

Metacognitive Knowledge of EFL Learners in Exam Preparation

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Abstract

Metacognitive knowledge or knowledge of cognition is fundamental in building learners' knowledge about themselves, the strategies they use when learning, and the conditions under which these strategies are used. This study sheds light on the varying degrees of metacognitive knowledge awareness among EFL learners offering valuable insights into their cognitive processes during exam preparation. More specifically, it seeks to discern the types of metacognitive knowledge that learners are more aware of, as well as those of which they are less aware. Accordingly, a 5-points Likert scale survey was administered to a randomly selected sample consisting of 120 third-year EFL learners at Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia, Jijel University. The subsequent analysis of the data revealed a high level of awareness regarding learners' metacognitive knowledge. Specifically, the findings indicated a high level of awareness regarding learners' declarative and procedural knowledge, while demonstrating a medium level of awareness for their conditional knowledge. By recognizing these levels of awareness, educators and curriculum designers can tailor instructional approaches to address specific areas of metacognitive development, ultimately optimizing learners' exam preparation.

Keywords: Metacognitive knowledge, Metacognitive awareness, Declarative knowledge, Procedural knowledge, Conditional knowledge, Exam preparation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Preparing for exams is a learning process through which learners engage in various activities to understand or retain knowledge in order to perform well. During this process, learners use a variety of cognitive strategies that include memorization techniques, reading books and notes, organization, working in groups, and time management, etc. (Wallace, 1980). Understanding one's cognitive knowledge, referred to as *metacognitive knowledge* or *knowledge of cognition* (Flavell, 1979; Schraw&Deninson, 1994), while engaging in learning is invaluable for learners. First, it raises their self-awareness, helps them understand the nature and demands of the task at hand, makes them aware of the various strategies they employ to achieve their learning goals as well as when and why these strategies might be used. Second, this self-awareness would allow learners to plan, monitor and evaluate their cognitive processes, which are cognitive regulation concepts (Devine, 1993; Schraw, 1994).

The use of metacognition in the context of exam preparation remains a fertile area for investigation. This study aims to address this gap in an attempt to assess third-year EFL learners' metacognitive knowledge awareness while preparing for their exams. It also seeks to identify the varying levels of learners' awareness in relation to the three types of metacognitive knowledge. To reach the above aims, this study intends to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Are third-year EFL learners aware of their metacognitive knowledge when they prepare for their exams?
- 2) What is the level of metacognitive knowledge of third-year EFL learners when they prepare for their exams?
- 3) Which type of metacognitive knowledge are third-year EFL learners most aware of when they prepare for their exams?
- 4) Which type of metacognitive knowledge are third-year EFL learners less aware of when they prepare for their exams?

Overall, these research questions provide a comprehensive framework for investigating the metacognitive knowledge awareness of third-year EFL learners, offering valuable insights into their cognitive processes during exam preparation.

2. Literature Review

Preparing for exams is a challenging experience for most learners. To make the process successful, learners need to activate their knowledge of cognition. In other words, learners need to understand how their cognitive processes work, by identifying their strengths and weaknesses while adopting effective learning strategies to better reach their learning goals.

2.1. What is Metacognition?

Though its multifaceted nature, the term *metacognition* has evolved significantly with the contributions of diverse researchers who have successfully explored metacognition from different perspectives, allowing for a deeper understanding of the process (Flavell 1976, Brown 1978, 1987; Shraw&Denninson, 1994). Metacognition refers to second-order thinking, and being metacognitive is to know about one's cognitions, which involves thoughts about thoughts, knowledge about knowledge or reflections about actions (Louca, 2008). In another definition, Flavell (1976, p.232) described metacognition as "the active monitoring and consequent regulation and orchestration" of cognitive processes.

