

# Exploring Learning to Learn: Metacognitive Strategies Covered in the Indonesian EFL Textbooks

Pipit Prihartanti Suharto<sup>1,\*</sup>, Ika Lestari Damayanti<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Perjuangan Tasikmalaya, Tasikmalaya

<sup>2</sup> English Education Department, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung

\*Corresponding author. Email: [pipitprihartanti@unper.ac.id](mailto:pipitprihartanti@unper.ac.id)

## ABSTRACT

Learning to learn, originally developed in the European context, is considered as a key goal in the 21st-century curriculum. It requires metacognitive strategies to be included into the learning so as to allow learners to think about how they learn, in addition to what they learn. Unfortunately, in the context of Indonesia, such strategies are not widely taught in the classrooms or explicitly encouraged in the educational textbooks. This research, thus, aims to investigate how metacognitive strategies are covered in the Indonesian EFL textbooks. A textbooks analysis using 'plan do review' of Ellis's & Ibrahim's (2015) reflective framework was carried out in an attempt to obtain the qualitative data for the study. In addition, in order to supplement the data, questionnaire surveys involving teachers and students as well as semi-structured interviews with textbook writers were also done. The results indicated that metacognitive strategies were developed mainly through reflection activities. Different perceptions among teachers and writers on the essence and the aim of reflection was also revealed which then could contribute to the challenges of its use in the classroom. Finally, this research elaborates the pedagogical implications and recommendations useful for future language teaching and learning process.

**Keywords:** Textbook analysis, learning to learn, metacognitive strategies, reflection

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There have been several curriculum revisions carried out in Indonesia. The latest one was introduced in 2013 and popularly called *Kurikulum 2013* (*Kurtilas* in short). This revised curriculum (hence *Kurtilas*) suggested that English subject to begin in the first year of junior high school or to students of Year 7 of their nine-year compulsory education. EFL textbook development was done to adjust the materials on the basis of the *Kurtilas*. Since then, the official textbook for Year 7 has been revised for three times so as to fulfill the curriculum requirements as well as to meet the needs of the learners. The textbook is intended as the main reference or the basic standard for the English language teaching and learning in junior high school entire the country. On the preface of the textbook, it reads that it is designed in accordance with the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning in a way that learners are responsible for their own learning. They need to be able to find more learning resources on their own. The textbook also suggests that teachers play an essential role in enhancing the learning and helping the learners to become autonomous.

Learning to learn, according to Pinter (2017), aims to inform learners about various factors influencing their language learning as well as to allow them to start to think for themselves. Pinter's definition seems to fit the goal of the government-approved junior high school EFL textbook, i.e., to become responsible, independent learners. There have been recently significant efforts made by the government in terms of incorporating metacognitive skills-related activities into textbook and encouraging teachers to implement them in their classrooms. The rationale behind this is that developing both metacognitive and cognitive strategies closely links with learner autonomy which is considered to be essential in the 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum.

### 1.1. What is Learning to Learn?

Learning to learn is the basic essential objective in educational setting (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015) not only in English but also across curriculum. They propose that it is a key goal in a 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum and is closely related with learner autonomy which is essential for learners' educational development. It refers to the

umbrella term for various kinds of learning activities, tasks, or discussions in class intended to develop metacognitive awareness and learning strategies (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015; Pinter, 2017). Thus, it requires the combination of metacognitive and cognitive strategies to be incorporated into the learning so as to allow learners to think about their own learning, emphasizing *how* they learn, in addition to *what* they learn.

### ***1.2. Learning to Learn and the Role of the Teachers***

In most Asian context, as Hazari (2013) argues, skills such as learning to learn are not taught or encouraged in the textbooks and published materials. As a consequence, schools are responsible to teach learning how to learn, i.e. equipping the students with strategies they can use outside school (Pinter 2017). Teachers need to learn how to include it into their lessons and establish students' positive attitudes towards it as Pramling (as cited in Boström, 2012) maintains that teacher are in charge in identifying how their learners' learning. McDonough, Shaw, and Masuhara (2013) also believe that learners are actually have innate capacity to be autonomous, yet in practice they tend to need encouragement and supports from others. Making students informed about their own learning is essential in order to help them become successful language learners.

### ***1.3. Metacognitive Strategies: A Part of Learning to Learn***

As previously stated that learning to learn comprises both metacognitive awareness and learning strategies. The latter also specifically include metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, socioaffective strategies, and communicative strategies (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015). Metacognitive strategies, therefore, is a part of learning to learn. They refer to classroom activities aimed at encouraging learners to think and reflect through planning, monitoring, and evaluating their language learning (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015; Pinter, 2017). It can be concluded that whether or not learning to learn is integrated into a lesson could be seen from the conscious process of metacognition such as reflection in class.

