involved in their

learning. They were more effective in identifying their weaknesses and applying effective mechanisms to tackle them. In sum, Morshedian, et al. (2017) demonstrated that although some self-regulation strategies are used by learners spontaneously, the appropriate use of these strategies can be expanded by teaching them explicitly.

In agreement with the previous study, Finkbeiner, Knierim, Smasal, and Ludwig (2012) believe that reading provides valuable opportunities for learners to acquire language. They also agreed that students' use of self-regulation skills facilitates their efforts while reading. However, they followed a different procedure to deal with these issues. Instead of overtly instructing students to use self-regulation strategies from the beginning, the teacher first identified the most common techniques used by students when approaching a text while working in pairs without the teacher's support. In a second phase, students received help from the teacher, who guided them through the tasks and self-regulatory strategies. The study focused on identifying the teacher's actions in providing such guidance when he or she noticed that a particular self-regulatory strategy was not successful.

Interestingly, the researchers determined that students use a good array of strategies. The most frequent strategies used by students were questioning for clarification (vocabulary related), summarizing at the word/sentence level, resourcing (using a dictionary), questioning for clarification (task-procedure related), word elaborating (language related), inferencing at the word/sentence level, translating for clarification (content-related), and word elaborating (content related) (Finkbeiner et al., 2012). The study also provided training to teachers to support students when they were not successful in using self-regulatory mechanisms. Researchers realized that without training, the quality of support teachers give students is quite poor. According to the study, teachers' intervention is limited to doing things for students to accomplish the task. In doing so, teachers restrict students' opportunities to reflect and take action by themselves. In other words, the mediation strategies adopted by the teachers were basically teacher-centered and instructional (summarizing for the students, providing direct translation) that inhibit students' self-reflection.

Synthetizing the findings in both studies, we acknowledge that the teacher's role is crucial to foster the "innate" self-regulation skills in second/foreign language learners no matter their language level. These findings are consistent because self-regulatory competencies can be enhanced through suitable educational interventions (Schunk, 2012). The second/foreign language classroom is a setting where students' needs are not limited to mastering the target language but developing

holistically. In this sense, teachers are the clue for success. They must promote reflection, but mainly they must be sensitive enough to identify students' struggles. In sum, to improve reading skills, learners need appropriate guidance on self-regulation strategies to monitor and adjust their progress.

As with reading, students can also benefit from using self-regulation strategies when developing their writing skills. For second/foreign language learners, writing can be a painful process demanding a lot of effort, usually resulting in frustration when they have not achieved the desired outcomes. Similarly, on the side of teachers, writing is sometimes seen as an arduous, time-consuming task. Providing students with solid foundations in self-regulation strategies is necessary to enhance students' writing development in the long term.

The practical applications of self-regulation strategies to support writing in second/foreign by Lam (2015) and Magno (2014). Lam (2015) studied the importance of acquiring metacognitive knowledge because students need to manage their learning efficiently. Teachers can provide students with explicit strategy instruction so they can self-regulate when working on writing tasks. The author points out that investing time in supporting students to manage their learning is more productive than filling them with grammar, extensive vocabulary, and rules. During a 15 week of process-oriented writing course, teachers guided students through cognitive monitoring while simultaneously constructing and using self-evaluation strategies. A debriefing component at the end of each session helped students understand how to monitor their learning. By integrating process and cognitive monitoring, students were provided with more opportunities to reflect on their work. Teacher's feedback also improved metacognitive knowledge, which had a positive effect in promoting self-regulatory learning. As text revision strategies were also included in the course, Lam (2015) contended that students improved their planning, revising, and editing strategies. The supportive approach taken by researchers in this study provoked positive changes in attitude regarding writing. Students became more self-regulated writers able to organize, assess and manage their production.

When students learn, they subconsciously use self-regulatory strategies. Magno (2009) analyzed the move from process to outcome in writing using the academic self-regulated learning scale and the learning process questionnaire. The author based the study on the fact that when learning a second/foreign language, students adopt a series of cognitive strategies and learning approaches.

The author assessed the effect of such approaches to learning on eight components of self-regulation identified as memory, strategy, goal-setting, self-evaluation, seeking assistance, environmental structuring, responsibility, and organizing. Results showed a strong relationship between deep learning approaches and most self-regulation components except for seeking environmental aid and structuring. In contrast, surface approaches had no significant association with self-regulation except for the memory strategy component. A possible explanation for the low levels of seeking assistance is that both require an external agent to generate self-regulatory effects (Magno, 2009). This explanation contradicts the previous study that emphasized the importance of external support from the teacher or peers to support self-regulation learning. However, the author believes that this phenomenon might occur because writing requires independent thinking and self-discipline, which do not demand a lot of assistance from others.