From the above definitions, metacognition consists of two related dimensions: *metacognitive knowledge* or *knowledge of cognition* and *regulation of cognition*. On the one hand, *metacognitive knowledge* is the knowledge learners have about their cognition, (Flavell, 1979); on the other hand, *regulation of cognition* encompasses all the activities the learners

use to control and regulate their learning (Louca, 2003). The literature has outlined several regulatory skills such as *planning*, *monitoring*, and *evaluation* (Flavell, 1979; Brown, 1987; Oxford, 1990). Other researchers added *information management and debugging strategies* (Baker, 1989; Artzt & Armour-Thomas, 1992; Schraw & Dennison, 1994).

In an attempt to distinguish between cognition and metacognition, Efklides (2008) reported that the two concepts of cognition and metacognition are related to each other through two functions, namely *monitoring* and *control functions*. In other words, while cognition informs metacognition through monitoring functions, metacognition informs cognition through control of functions. On his part, Flavell (1978 cited in Forrest-Pressley et al., 1984) reported that the relation between cognition and metacognition has a causative sense. This means that cognition could cause metacognition and vice versa. This shows the relationship between the two concepts in that metacognitive processes are what direct one's cognitive processes, resulting in the use of more efficient cognitive strategies (Flavell & Wellman, 1977).

Metacognition has always been an indicator of academic achievement. Accordingly, a plethora of research has been conducted to understand how learners think when processing knowledge, the reasons that make them succeed and fail, and the methods they use to self-regulate their learning. Pellegrino & Hilton (2012) distinguished between competent and less competent learners saying that competent learners are more able to explain which strategies they used to solve a problem and why, while less competent learners monitor their thinking in an ineffective way providing incomplete explanations; hence, learners with well-developed metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive regulatory skills will excel academically (Young & Fry, 2008). On his part, Hashey (2023) reported on the power of metacognition in fostering learners' autonomy, explaining that metacognitive learners are more responsible for their learning. Similarly, Hacker et al., (2009) said that learners who engage in metacognition when learning develop a "*sense of agency*" which in turn increases their self-concept and their motivation for better learning outcomes, while Anderson (2002, p.3) described metacognitive learners as those "who know what to do when they do not know what to do; that is, they have strategies for finding out or figuring out what they need to do". In contrast, learners who lack metacognition will struggle in their learning because they are essentially learners who are unable to plan their learning tasks, track their progress, or reflect on their achievements (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

From the above discussion, it is obvious that metacognition holds a significant place in education; therefore, educators should work towards developing learners' metacognitive awareness. By doing so, they can help equip learners with the necessary skills for self-directed and life-long learning.

2.2. Metacognitive Knowledge

Metacognitive knowledge or knowledge of cognition constitutes one of the two main components of metacognition. It is generally defined as knowledge about one's cognition, and it is very similar to any type of knowledge an individual has in his/her long-term memory about any topic. It includes knowing the general strategies applicable to various tasks, knowing the conditions under which these strategies might be used, recognizing the effectiveness of these strategies, and possessing self-awareness (Pintrich et al., 2000). For many researchers, knowledge of cognition appears from early ages and continues to develop till adolescence (Brown 1987, Garner&Alexander, 1989, Flavell, 1987 in Schraw & Moshman, 1995). Furthermore, some theorists maintained that adults are more knowledgeable about their cognition and can better express that knowledge than children. Others, however, like Flavell (1992, cited in Schraw & Moshman, 1995) revealed that children can reflect on their cognitions, especially when the domain in question is familiar to them.

Metacognitive knowledge has been revealed as a necessary component of self-regulated and independent learning (Zhang&Zhang, 2019). Thus, learners with metacognitive knowledge are better able to deal with challenging learning situations (Pintrich, 2002). Accordingly, learners who are aware of their strengths and weaknesses are more likely to adjust their strategies to various learning tasks, making their learning experience easier. On the contrary, students who cannot adjust their cognitions because of a lack of self-knowledge will inevitably struggle in their learning process (Pintrich, 2002).

2.3. Metacognitive Knowledge Classification

In his classic paper on metacognition, Flavell (1979) reported that metacognitive knowledge involves an understanding of the factors that act and interact to influence the course and outcome of cognitive processes. According to him, these factors fall into three main variables: *person knowledge*, *task knowledge* and *strategy knowledge* (Flavell, 1979).