This research aims at examining to what extent metacognitive strategies are covered in the Indonesian official EFL textbooks. In addition to that, how the teachers help students develop metacognitive strategies is, too, worth exploring. Hopefully, this study could contribute to the materials development as well as to the improvement of teaching and learning process primarily in the Indonesian context.

## **2. METHOD**

### ***2.1. Research Design***

This study focuses on investigating metacognitive strategies covered in the Indonesian junior EFL textbooks (both student's and teacher's book for Year 7) suggested by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This official textbook has been revised for three times, in 2014, 2016 and in 2017 respectively. The first two revised editions were selected for this study as they are still relevant to present day and that the second bears a very strong resemblance to the third one. The research, therefore, is designed as a descriptive-evaluative content analysis.

### ***2.2. Participants***

There were three groups of participants involved in this study including two textbook writers as well as 14 teachers and 17 junior high school students based in West Java Province. Confidentiality and anonymity were taken into consideration to protect the participants' privacy (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2000). The identity of the textbooks under the study and the participants taking part were kept anonymous.

### ***2.3. Data Collection and Analysis***

Method triangulation was guaranteed by applying different approaches to data collection including textbook analysis, interviews, and questionnaire. The data gained from textbook analysis and from the interview with two textbook writers reveal to what extent metacognitive strategies are covered in the textbooks. Meanwhile, the data collected through interviews with the teachers and questionnaires administered to both teachers and students shed a light on how the teachers help students develop their metacognitive strategy skills.

The student's questionnaire, in particular, was adjusted with the context and the age of the participants in a child-friendly manner to enable them fill in the online questionnaire. According to Kellet (2011), child-friendliness should be taken into consideration when designing a research tools for children to make the data collection more interactive and, as Pinter (2011) maintains, to suit their feelings and opinions as well. NVivo software along with *Qualtrics* were utilized for these data collection procedures.

All data gathered from textbook analysis and interview transcripts were stored on *NVivo* software to be identified and categorized. *Qualtrics* website presents the calculated data from questionnaires previously administered online. As for the textbook analysis, the textbooks were analyzed in regard with reflective framework of Ellis Ibrahim (2015) as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Reflective Framework (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015).

These ‘plan-do-review’ learning cycles help learners to think about their own learning through *reflection, experimentation, and further reflection*. For the purpose of this study, the textbook analysis was focused more on ‘plan’ and ‘review’ stages as ‘do’ stage refers to tasks or activities carried out in classroom.

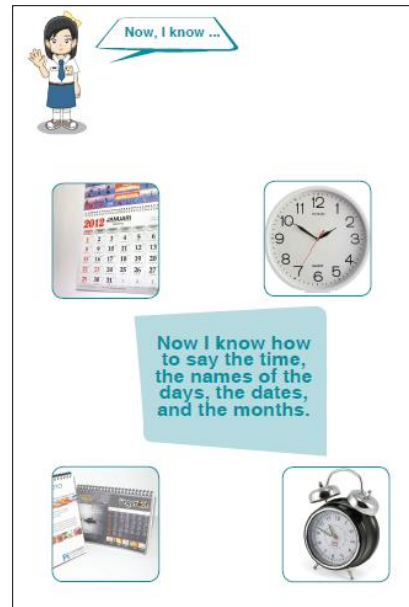
### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Findings

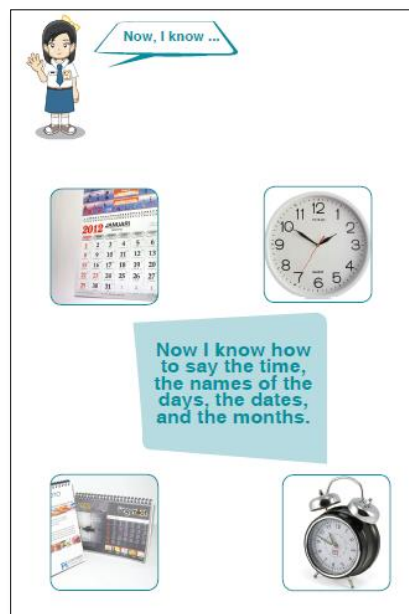
In accordance with plan-do-review stages, the textbooks under the study have covered several metacognitive strategies. As for ‘plan’ stage, it was found that only Textbook B provides instruction which allow students to plan for their learning. The tasks on this textbook usually begin with *Aims* as well as *Success Criteria*. These two items allow learners to prepare themselves for what they are going to do and what they have to achieve during the lesson. Additionally, both editions on the teacher’s book suggest reflection and self-evaluation to be done in the classroom as parts of the metacognitive strategy development. The student’s books also covered such activities though only appears in a few chapters.