Although the improvement of language skills through adopting self-regulation mechanisms by the learner is crucial, it is also essential to consider the possibility that these strategies can enhance language achievement in general. Seker (2016) attempted to define the relationship between both variables. He pointed out that self-regulation is pivotal in second/foreign language in terms of improving learning. He also emphasized that although self-regulation is autonomous, it needs support to be more effective. Therefore, teachers must play an active role in providing this assistance and guiding learners towards self-regulation. Before administering a self-regulation survey to students, the author interviewed teachers regarding their level of awareness of self-regulation. Surprisingly, he found that only a few teachers considered supporting their students in developing self-regulation as a critical component of their practice. However, they acknowledged that a good language learner should manage her/his learning process independently. The survey administered to students analyzed three main topics: orientation, performance strategies, and evaluation strategies with five subscales: internal orientation, external orientation, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and evaluation (Seker, 2016). The findings supported the fact that self-regulated learning significantly predicts language achievement. Therefore, there is an undeniable need to include self-regulation as a second/foreign language instruction component. To support his findings, the author also referred to other studies demonstrating that self-regulation learning enhances reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and writing (Seker, 2016). Seker (2016) made a final observation that the need to make the teaching of self-regulation the core

of formal education curricula, regardless of the area or level of education, to provide students with learning tools they can use on a long-term basis.

Final Comments

The number of people learning a second and a foreign language worldwide has increased dramatically in the last 30 years. Along with the number of learners, a myriad of methodologies and techniques have emerged, offering promising results. Although many of these "innovative" approaches have solid foundations in learning theories, sometimes teachers fail to maximize their use because they are not adequately informed about them. As was stated at the beginning of this analysis, each approach has contributed to explain the complexities related to learning a second/foreign language. Still, none of them can claim to have the answers to the multiple questions that arise in the classroom.

Constructivism and socio-cognitive theory have a great potential to support second/foreign language learners as both theories have contributed to facilitate language learning. These theories acknowledge language as the human expression that creates cultural bonds between individuals and their communities. In this sense, the classroom becomes the perfect environment where interactions should be encouraged to foster learning. It is in the sharing that students build up language.

In terms of cognition, constructivism explains learning as the result of culture and social interactions that influence the acquisition of skills and knowledge. Constructivism sees language as a pivotal element to generate learning. Vygotsky's idea of working in students' zone of proximal development with the support and guidance of a more experienced or skilled party impacts the second/foreign language classroom. By identifying what students can do without help and what they need to jump to the next step, the teacher can provide the necessary scaffolding to construct new knowledge. Three themes emerged from the articles with practical applications: They all agreed on the importance of encouraging classroom interactions, especially among peers, to generate learning. They also gave importance to mediation as a dynamic, structured process that results in individual and group improvement. Finally, the three articles coincided in that collaboration is needed to create an appropriate learning environment.

Socio-cognitive theories also see learning within the influence of a social environment. One of the applications of socio-cognitive theory is the self-regulation principle proposed by Bandura. According to Schunk (2012), a self-regulated learner can set goals, judge outcomes, evaluate progress, and self-regulate thoughts, emotions, and actions when learning. Although self-regulation is an innate skill, it requires explicit guidance to strengthen its potential. The importance of guiding students to self-regulate lies in that learners are eager to take agency of their learning and direct their efforts towards it. Also, the socio-cognitive articles emphasized the importance of pair work to enhance effectiveness and collaboration. Adopting activities where students collaborate makes learning more meaningful and engaging since there is mutual support, and students can work in a more relaxed, natural way. These interactions enhance their confidence in using language that ultimately helps to make learning a fulfilling experience.

Implications for Further Research

Further research can be conducted along these lines in various areas related to second/foreign language instruction. For example, researchers acknowledged the need to perform similar studies analyzing the impact of such interventions on genre, age, level of performance, and, contexts. The field would also benefit from studies that examine strategies that teachers and peers can use to develop specific subskills in reading and writing. In writing, for instance, it is necessary to understand better mechanisms that can be used to enhance interactions that favor the development of persuasion, argumentation, exposition, and description. In reading, those interactions might contribute to developing comprehension, fluency, automaticity, and prosody. More research is also needed to know if scaffolding interventions might take different attributes depending on the learning community. As for self-regulation, research can provide material developers with more information on guiding students to use other mechanisms according to their learning. Teachers also need more knowledge on including self-regulation as part of their course syllabus and daily plans. Finally, there is a growing need to provide teachers with suitable training on the use of strategies grounded in these theories to apply them in a more informed manner.

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