-Person Knowledge: is considered as an important component of metacognitive knowledge. Additionally, self-knowledge refers to learners' knowledge about their learning process and how they learn and process information (Flavell, 1979). Accordingly, a learner with good person knowledge is aware of his/her strengths and weaknesses (Pintrich, 2002). In the context of exam preparation; for example, a learner who knows that he/she is not good at memorizing information possesses some knowledge about his/her abilities. Possessing such knowledge will enable the learner to think for more appropriate strategies to improve his/her weaknesses.

-Task Knowledge: involves knowing that different tasks can be more or less difficult and that different cognitive strategies are needed depending on the nature of the task (Pintrich, 2002). Moreover, Wenden (1995) reported that task knowledge includes the following: (i) the purpose of a task, (ii) the task requirements, and (iii) the kind of the task. In fact, being aware of the purpose of the task directs learners' attention towards a specific goal, while knowing about task demands helps learners to determine how best to accomplish the task. Finally, task variations knowledge affects the use of cognitive processes (Wenden, 1995).

-Strategy Knowledge: is considered as the most familiar category of metacognitive knowledge as most research has been done in the area of strategy knowledge (Pintrich et al., 2000). It is concerned with all learners' knowledge about the various procedures and strategies used for cognitive processes. This may include memorizing, reading, writing, reasoning or problem solving...etc (Pintrich et al., 2000) as well as when and where to use the appropriate strategies (Levingston, 2003). For example, knowing that memorizing is the best strategy for retaining dates when preparing for a history exam is a kind of strategy knowledge.

Another classification of metacognitive knowledge involves the distinction between three variables: *declarative*, *procedural*, and *conditional knowledge* (Paris et al., 1983; Jacobs & Paris, 1987; Schraw, 1998; Schraw & Dennison, 1994; Pintrich et al., 2000).

-Declarative Knowledge: this type of knowledge is sometimes called knowledge of facts and it includes knowledge of *what* of cognition (Pintrich et al., 2000). It encompasses the two first variables presented by Flavell (1979) in his metacognitive framework, mainly *person* and *task knowledge*. According to Schraw & Moshman (1995), declarative knowledge consists of knowledge about oneself and the influencing factors that may impact ones' learning performance. On his part, Paris et al. (1983) reported that declarative knowledge contains propositions about task structures and task goals. In sum, declarative knowledge is all about learners' awareness about personal and task characteristics.

-Procedural Knowledge: in Flavell's model, procedural knowledge falls under strategy knowledge. Known also as knowledge of procedures, it is *knowing how* or is the knowledge learners have about the different steps needed to reach their learning goals (Bynes & Wasik, 2009). In other words, procedural knowledge is about the knowledge of how to

apply cognitive activities. Different strategies that may encompass the procedural knowledge can be classified into three general categories: rehearsal, elaboration, and organisation (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986 in Pintrich, 2000). In exam preparation, acquiring this type of knowledge is central for learners as it includes the application of various strategies to memorize materials, reach comprehension when reading or listening to their teachers, extract meaning from text, summarise a chapter, or mark a text (Pintrich, 2000).

-Conditional Knowledge: this type of knowledge refers to an awareness of *why and when* to use various cognitive strategies (Pintrich et al., 2000). In other words, conditional knowledge involves the conditions under which learners apply specific cognitive strategies. This indicates that though learners possess a good knowledge of procedures, they will not be able to apply and adjust strategies if they lack conditional knowledge. In this vein, Shunk (2020) described this type of knowledge as an integral part of self-regulated learning requiring the learners to decide which learning strategy to employ before engaging in a task. An example of conditional knowledge is learners' awareness that different types of exams require different exam preparations, such as multiple-choice exam in which learners need to recognize the correct answer, as opposite to essay exams in which they need to recall information. Activating such type of knowledge may significantly impact the way learners prepare for their exams, focusing on key words and concepts to prepare for a multiple-choice exam and structuring their arguments to prepare for an essay exam.

