



EXPLORING METALINGUISTIC AWARENESS OF PRESERVICE TEACHERS (PSTs): LEARNING TO EDUCATE LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS

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Abstract

This article investigates the function of Metalinguistic Awareness (MLA) in preparing preservice teachers (PSTs) to instruct students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. It examines the level of MLA among PSTs, their opportunities for learning and educating learners from diverse backgrounds, and their acquisition of MLA knowledge and teaching skills. The literature review highlights the positive effects of MLA on language instruction and learning, including its advantages in analyzing language properties, enhancing proficiency, facilitating language acquisition, and enhancing cognitive development and comprehension skills in bilingual students. However, the review reveals a dearth of MLA in PSTs and highlights the need to improve teacher education programs to better support students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The study proposes the incorporation of service-learning and multicultural education programs in order to enhance the preparation of PSTs, emphasizing the significance of intercultural reflection and accommodating English language learners. It highlights the significance of MLA in the teaching and learning process as well as the consequences of inadequate training for



PSTs. Future research should concentrate on a comprehensive examination of MLA and its implementation in preservice teacher education. In conclusion, this study highlights the significance of MLA in multilingual learning and the need to improve PSTs' understanding of linguistic diversity. By investigating MLA among PSTs at a private university in Pakistan, this study aims to contribute to the improvement of teacher education programs and ensure that PSTs possess the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively support diverse learners.

1. Introduction

Metalinguistic awareness (MLA) plays a key role in multilingual learning. The importance of MLA in the language learning process increases through association or contact with other languages. A person who participates in metalinguistic awareness has the following abilities: i) Categorising words into word classes. ii) Switching focus from form, function, and meaning. iii) Explaining the functions of a particular word (Jessner, 2013). According to Angelovska (2018), MLA requires a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of the concept. It is a neglected area of research. Moreover, it is important to promote and develop MLA in learners. It helps to control communication skills in both modes - oral and written. It also helps learners to grasp the meaning of the messages they read or hear. This helps learners to assert themselves in society and also favours employment opportunities (El-Euch & Huot, 2015).

Several studies have attempted to prove the importance of MLA. It improves learner performance in both language and non-language subjects. The study has conclusively shown that there is a significant relationship with academic achievement (Spellerberg, 2015) and that it helps learners to use language in a variety of settings or contexts (El-Euch & Huot, 2015). Moreover, the concept of MLA contributes to bilingual readers' comprehension skills (Nagy, 2007). Basically, knowledge of two languages increases awareness of linguistic structures and helps improve metalinguistic performance (Bialystok & Raluca, 2012). In this regard, MLA is positively associated with bilingualism on cognitive measures (Spellerberg, 2015).

In the teacher education program, there is a need to prepare preservice teachers (PSTs) is at the peak of consideration (Jones, 2002). Likewise, teaching diverse learners include the knowledge of teaching practices in different settings and develop the skills of critical consciousness. Here, a question arises today about the capacities of monolingual teachers as evaluating the linguistically diverse students. In the context of teaching, preservice teachers (PSTs) should understand the learner's language skills, viewing learners' families and L1s as a resource for teaching instruction. Additionally, there is a need to work on teacher education programs in order to provide PSTs experiences and awareness about linguistically diverse students in a supportive environment with the supervision of skilled mentors. Importantly, PSTs also needs to build the confidence level, so that they face linguistically diverse learners and answering them and do not withdraw when in an opposition (Salerno & Kibler, 2013).