Reflection activity is encouraged on *Now I know* task which is meant as a learning journal mainly featured in the Textbook A (see Figure 2). The so-called reflection only provides learners to review what they have learned and or sort of can-do statements. While on textbook B, it allows learners to review what they have learned as well as to self-assess their own learning (see Figure 3). In short, these kinds of reflection-related activity on both textbooks serve to provide a summary of what they have learnt and to give them some space to reflect on it.

The second type of reflection displayed in *Reflecting* task which appears only in two chapters of the Textbook B (see Figure 4). According to Writer 2 (see Figure 5) such reflection is referred to a ‘pit stop’ in the middle of a chapter where the students try to measure their understanding about a topic which covers more about metalanguage and cognitive skills. Additionally, the third type of reflection is in the form of a learning journal called *My Journal* (see Figure 6) which allows learners to explore their feelings about their own learning.



**Figure 2** *Now I Know* (Textbook A).



**Figure 3** *Now I Know* (Textbook B).

The writer added that the reason behind it was because of the issue of publishing budget where it was only possible to put one page of the learning journal format at the end of the textbook. Yet, it does not mean that there would be no reflection activity in every unit of the textbook. Unfortunately, the format such learning journal appears only once at the end of the pages on Textbook B and was not even included on Textbook A.



Figure 4 Reflecting (Textbook B).

Jadi memang ada beda, kalau misal di akhir bab itu itu lebih kepada refleksi hal-hal yang sudah dipelajari apa saja, lalu kesulitan yang dihadapi apa saja, lalu apa namanya yang paling disukai apa, yang paling sulit apa, apa-apa yang dilakukan jadi lebih baik, itu selalu ada di akhir bab.

It's different, the one (reflection, adj.) at the end of a chapter is more about reflecting what they have learned, what are the difficulties, what they like most, what to do next, it's always at the end of a chapter. (Writer 2)

Figure 5 Writer's interview regarding the function of reflection.

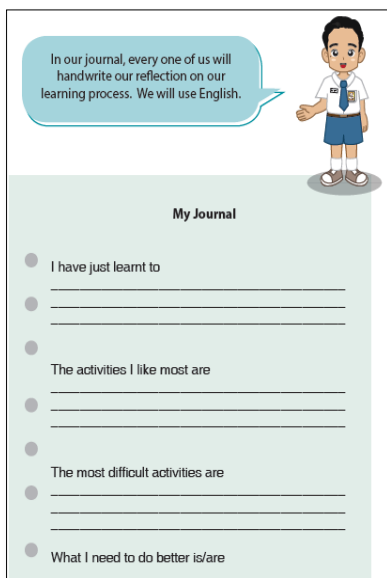


Figure 6 My Journal (Textbook B).

Refleksi itu sebenarnya kan bagian dari apa ya penilaian diri sendiri. Bentuknya tidak harus written sebenarnya bisa jadi nanti dalam bentuk obrolan diskusi langsung di kelas.

Reflection is actually a part of the self-evaluation. It could be in written format or in class discussion. (Writer 2)

Figure 7 Writer's interview regarding the form of reflection.

...kadang terus refleksi kadang saya jarang dipake juga soalnya kebanyakan, waktunya itu waktunya kan kan di terakhir suka da refleksi kaya gitu saya jarang di ini, soalnya waktunya manajemen waktunya.

I rarely do reflection, I know at the end of a lesson I have to do it (with my students) but I usually don't. It's too much, I have no time. It's because of my time management skill. (Teacher 2)

Figure 8 Teacher's interview regarding the challenge of using reflection.

As for the self-evaluation, however, there is no explicit format or guidance available in the student's book on both editions. It is only encouraged on the teacher's book as aforementioned. It turns out that, as Writer 2 believed, reflection is a part of self-evaluation (see Figure 7). It is therefore the teachers who are responsible to carry out this activity in the classroom.

However, the teachers argued that reflection is not emphasized. They added that it depends on them whether they want to apply it or not, although they knew it might be useful for their learners' learning. It seems that lack of time was the teachers' concern as revealed by the following teacher (hence, Teacher 2). She reported that she could not even cover all the chapters in one semester. She was aware, though, that it was most probably due to her time management skills (see Figure 8).