2.4 Exam Preparation

Performing well in exams has always been a big concern for learners. While learners' exam performance may be hindered by some factors such as learners' psychological states or external pressure; their way of preparing for their exams may heavily affect their performance. In fact, learners who are well prepared for their exams are more likely to perform well than those who have not prepared adequately (Zimmerman et al., 1996). For most learners, however, exams are not their favorite experience; moreover, their perceptions towards exams have always been overwhelming experiences. According to Burns & Sinfield (2004), the reasons are not related to the examination process itself, but to the way learners have been taught to study and learn. Effective exam preparation is, therefore, linked to the development of various study and behavioural skills.

In the view of most educators, exam preparation is a learning process that should start when learners take their first notes in a lecture or read their first chapter on a topic (Dembo, 2004). This type of preparation is called *long-term preparation*, which usually starts at the beginning of the academic year, or earlier. In contrast, a more intense and focused exam preparation, called *short-term preparation*, occurs some weeks before the exams start (Lopez, 2009).

3.Method

The current study is conducted at the Department of English at Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia, Jijel University during the academic year 2023-2024. It aims to assess third-year EFL learners' metacognitive knowledge awareness level when preparing for their exams. To answer the research questions of this study, a quantitative approach has been adopted to collect and analyse the data.

3.1 Research Instrument

Measuring metacognition involves two important factors. On the one hand, the timing of the measurement such as whether learners' metacognition is to be measured before [prospectively], during [concurrently] or after [retrospectively] learners have engaged in a

task; and on the other hand, the tool used such as self-reported questionnaires or interviews with participants (Tay et al., 2020). Accordingly, many self-report instruments have been developed to assess learners' thinking when engaging in their learning activities, specifically their metacognitive knowledge and self-regulation knowledge. For this study, however, and given the fact that there is no existing self-report for assessing learners' metacognitive knowledge in exam preparation context, the researchers relied on the *Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI)* designed by Schraw & Dennison (1994). Initially, the inventory consisted of 52 items classified into eight subcomponents subsumed into two main categories: *metacognitive knowledge* and *regulation of cognition* (See Schraw&Denninson, 1994, pp.472-474). One advantage of the MAI is that its items were developed to assess metacognition in general learning situations; this makes it easier to adapt the inventory to different learning contexts (González-Cabañes et al., 2022).

To reach the aims of this study, only the metacognitive knowledge component (consisting of 17 items in the original version), was assessed. The MAI was adapted to exam preparation context. However, only the statements that fit the researchers' purposes were adapted (13 items), while three items were developed by the researchers (items 4 and 5 in declarative knowledge, and item 3 in conditional knowledge), totaling 16 items. The adapted inventory used for this study is therefore composed of declarative knowledge (8 items), procedural knowledge (4 items) and conditional knowledge (4 items). The statements were rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1-5 (Always = 5, often = 4, Sometimes = 3, rarely = 2, and Never = 1). Before submitting the questionnaire, the instrument was tested for both validity and reliability. The instrument's validity was checked by presenting the instrument to three teachers teaching at the Department of English, and two experts specialized in the design of metacognitive inventories who provided the researchers with valuable comments regarding the items' content and wording. The instrument's reliability, on the other hand, was verified through the calculation of Cronbach's alpha coefficient (.807), which was found to be good. According to Dornyei (2003), a reliability value of a > 0.70 is acceptable.

3.2. The Population

To collect the data for this study, the researchers randomly selected a sample of 120 out of 236 third-year EFL learners. The participants have already completed five semesters and thus gained experience with exam preparation at university. Moreover, they are supposed to have acquired some metacognitive awareness during their learning experience and are more likely to report on their metacognitive knowledge in relation to their exam preparation experience. The data collection procedure took place at the beginning of the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024; i.e., after the learners had taken their first semester exams and received their grades. During the collection data procedures, the learners were informed about the purpose of the study and helped to eliminate any ambiguity regarding the wording of the statements. The researchers also explained to the learners that their choices should only reflect what best describes them when they prepare for their exams.