Principally, pre-service teachers are not well prepared to teach across languages and cultures. It is recommended to provide PSTs opportunities to enhance the understanding level of diversity by means of immersion in the setting and develop the cultural competency (Hook, 2008). Notably, English language learners (ELLs) have diverse linguistic backgrounds, different level of cognitive abilities, different languages and educational profiles (Short & Echevarria, 2005). Researchers have concluded to provide training to the PSTs to teach ELLs, who are learning English as a second language (Hooks, 2008; Jones, 2002; Short & Echevarria, 2005). Even the teacher educators do not take steps or measures to help PSTs to learn the effective skills of educating ELLs. Additionally, teacher educators do not provide models or discuss knowledge or skills to support linguistically diverse students (Daniel, 2014). Teachers should recognize students' native languages and cultures, but very few empirical studies provide guidance on how PSTs learning can take place in terms of application of this knowledge. Future research requires PSTs necessary skills, resources, tools in order to access the linguistic and cultural strengths of ELLs (Jimenez & Rose, 2010).

According to Lucaz, Villegas and Freedson-Gonzalez (2008) have suggested that teacher education programs should integrate the knowledge and skills in order to prepare PSTs linguistically responsive. In the same vein, PSTs education considers as the first phase in the teacher development in terms of teaching ELLs and also prepare novices for entry in the teaching field. However, for developing the teacher learning assortment, teacher educator should organize pre-service and professional learning activities (Lucas & Villegas, 2013). Schoonmaker's (2015) study has also reported the lack of MLA of the preservice teachers. It has been suggested that there is a need to work on the notion of MLA in terms of grammatical aspects in order to shed light positively in the pedagogical classroom practices. The study also suggests working with the same format of research in terms of enhancing and solidifying the methodology. The literature review reveals that there is a need to work on the detailed analysis of metalinguistic awareness (Angelovska, 2018) with a focus on preservice teacher training, as there is a lack of MLA for preservice teacher training. The future research will ensure the PSTs should receive the maximum input focuses on language preparation. As PSTs lack knowledge and not aware of the language structure. There is a need for improvement in preparation along with performance of literacy-educators. Moreover, without proper training, the sense of effectiveness in terms of jobs is undoubtedly debilitated. Hence, teachers must enhance the learning strategies and improve their teaching skills. Importantly, service-learning in terms of teacher education as well as multicultural education is helpful for innovation, collaboration and community development.

The program of service-learning offers a potential model to better prepare a preservice teacher (EL-Euch & Huot, 2015; Lund, Bragg, Kaipainen & Lee, 2014; Moats, 1994; Salerno & Kibler, 2013). Moreover, it is also necessary that preservice teachers develop the reflective intercultural process in terms of meeting the diverse learners' needs. Likewise, PSTs also learns the requirements to accommodate the English language learners in the classroom. Therefore, these teachers find complexity in understanding the connection between language development as well as content



learning (Pappamihiel,2007). Hence, research findings suggest that MLA is considered an essential component in teaching and learning process for both the future educators and learners. Given the crucial consequences of not providing pre-services teacher's training, teacher-education, not fulfilling learner's need, do not meet the demands of linguistically diverse learners. Considering the gap, the present study will investigate the MLA of the preservice teachers at the private sector university in Pakistan and explore whether PSTs receive the input with emphases on the language preparation in terms of dealing linguistically diverse students.

1.1 Research Objectives

The present research study aims:

- To examine the metalinguistic awareness of the Preservice teachers.
- To explore the PSTs maximum input or opportunities in order to learn or to educate the linguistically diverse learners.

1.2 Research Question

The Present study will investigate the following research question:

RQ: Do the PSTs conceptualize the knowledge of MLA? How and when Preservice teachers learn to educate linguistically diverse students in their study program of professional education?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Constructive Role Of MLA

MLA helps in the analyzation of language properties and speeding up the process of language teaching and learning. Metalinguistic Awareness (MLA) has been defined in different forms depending upon the construct of research as illustrates in Table 1.