In contrast with Teacher 2's opinion, Table 1 shows the results from students' questionnaires unveiling that the majority of the students did self-evaluation which might be in the form of reflection. Note that according to Writer 2, as previously stated, reflection is a part of self-evaluation activity. There are three possible reasons contributing to this contrastive data: firstly, the students taking part in the questionnaire survey really did use the reflection format but not under the guidance of Teacher 2; secondly, they did only oral reflection which might be informally and briefly done after the lesson with the teacher; lastly, they might provide answer on the questionnaire only to satisfy what is expected by the study, especially due to the absence of the researcher.

**Table 1.** Students' questionnaire: the highest value (4.3 – 4.4) of mean 3.8

Statement	Average value	Category
I do self-assessment	4.4	Metacognitive strategy
The textbook makes me understand that language learning is a lifelong process which I have to continue myself after I finish the school	4.4	Cognitive awareness
I get enough feedback from the teacher after having the test done	4.4	Metacognitive strategy
I think the textbook is useful	4.3	General satisfaction of the textbook
This textbook encourages pair work and group work	4.3	Socioaffective strategy

The table also shows that another metacognitive strategy enhanced by the teacher is through feedback giving which might assist the students when evaluating their own learning. This is in line with the teachers on answers on the open-ended questionnaire that providing feedback is one of the ways to encouraging their students to be responsible with their own learning.

### 3.2. Discussion

In general, there was no particular description about learning to learn or specifically about metacognitive strategies on both Textbook A and Textbook B, either on their student's books or teacher's books. In addition, both writers during the interviews were discovered to be unfamiliar with the term as well.

Based on the findings of the research, Textbook A covered less metacognitive strategies than the Textbook B. It implies that there has been a significant effort made by the government to incorporate such strategies into the textbook. It was found that metacognitive strategies are developed through, by and large, reflection activity. In terms of the use of reflection as metacognitive strategy training, teachers and writers showed different viewpoints. While the writers do expect the teachers to apply it in the classroom, the teachers considered it as optional. As Writer 2 reported, he had to remind teachers not to neglect reflection after a lesson although the formats are not available on every chapter. The other writer, Writer 1, during the interview proposed that

reflection is ideally done after a lesson or at least on weekly basis to help learners manage their own learning so as to achieve the aims of the textbooks. She was aware, though, that misconception might exist among teachers in terms how to define 'reflection' as well as when and how to carry it out. She assumed teachers used to think that reflection as a form of evaluation activity should be numerically be graded.

On the other hand, the teacher's book of Textbook B suggests the opposite, i.e., self-evaluation is a part of portfolio assessment which requires comments, checklists and scores as forms of the grading. If reflection is a part of self-evaluation, as Writer 2 proposed earlier, then it does require grading. It is then understandable if there is a misinterpretation about the essence and the aim of reflection among teachers and the writers. Thus, if the teachers were misled, they would not be able to benefit reflection activity to enhance learners learning which eventually could contribute to the delay of autonomous learning.

There were two teachers who opted out not to encourage students to be responsible with their learning. The main reason was mainly due to the age of the learners which they assumed as complete beginner learners of English so that they still need to receive the full guidance from the teachers. These two teachers might be the most senior among all, or those who still embraced teacher-centredness in which culturally learners are considered as the *empty cups* (knowledge receivers), while teachers are the *teapots full of water* (knowledge providers). A teacher described about other fellow teachers that although they had been told to promote learner-centredness in the classroom, they reverted to their former teaching style.

Most teachers believed that the textbooks do not include ways to encouraging learner autonomy. They might have no idea the function of the reflection tasks on the textbooks and how it closely relates to learner autonomy. They might feel there is no sufficient guideline on the textbooks, they are unsure how to adapt learning to learn into their lessons, or they already feel pressurized by the workload of the syllabus (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015). Reflection can actually be adapted into smaller units such as tasks or activities or even bigger unit (Pinter, 2017) such as at the end of semester or at the end of the year. In Indonesian context, after an exam a review and remedial teacher are usually done, only emphasizing learners' cognitive achievements. Therefore, it would be helpful for the learners to have reflection to add to sort of semestral review session.

In addition to such different perspectives that the teachers and the writers have, some of the teachers found the textbooks confusing so that they only followed the general guidance then improvised or modified the rest of their teaching. It seems that a textbook, as a learning resource, has to be carefully designed to motivate not

only the learners but also the teachers who play an essential role to make the learning happen.