4. Results

This section is devoted to the analysis of the collected data using SPSS Statistics 20. This software is the most appropriate method for calculating frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation. In addition, evaluation criteria based on the five-points Likert Scale were adopted and illustrated in the following table.

Table 1: Grading Criteria

Numerical scale	Likert Scale Options	Mean Scores	Level of Awareness
1	Never	From 1 to 1.80	Very low
2	Rarely	From 1.81 to 2.60	Low
3	Sometimes	From 2.61 to 3.40	Medium
4	Often	From 3.41 to 4.20	High
5	Always	From 4.21 to 5.00	Very high

4.1 Data Analysis of Learners' Declarative Knowledge**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Learners' Awareness in Declarative Knowledge**

N	Statements	Frequencies & Percentages	Likert Options					Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Awareness	Rank
			Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never				
1	I am good at remembering information when I prepare for my exams.	F	7	45	37	23	8	3.16	1.02	Medium	7
		%	5.8	37.5	30.8	19.2	6.7				
2	I understand my learning strengths and weaknesses when I prepare for my exams.	F	43	34	24	11	8	3.77	1.21	High	3
		%	35.8	28.3	20	9.2	6.7				
3	I am a good judge of how well I prepare for my exams.	F	29	30	31	21	9	3.40	1.24	Medium	5
		%	24.2	25	25.8	17.5	7.5				
4	I know which subjects I can easily learn and those in which I might encounter difficulties.	F	67	23	23	5	2	4.23	1.01	V.High	2
		%	55.8	19.2	19.2	4.2	1.7				
5	I am good at managing stress during my exam preparation.	F	14	13	33	30	30	2.59	1.29	Low	8
		%	11.7	10.8	27.5	25	25				
6	I know what kind of information is most important to learn for my exams.	F	25	24	31	27	13	3.17	1.29	Medium	6
		%	20.8	20	25.8	22.5	10.8				
7	I learn more when I am interested in the subjects.	F	101	11	5	1	2	4.73	0.73	V.High	1
		%	84.2	9.2	4.2	0.8	1.7				
8	I am good at organizing information when I prepare for my exams.	F	39	17	31	25	8	3.45	1.31	High	4
		%	32.5	14.5	25.8	20.8	6.7				

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics of learners' awareness in declarative knowledge. As for the first statement, (37.5%) of learners declared that they are often good at remembering information when they prepare for their exams, (30.8%) indicated that they sometimes remember information well, while (19.2%) selected rarely. Additionally, (6.7%) of participants chose never, while only (5.8%) stated that they are always good at remembering information while preparing for their exams. In response to the second statement, (35.8%) of respondents declared that they are always aware of their strengths and weaknesses when they prepare for their exams. Moreover, (28.3%) selected often, and (20%) opted for sometimes. Meanwhile, a small percentage (9.2%), selected rarely, and (6.7%) opted for never. For the third statement, (25.8%) of the informants declared that they are sometimes good judges of how well they prepare for their exams. Almost equally, (25%) chose often while (24.2%) selected always. Meanwhile, (17.5%) selected rarely, and only (7.5%) opted for never. Concerning the fourth statement, a significant number of learners (55.8%) claimed that they always know which subjects they can easily learn and those in which they may encounter difficulties when it comes to their exam preparation. On the other hand, the same number of the participants (19.2%) selected the options often and sometimes, while (4.2%) opted for never, and only (1.7%) selected never.