Table 1 Defining features of MLA

Features	Researchers
1. Metalinguistics awareness (MLA) reflects on the instance of self-repair and analyzes the language properties.	Angelovska (2018)
2. L2 learner's awareness or focus on linguistic forms.	Jessner (2008) and O'Brien (2019)
3. Develop competence in two or more languages and a key element in the cognitive development. As a result, speeding up the process of language learning and facilitates the additional languages acquisition.	Jessner (1999)
4. Reflection and manipulation of features of the language structures.	Nagy and Anderson (1995)
5. Thinking about language and facilitating the process of acquisition.	Gas (1983)
6. Vital constituent of multilinguistic competence.	Wremble (2014)
7. A device of language acquisition.	Herdina and Jessner (2002)
8. Positive result of learning and cognitive development of the learners.	Bono (2011)
9. Ability of deconstruction and analyzation of the complex language systems	Schoonmaker (2015)

Investigating metalinguistic awareness is a continuing concern of the researchers. According to Serrano (2011) the positive impact of MLA depends on the following variables: learner's analytical skills; age; motivational level, study program, practice hours and the treatment given to them. A primary concern of the research study has two main aspects: firstly, analyzation of the metalinguistic instructional effect on the learners. Secondly, to evaluate the metalinguistic and the production task performance of the learners. The findings have displayed that the multilinguistic instruction has a slight optimistic effect on the learners' performances and oral production tasks. However, the increasing concern in terms of catering L2 learners need is to do a future research on the same primary concerns that how these aspects effect in the L2 acquisition.

Conversely, a recent study of Brien (2019) investigates the linkage among the concepts of production; self-assessment and cognizance of lexical stress rules. Moreover, the research contributes



to the literature by studying the link between metalinguistic awareness of the learners in terms of awareness of lexical stress and stress assignment accuracy. The result shows the lexical stress assignment relatively change depends upon the career of L2 learners, once they reach the level of intermediate proficiency.

Several attempts have been made in the field of MLA. An Angelovska's study has tended to focus on the problems of multilinguistic reflection ability in terms of L3 writing. Moreover, the research has investigated the connection between the L3 proficiency and the MLA various functions, types by means of its sub-elements of crosslinguistic awareness. The cross linguistics influence of a multilingual learner is resulted by means of acquisition of three or more languages. Hence, metalinguistic reflections accounts to focus on two forms of knowledge: multilinguistic or multilingual; multilinguistic or cross-linguistic awareness. The analysis explores that L3 learners uses their other languages in the specific ways and also able to express several kinds of Metalinguistic and crosslinguistic awareness (Angelovska,2018).

Jessner (1999) research literature offers the important findings about the Dynamic Model of Multilingualism (DMM). This model considers multilingualism as a dynamic process in terms of language development. Moreover, the model also focuses the cognitive features that are helpful in the language learning process. This development process of multilinguistic abilities through increased system of monitoring to the languages involved in the process, thus increases MLA. However, model also tenders positive outcomes for the multilingual education. As concerns, Spataro, Arnaud, and Longobardi (2018) investigate the relationship between MLA and theory of mind (TOM) of the children of primary school. The findings reveal a significant relation between MLA and TOM in the provision of verbal reasonings of the school age children.

Another research of Nagy and Anderson (1995) have reported the MLA role in terms of learning the reading skills and in what manner its role is formed by the writing conventions and language structural features. As learning the art of reading is primarily multilinguistic. The researchers also point out bilingualism increases the certain features of MLA. In addition, a skilled bilingual reader effectively utilizes the transformation skills and knowledge increased from one language and transfer to the other language. The skills and knowledge transformation are facilitated by MLA. Henceforth, learning the skills of reading in a second language increases the opportunities for MLA.

A recent study of Woll (2018) also reveals the constructive role of MLA in terms of positive transferring from a second language to a third language. The study has focused on the metalinguistic reflection levels that arisen with reference to the investigation of think aloud protocols. Moreover, the study also examines the connections between non-native languages, positive acquaintances and MLA role in the learning process of L3. Certainly, metalinguistic tasks target the learners understanding level by means of articulation of structures with the appropriate usage of metalinguistic



terminology. Findings have displayed the positive connection between MLA and positive transfer. Consequently, high applied awareness level is advantageous to the learning process of new vocabulary items in L3.