Based on the findings in general, metacognitive strategies have not been developed completely according to Ellis and Ibrahim's (2015) framework. Additionally, both teachers and learners also implicitly indicated that learner autonomy has not been achieved in their classroom. As Pinter (2017) suggests independent learning in the classroom can be fostered by raising awareness about learning process, developing language learning strategies, and giving children some freedom in their learning.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that the textbooks include only a few of metacognitive strategies of which some of them are not completely covered. According to the survey data from both teachers and learners, it has been found that self-confidence, motivation, and learner autonomy are the major issues to be enhanced in the Indonesian EFL classrooms. Although the textbooks require students to be autonomous, they do not equip learners with sufficient tasks which allow them to reflect on their learning.

In addition, there have been quite significant different perceptions between the textbook writers and the teachers. The textbook writers expected teachers to develop learners' metacognitive skills by helping them reflect and evaluate their own learning. The teachers, on the other hands, considered that such awareness and strategies are not emphasized by the curriculum or covered by the textbooks. They also believed they are not in charge with developing other than language learning strategies in the classroom. Such different perceptions among them on the essence and the aim of reflection could then contribute to the challenges of its use in the classroom.

The present study suggests that, specifically for the context of Indonesia, reflection is the catalyst in the process of developing learners' self-confidence, motivation, and ultimately learner autonomy. It requires learners to reflect on their learning which inevitably involves teachers to support them consciously develop their own learning strategies and awareness of how they learn (Ellis & Ibrahim, 2015). It can benefit both learners and teachers and enhance the overall learning development in class (Hazari, 2013), not only in English class but also across curriculum.

There are some steps which can be taken into consideration. Firstly, learning to learn should be widely introduced to the Indonesian schools including to the education faculty providing student teachers with teaching knowledge and skills. Secondly, metacognitive strategy training for both teachers and learners can be done at schools, especially regarding with how to carry out reflection activity. Thirdly, teachers have to be

encouraged to reflect and redesign the current teaching materials in which this requires materials training.

Teachers cannot rely completely on the textbook provided by government; at least they can include reflection into their teaching or to adapt the reflection format into their lesson plan and the learners' worksheet. They also need to be aware that they are responsible with not only *teaching* learning strategies but also *developing* metacognitive awareness (Pinter, 2017). Their job is not only teaching language but also developing learners' learning responsibilities so that they could continue their learning outside of the classroom (Richards & Renandya, 2002). If activities for developing metacognitive awareness are not included on the textbook, it means the teachers can take charge to exploit or to redesign their current teaching materials so that they can develop their own supplementary materials.

As for the textbook writers, putting learning to learn through metacognitive strategy training into the textbook should be strongly and explicitly emphasized. They also need to coordinate with the curriculum designer as well as the publisher that, for example, reflection page cannot be omitted. Therefore, any miscommunication such what happened to the textbooks under the study could be prevented. Moreover, materials are the essential feature determining the achievement of successful language learning (Canniveng & Martinez, 2003). In addition, what expected by the textbooks should be well articulated during the teacher training done so that both teachers and writers could gain the same perspective.

#### REFERENCES

- Boström, L. (2012). Do ten-year-old children in Sweden know how they learn? A study of how young students believe they learn compared to their learning styles preferences. *International Education Studies*, 5 (6), 11-23. Retrieved from: <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ies/article/view/19999>
- Canniveng, C., & Martinez, M. (2003). Materials development and teacher training. In B. Tomlinson, (Ed.), *Developing materials for language teaching* (pp.479-489). London: Continuum.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th edition). New York: Routledge Falmer
- Ellis, G., & Ibrahim, N. (2015). *Teaching children how to learn*. Surrey: Deltha Publishing.
- Hazari, S. (2013). *Equipping young learners with learning to learn strategies by developing their metacognitive skills through reflection*. [Unpublished Master's Dissertation]. Warwick University, Coventry, United Kingdom. Retrieved

from:

[https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/sami\\_warwick\\_diss\\_2014.pdf](https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/sami_warwick_diss_2014.pdf)

Kellet, M. (2011). *Researching with and for children and young people*, in: *Centre for Children and Young People: Background Briefing Series*, no 5. Lismore: Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University.

McDonough, J., Shaw, C., Masuhara, H. (2013). *Materials and methods in ELT: A teacher's guide* (3rd ed.). Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.

Pinter, A. (2011). *Children learning second languages*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pinter, A. (2017). *Teaching young language learners, Second edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Richards, J. C., Renandya, W. A. (Eds.). (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.