Regarding the fifth statement, which addresses learners' ability to manage their stress during their exam preparation, results revealed that (27.2%) of them are sometimes able to overcome their stress during their exam preparation. An equal number of participants (25%) selected rarely and never. Furthermore, (11.7%) chose always, while (10.8%) selected often. Statement six was intended to assess learners' awareness regarding the most important information they need to learn when they prepare for their exams. Results revealed that (25.8%) of informants declared that they sometimes know what information is most important for them to learn for their exams. Additionally, (22.5%) of participants selected rarely, (20.8%) chose always, (20%) opted for often, and (10.8%) chose never. For the seventh statement, an overwhelming majority of participants (84.2%) believed that they learn more when they are interested in the subject. Furthermore, (9.2%) of them selected often, (4.2%) chose sometimes, (1.7%) opted for never and only (0.8%) chose rarely. The last statement showed that (32%) of learners reported that they are always good at organizing information when they prepare for their exams. Meanwhile, (25%) selected sometimes, (20.8%) opted for rarely, (14.5%) chose often, and (6.7%) selected never.

After calculating the mean and standard deviation of each statement, results reveal that statements 7 and 4 recorded a very high level of awareness totaling a mean of 4.73 and 4.23 respectively. In addition, statements 2 and 8 recorded a high level of awareness totaling a mean of 3.77 and 3.45 respectively. Meanwhile, statements 3, 6, and 1 revealed a medium level of awareness with a mean of 3.40, 3.17, and 3.16 respectively. Finally, the fifth statement recorded the lowest level of awareness recording a mean of 2.59.

4.2 Data Analysis of Procedural Knowledge

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Learners' Awareness in Procedural Knowledge

N	Statements	Frequencies & Percentages	Likert Options					Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Awareness	Rank
			Always	Often	Someti mes	Rarely	Never				
1	I have a specific purpose for each strategy I use when I prepare for my exams	F	22	25	32	23	18	3.08	1.31	Medium	4
		%	18.3	20.8	26.7	19.2	15				
2	I try to use strategies that have worked for me in preparing past exams.	F	54	31	14	15	6	3.93	1.23	High	1
		%	45	25.8	11.7	12.5	5				
3	I am aware of what strategies I use when I prepare for my exams	F	22	31	51	15	1	3.48	0.96	High	3
		%	18.3	25.8	42.5	12.5	0.8				
4	I find myself using helpful learning strategies automatically when I prepare for my exams.	F	22	42	35	16	5	3.5	1.06	High	2
		%	18.3	35	29.2	13.3	4.2				

The above table reports on learners' level of awareness in procedural knowledge. Regarding the first statement, (26.7%) of learners reported that they sometimes have a specific purpose for each strategy they use when preparing for their exams. In comparison, (20.8%) indicated they often have a specific purpose. Meanwhile, (19.2%) of learners selected rarely, (18.3%) chose always, and (15%) opted for never. Regarding the second statement, (45%) of the participants reported that they always use strategies that have worked for them in preparing past exams. Additionally, (25.8%) chose often, (11.7%) selected sometimes while (12.5%) chose rarely, and only (5%) opted for never. The results of the third statement revealed that (51%) of learners are sometimes aware of the strategies they use when preparing for their exams. (25.8%) of participants reported that they are often aware about the strategies they use, (18.3%) opted for always, (12.5%) selected rarely, and (0.8%) opted for never. Finally, the last statement showed that (35%) of learners often use helpful learning strategies automatically. In addition, (29.2%) of the participants selected sometimes, (18.3%) chose always. On the other hand, (13.3%) of learners opted for rarely, while a small number of them (4.2%) selected never.

After calculating the mean and standard deviation of each statement, results show that statements 2, 4 and 3 recorded the highest level awareness with a mean of 3.93, 3.5, and 3.48 respectively. In contrast, statement 1 recorded a medium level totaling a mean of 3.08.