The study of Jessner, Allgauer-Hackl, and Hofer (2016) has revealed that the multilingual approaches related to teaching and learning give substantial assistance in terms of linguistic as well as metalinguistic levels. Moreover, in the classroom widespread connection of multilingual languages, principally linked with the training of MLA increases the learner's awareness level of linguistic and metalinguistic. It also enables the additional language acquisition. Henceforth, acquisition of multilingual training and learning helps to prepare the students to interact with the professional multilingual situations. Even though, the multilingual approaches support teamwork as an important feature of teaching. With respect to Psycholinguistics research studies have revealed that bilingualism and multilingualism bring about the advantages in terms of linguistic and cognitive. Multilingual possesses linguistic knowledge as well as experience related to different languages. This may lead to the potential abilities in the multilingual user and learner. Even students can be benefitted more from multilingual approaches than monolingual classroom approaches with respect to linguistic knowledge and metalinguistic knowledge. Moreover, the study of Jessner et al. (2016) also manifest the significance of dynamic systems theory or complexity theory (DCT) and consider as an important component to understand and develop the concept of multicompetence in the multilingual learners. Particularly, in DCT, the multilingual concept is termed as an open system, depending on numerous factors, for instance: social and psychological. Additionally, multilingual system possesses various language systems that are intellectualized as interrelated instead of autonomous, owing to the influencing and interacting change strenuously, and in turn also influenced by other language systems. Therefore, in the teacher training program the necessary component of multilingual perspectives can also be added. In this way creation and understanding of the individual multilingual development took place and also understood the societal multilingual phenomena. Hence, literature has revealed that DCT as a pedagogical framework of multilingualism.

Jessner (2008) has identified MLA is an ability to switch the focus between the form and meaning. Study of Jessner highlight the key role of dynamic systems theory (DST) in the development process of individual multilingualism. The applications of DST with reference to multilingualism plays an advantageous role in MLA in terms of usage and helpful in the learning of several languages. Moreover, Sanz (2019) defines MLA as an advanced working tool for the internal linguistic stimuli that develops the learner's ability in terms of focusing forms. It also develops the learner's attentiveness to the pertinent features in the input process that increases the amount of linguistic information. With respect to the domain of third language acquisition, the study by Kopeckova (2018) has revealed that MLA is an essential element of multilingual competence and consider as a vital aspect that facilitates the additional language acquisition. Moreover, in the context of language education, MLA necessitates a critical perception and empowerment (Melo-Pfeifer, 2015). Clearly, Andrew (1997) has featured a key aspect of MLA is to focus on the cognitive process



and helpful to give reflections about language and communicative competence that is a necessary skill of a language teacher. The study demonstrates the link between the declarative and the procedural features of MLA. It also shows that how MLA linked with language and communicative competence.

Another research study by zipke (2008) has also revealed a positive effect of metalinguistic training of the students. They have learned successfully the identification and definition of homonyms as well as vague sentences. Similarly, Zipke, Ehri, and Cairns (2009) explore the effectiveness of MLA instructions in terms of training students. Observations has revealed that the learners are enthusiastic and responsive in the classroom activities.

The similar findings of Schoonmaker's study (2015) also point out the achievement in terms of MLA of teacher training with respect to grammatical item recognition with a little time framework. It is considered as an important component of developing professional skills. However, MLA also acting as a tool in terms of helping teachers to aid the future learners for their language development. Hence, metalinguistically aware teachers are careful metalanguage users, and make a sound pedagogical implication. However, a considerable amount of published studies describing the positive impact of MLA. It empowers the teachers as well as learners and an important component of the professional development.

Previous studies have reported the productive role of MLA in various dimensions and forms. However, previous research has shown that there is a need to work on the aspects of the teacher's MLA, with reference to explore the PSTs construct of learning in order to teach linguistically diverse students in the context of pedagogy. Thus, previous research findings suggest that the major problem of examining the MLA of PSTs training is still not fully investigated.



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