4.3 Data Analysis of Conditional Knowledge

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Learners' Awareness in Conditional Knowledge

N	Statements	Frequencies & Percentages	Likert Options					Mean	Standard Deviation	Level of Awareness	Rank
			Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never				
1	I know when each strategy I use will be most effective during my exam preparation.	F	19	27	43	20	11	3.19	1.16	Medium	3
		%	15.8	22.5	35.8	16.7	9.2				
2	I use different study strategies to prepare for different exams.	F	34	29	21	23	13	3.40	1.36	Medium	2
		%	28.3	24.2	17.5	19.2	10.8				
3	I know what to do when the strategies I use are not effective.	F	34	38	17	22	9	3.55	1.28	High	1
		%	28.3	31.7	14.2	18.3	7.5				
4	I can motivate myself when I need to prepare for my exams.	F	4	21	39	32	24	2.57	1.09	Low	4
		%	3.3	17.5	32.5	26.7	20				

As shown in table 4, learners' conditional knowledge recorded different levels of awareness. As far as the first statement is concerned, (43%) of respondents are sometimes aware when each strategy they use will be most effective regarding their exam preparation. (22.5%) selected often, (16.7%) chose rarely, (15.8%) opted for always, while (9.2%) selected never. Regarding the second statement, results showed that (28.3%) of learners always use different strategies when they prepare for different exams, (24.2%) opted for often and (19.2%) selected rarely. Moreover, (17.5%) of participants declared that they sometimes use different strategies to prepare for different exams, while 10.8% chose never. In the third statement, (31.7%) of participants believed that they often know what to do when their strategies are not effective. Meanwhile, (28.3%) of learners chose always, (18.3%) reported that they rarely know what to do, while only (7.5%) selected never. For the last statement, (32.5%) of learners claimed that they are able to motivate themselves when they need to during their exam reparation. Furthermore, (26.7%) reported that they are rarely able to motivate themselves, (20%) chose never, (17.5%) selected often, while only (3.3%) opted for always.

After calculating the mean and standard deviation of each statement, results show that statement 3 recorded the highest level of awareness with a mean of 3.55. Meanwhile, statements 1 and 2 recorded a medium level of awareness totaling a mean of 3.40 and 3.19 respectively. Finally, the last item recorded a low level of awareness with a mean of 2.57.

4.4 Data Analysis of Learners' Metacognitive Knowledge

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Learners' Metacognitive Knowledge

Type of metacognitive Knowledge	N	Mean	SD	Rank	Level of Awareness
Declarative	120	3.82	0.65	1	High
Procedural	120	3.50	0.83	2	High
Conditional	120	3.17	0.80	3	Medium
Metacognitive knowledge	120	3.48	0.58	/	High

The data obtained from the analysis of the three components of metacognitive knowledge is summarized in Table 5. In overall, metacognitive knowledge recorded a high level of awareness, with a mean of 3.48. However, and with regard to the three components of metacognitive knowledge, results show varying levels of awareness. In the first rank, declarative knowledge recorded a high level of awareness with a mean of 3.82. In the second rank, procedural knowledge recorded a high level of awareness, as well, with a mean of 3.50. Finally, conditional knowledge was ranked in the third position with a medium level of awareness totaling a mean of 3.17.

5. Discussion

The findings generated from the analysis of the collected data provided interesting insights of learners' level of awareness regarding their metacognitive knowledge, which recorded a high level. A solid foundation of metacognitive knowledge is important for learners as it helps them perform their tasks effectively (Schraw & Moshman, 1995). In addition, metacognitive knowledge has been disclosed to have a significant role in achieving academic success, as it was put by Devine (1993) who reported that a successful language learner is the one who has ample metacognitive knowledge about himself, about the nature of the task he/she needs to perform and about appropriate strategies he/she needs to use for achieving cognitive goals. Last but not least, learners with a good knowledge of their cognitions are more likely to regulate their learning (Shraw, 1994).

As far as the three components of metacognitive knowledge are concerned, learners recorded different levels of awareness. Firstly, declarative knowledge, referring to learners' skills, intellectual resources and abilities (Schraw & Deninson, 1994), recorded the highest level of awareness. This means that third year EFL learners have a good knowledge about themselves as learners, as well as about the tasks they undertake when preparing for their exams. According to results, two statements recorded a very high level of awareness. The first one is learners' abilities to learn more when they are motivated, whereas the second one is learners' abilities to distinguish between the subjects that they can easily learn and those in which they might encounter difficulties. In addition, two statements recorded a high level of awareness which are learners' abilities to know about their strengths and weaknesses, and learners' abilities to organize information when preparing for exams. On the contrary, three statements showed a medium level of awareness, which are being a good judge of how well learners prepare for their exams, learners' awareness about the most important information they need to learn and students' ability to remember information when they process it. Finally, learners' ability to manage stress during exam preparation indicated a low level of awareness.

Secondly, and with reference to learners' procedural knowledge, which involves knowledge about how to apply learning procedures (Schraw&Deninson, 1994), results indicated a high level of awareness, as well, ranking procedural knowledge at the second position after declarative knowledge. Processing such knowledge will enable learners to use strategies more automatically, sequence strategies effectively, and use qualitatively different strategies to solve problems (Stanovitch, 1990; Pressley et al., 1987; Glaser&Chie, 1988, cited in Schraw&Moshman, 1995). Three statements recorded a high level of awareness, which are learners' use of strategies that have worked for them in preparing for past exams, learners' abilities to use helpful learning strategies automatically, and learners' awareness of which strategies they need to use. Meanwhile, learners' awareness regarding the specific purpose for each strategy they use showed a medium level.

Finally, conditional knowledge, which refers to the conditions under which learning procedures are used (Schraw&Deninson, 1994), unveiled a medium level of awareness. Meanwhile, only one statement recorded a high level of awareness, which is learners' awareness of what to do when their strategies are not effective. Furthermore, third year EFL learners showed a medium level of awareness towards two statements. These are learners' use of different strategies to prepare for different exams and learners' awareness about the effectiveness of their strategies. Finally, learners' abilities to motivate themselves when needed received a low level of awareness. Pintrich (2002) underscored conditional knowledge, saying that it is an important aspect of learning. It is the type of knowledge that makes learners aware of when and why using learning strategies. In addition, conditional knowledge enables learners to adapt their learning to different learning demands of each learning task (Schraw, 1998). In his study, Weaver-McDougall (1989), found a positive relation between conditional knowledge and regulation of cognition (cited in Schraw &Moshman, 1995).

In a nutshell, though third year EFL learners recorded a high level of awareness regarding their metacognitive knowledge, results showed that they lack some conditional knowledge as they recorded a medium level of awareness. In fact, possessing good declarative and procedural knowledge enables learners to acquire only knowledge and skills that are required for performing a task, but not the conditions under which they might wish perform actions (Paris et al., 1983). This implies that procedural knowledge is not enough to adapt learners' behavior to changing learning situations. While studying for their exams, learners may experience different learning situations (reading, writing, memorising...) that require them to use different learning strategies. Moreover, students need to prepare different types of exams. This implies that they need to use different study strategies. Thus, without ample conditional knowledge, learners may struggle to select the appropriate strategies that fit their learning situations, which render their exam preparation process less effective.

6. Conclusion

This research is intended to assess third-year EFL learners' metacognitive knowledge awareness when they prepare for their exams. Data collection and analysis revealed that third-year learners have good cognition knowledge. However, while the results have indicated a high level of awareness in declarative and procedural knowledge, results in the conditional knowledge reported a medium level of awareness, which may affect learners' choice of learning strategies.

To enhance learners' conditional knowledge, teachers are encouraged to engage their learners in teaching activities that explicitly instruct them when and why to apply their knowledge in different learning situations. Teachers should also encourage their learners to reflect on their metacognitive knowledge in general and conditional knowledge in particular.

This self-awareness will inevitably help them acquire new knowledge about their cognition, ultimately leading to more successful academic outcomes.

While conducting this research, some limitations have been noticed. First, only one component of metacognition has been investigated, mainly metacognitive knowledge. In addition, metacognitive knowledge has been investigated using just one instrument. For a better understanding of learners' metacognition, further studies are needed to investigate learners' awareness regarding their regulation of cognition. Similarly, studies investigating correlations between learners' metacognitive knowledge and regulation of cognition and their impact on learners' academic achievements are also appreciated.

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